EMPOWERING PARISH MINISTRIES

From Maintenance to Mission

Lessons from the Transformation of
Sts. Constantine & Helen Church, Webster MA

TCI with Other Metropolises • June 15, 2026

Saints Constantine and Helen, Webster, Massachusetts — 2004

A Parish in Crisis

43rd	$60K	30–40	10 yrs
Priest in 85 years	Annual budget	Sunday faithful	Before possible closure

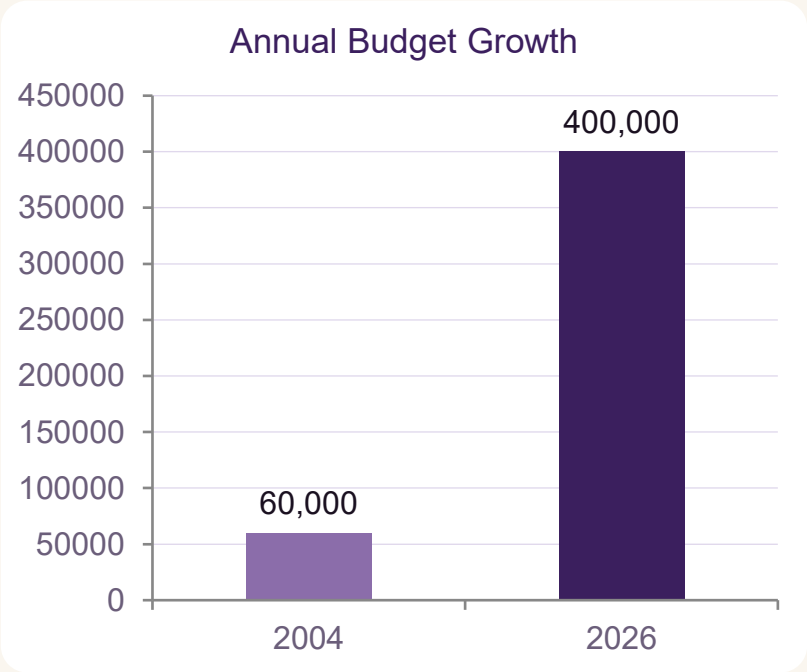
Inward-turned • No vision • Little hope • Not welcoming • Historically divisive

"Father, we can't do that. We've always done it this way."

— The death knell of a declining church

Twenty-One Years Later

The Grace of Transformation



170
Families (from 80)

90+
New members — last 5 years

$1.2M
Church renovation (2015-19)

190/80
People sent on mission trips

20K
Meals packaged for children globally

3.5M
In medical debt paid off for 2,200 families

What Makes a Parish Thrive?



Robust Spiritual Life

Encountering the Living God through worship, prayer, and the sacraments



Clear Vision

Understanding what it means to be the Church — why we exist, who we are



Witness & Mission

Offering God's love and Good News to the surrounding community, locally and globally

Tonight: Moving from Maintenance to Mission — empowering lay leaders who own, lead, and extend the life of the Church.

A Foundational Principle

Ministry Belongs to the Whole Body of Christ

"Every baptized Christian has received a gift, and each is obliged to minister to others with it. Let no one say, 'I am only a layman.' You have a responsibility in the building up of the Church."

— St. John Chrysostom

The Danger of Clericalism

Priest does everything

- Laity are spectators
- Parish atrophies
- Gifts go unused

The Vision of Empowerment

Priest as enabler & guide • Laity as co-workers in mission • Parish flourishes • Every gift glorifies God

Five Lessons in Empowering Ministry

1. **Name the Problem Honestly**
   Health begins with truth
2. **Find the Hidden Ministers**
   Gifts are already in the pew
3. **Give Real Ownership**
   Trust, not just tasks
4. **Allow Failure & Adjust**
   A safe culture grows boldly
5. **Keep the Spiritual Center**
   Ministry flows from the Liturgy

1 Name the Problem Honestly

The Story

When we arrived, one woman did everything — shovel snow, manage the pangari, prepare coffee — while criticizing anyone who offered to help.

She kept the church alive, but also kept it from growing.

For the first year, we focused entirely on creating a culture of warm, sincere hospitality. We asked naturally friendly parishioners to become greeters and ushers.

Principle 1

Parishes cannot be healed of problems that aren't named.

Ask Yourself:

How are people greeted when they walk in the door?

Who feels welcome — and who doesn't?

2 Find the Hidden Ministers

The Story

A parishioner went on our first Project Mexico mission trip with his teenage son. It was the first time he had ever volunteered in this way.

He returned five more times — bringing all three of his children.

I saw his gift for service. Today he completely runs our Living Bread Luncheon — a monthly meal serving 80 people from the Webster community — from shopping and cooking to managing 15–20 volunteers.

Principle 2

Every parish is full of latent ministers. The priest's job is to see the gift and call it out.

Three Questions to Ask:

Who are your people?

What gifts do they have?

What are they passionate about?

3 Give Real Ownership

"Helping Father"

Task fulfillment — dependent, fragile

→

Owning a Ministry

Real authority, real responsibility, real flourishing

The Parish Festival

In early years I was deeply involved in every aspect. As time went on, I saw gifts in others far better than my own. Now I take a complete back seat — aware of what's happening, but letting others run it.

The Bereavement Circle

A parishioner who lost her daughter, paired with a hospice chaplain from our parish. Together they now run this ministry for people inside and outside our church. I have almost no connection with the group.

Principle 3: Empowerment requires the transfer of genuine trust — not just tasks. Ask: 'Who can lead this ministry without me?'

4 Allow for Failure, Adjustment & Perseverance



Misjudged the person

Sometimes we ask someone to lead a ministry and they don't have the passion, the gifts, or the readiness. That's OK.



Honest self-analysis

Keep evaluating. Adjust without giving up on people. Help them find where they truly belong.



Try, adapt, persevere

Offer the work to God. Trust that His grace is present even in the attempts that don't succeed.

Principle 4: A culture that cannot fail safely cannot grow boldly.

5 Keep the Spiritual Center

Spiritual health of leaders matters — check in, pray with them



Ministry is 'living the liturgy after the liturgy' — connect all work to worship

Guard against burnout — rotate, rest, celebrate, express gratitude

Encourage leaders to develop others — always look for the next generation

Principle 5: Parish ministry is always an extension of the Eucharist into the world.

What Can You Do Starting This Week?

1

Audit your ministries

Who is really leading each ministry? What exists, what is dormant, what is missing entirely? Who has real responsibility and accountability?

2

Call 3 people this month

Identify three people not currently in ministry leadership. Call them. Ask: What are you passionate about? How can the church give you a place to use that gift?

3

Address the real obstacles

"Our people are too old." "No one steps up." "We've tried this before." Turn each challenge into an opportunity. Don't give up. Adjust, adapt, offer it to God.

Either going forward or backward. There is no such thing as staying in place.



The Long View

Twenty-one years is a long time.

But it began with one year.
One decision.
One person who said yes.

Every church will plateau. The default is to turn inward.
Renewal is ongoing — constantly evaluate, constantly invite.

"We are not building our parish — we are building God's Church as a part of His Kingdom. And His Kingdom advances one ministry, one person, one yes at a time."