

A Vision for Our Parish
A Homily Given on Sunday, August 30, 2026
By Fr. Michael Hayes

I am approaching my five-year anniversary of service in this parish. As a parish priest, a critical part of my ministry is to listen to the voice of God speaking in the hearts of its people and in the whole life of the parish, to discern His will, and to act on it.

With gratitude to the Lord for the gift of being your priest over these years, I would like to present to you a vision for the future of our parish, one that has developed from deep pastoral listening and reflection, and which I firmly believe, will lead toward the flourishing of Nativity of the Mother of God Parish.

The Core Elements of this Vision

At the heart of this vision are five core elements:

A Unified Body of Christ: Our parish as a place where people from all walks of life—from all ethnic, cultural, socio-economic backgrounds—gather in unity to worship and give thanks to the God of all, the Lord Jesus Christ, who saves us and who sanctifies us.

Rooted in Sacred Tradition: Our parish as a place where all persons gather to worship the Lord in the immensely rich, beautiful, and ancient Kyivan tradition of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church of which we are heirs.

Eucharistic and Social Fellowship: Our parish as a place where the heavenly fellowship of the liturgy is followed by the fellowship of sharing a meal, sharing friendship, sharing wisdom, sharing support, sharing time.

Intergenerational Community: Our parish as a place where persons spanning generations, with diverse experiences and backgrounds, gather weekly to build genuine, supportive and caring community – to grow to know each other, to love each other, to share in each other's joys, and to support each other in times of difficulty.

Continuous Faith Formation: Our parish as a place where the people of God have and take advantage of regular opportunities to increase their understanding of their faith, and by that deepen their love of God and neighbour.

The wonderful thing is that this is not a fantasy. This is not unrealistic. In our parish, right now, we have everyone and everything we need to start this.

What does this look like in practice?

The first necessary step is to unify the community for the Sunday Eucharist. The Sunday Liturgy should be the place where the Church comes together as one body to worship and give thanks to God.

There can be no genuine cohesion or community in a parish, especially in one as small as ours, if there are two Divine Liturgies on Sunday morning regardless of the reason for that separation. Such a setup actively hinders unity and discourages interaction and fellowship among parishioners.

For these reasons, I propose making the single bilingual Liturgy on Sunday morning permanent.

How would this work practically?

We already have an established practice in our parish which we have followed for the past two summers. According to this, we serve one week primarily in English and the next primarily in Ukrainian and alternate. Provided that readers are available, the scripture readings are always proclaimed in both English and Ukrainian.

I propose that we begin by continuing this practice and be open to further adjustments as needed.

Addressing the Concerns of English-speakers

For those who speak no Ukrainian and are accustomed to attending the English-language Liturgy, this presents a very real challenge because you are being asked to participate in a liturgy, part or most of which, depending on the Sunday, is being sung in an unfamiliar language. I am particularly sensitive to this challenge because this is exactly the predicament of my family.

We are a majority-English Parish in an English-speaking region. Our children are English-speaking. Any converts we may receive will be English speaking. English will undoubtedly remain the primary language of our parish as it has been for a long time. Nevertheless, we are a parish of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church whose roots go back over a thousand years in the land of Ukraine. We have a responsibility to continue utilizing

the Ukrainian language if there is a desire for it. This is challenging. I get it. However, I encourage you at the very least to learn the basic responses:

- Lord, have mercy–Господи помилуй (Hospody pomylui);
- To You, O Lord–Тобі Господи (Tobi Hospody);
- Grant this, O Lord–Подай Господи (Podai Hospody);
- Amen–АМІНЬ (Amin).

If you know these four responses, you can sing much of the liturgy already. These and the other responses will come with time and practice–I speak from experience.

Preserving our Ukrainian Heritage

To those who typically attend the Ukrainian language liturgy, I acknowledge and respect the importance of the Ukrainian language to you. It's a very important part of your heritage and of who you are.

According to this proposal, not only is Ukrainian to be maintained, it will be given a more prominent place in the parish than it currently has.

Under the current two-Liturgy model, the Ukrainian language is, in a sense, off to the side. Outside of the 9:30am Liturgy, Ukrainian pretty much doesn't exist. Under this model, Ukrainian easily becomes ghettoized, cut off from the rest, invisible. This is no way to celebrate and promote something so dear to a significant percentage of our parishioners.

By permanently transitioning to a bilingual Liturgy and meaningfully integrating the Ukrainian language, it will become a part of the parish's mainstream life. Therefore, non-Ukrainians will be exposed to it more. Regular attendees will likely learn at least a few basic responses for the Liturgy and some might in turn be inspired to try to learn the language itself. Visitors and inquirers, and other parishioners, will experience the reality that Ukrainian language and culture are important parts of our parish's identity.

The Liturgy after the Liturgy

I have spoken only of the Liturgy so far. As for the time after the Liturgy, I propose the following:

- Every week after Liturgy, the space and opportunity for fellowship is provided for everyone who comes to Church.
- Once per month, we share a fellowship meal after Liturgy—a simple potluck. This is where community can truly grow, be cultivated, and deepen perhaps more than in any other place. Think of this like the weekday family supper—it's typically a simple meal, but when done with intentionality and consistency, the family bonds deepen. Something analogous within our parish can and will happen with monthly fellowship meals.
- Once per month, as has been the case for many years, the Men's League hosts a fundraiser brunch advertised to the public. By participating in this brunch, we can extend our fellowship to the wider community.
- Once per month, there will be a faith formation session during the fellowship time. By this, the faithful are given consistent opportunities to grow in their understanding of their faith.
- On the other Sundays, once or twice depending on the month, there will be a simple coffee and fellowship.

Again, we have everyone and everything we need to start this immediately.

Concluding Thoughts

The challenges and sacrifices I am asking you to take on are real but they are all in service of something beautiful and life-giving: the opportunity to build a parish where people of all ages and backgrounds come together as one church, as one body to worship and give thanks to God, and share in fellowship during the Liturgy after the Liturgy where genuine community and mutual love and support is formed, nourished, and cultivated.

This is my proposal to you. We have everyone and everything we need to begin. Let's do something beautiful and lifegiving with our parish.

A Proposed Outline for the Sundays over the Next Ten Months
(Subject to change)

September	6 - Coffee and Fellowship (Finish summer faith formation) 13 - Praznyk Potluck 20 - Brunch 27 - Faith Formation
October	4 - Fellowship Meal 11 - Coffee and Fellowship (Fr. Michael away) 18 - Brunch 25 - Bishop's Visit
November	1 - Catechesis (Make up for October) 8 - Fellowship Meal 15 - Brunch 22 - Faith Formation 29 - Coffee and Fellowship
December	6 - St. Nicholas Concert and Potluck 13 - Coffee and Fellowship 20 - Brunch (Decorate Church for Christmas) 27 - Faith Formation
January	1 (Friday) - Special New Year's Potluck 3 - Coffee and Fellowship 10 - Jordan Supper 17 - Brunch 24 - Faith Formation 31 - Coffee and Fellowship
February	7 - Fellowship Meal followed by Forgiveness Vespers (Beginning of Lent) 14 - Coffee and Fellowship 21 - Brunch 28 - Faith Formation
March	7 - Fellowship Meal 14 - Coffee and Fellowship 21 - Brunch 28 - Pascha

April	4 - Parish Paschal Meal (Sviachene) 11 - Coffee and Fellowship 18 - Brunch 25 - Faith Formation
May	2 - Fellowship Meal 9 - Coffee and Fellowship (Fr. Michael away) 16 - Brunch 23 - Faith Formation 30 - Coffee and Fellowship
June	6 - Fellowship Meal 13 - Coffee and Fellowship 20 - Brunch 27 - Faith Formation