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Jacob's well 11

The Spiritual Discipline of Hospitality



Jacob's Well

Spring/Summer 2015



*"Give me this water,
that I may not thirst . . ."*
John 4:15

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The Spiritual Discipline of Hospitality

by Fr. John Shimchick

“Why was it that upon his death the rich man saw Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham, and not any other of the righteous?” The answer, according to Blessed Theophylact, was “because Abraham showed hospitality to strangers.” This expression “hospitality to strangers” sets in motion the immediate consideration of at least two other texts, which are held together by the words of Jesus.

The first comes from the Book of Genesis (18:1-15) and Abraham’s welcoming of three strangers. The second passage, with obvious consideration of the first, appears toward the end of the New Testament in the Epistle to the Hebrews: “Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it” (13:2). They are enlightened by the words of Jesus in the Parable of the Last Judgment where He says that in responding or not to the needs of the “least of the brethren,” one has either done it or not to Christ Himself (Mt 25:40,45).

Our exploration of this theme of hospitality is gratefully indebted to the particular expression, “The Spiritual Discipline of Hospitality,” first utilized by Fr. Barnabas Powell in his series entitled, *Faith Encouraged Live (Ancient Faith Radio*, September 14, 2014). While individuals may find it personally easier or more difficult to welcome strangers, Fr. Barnabas makes it clear from the beginning that “our ability to be a welcoming community – a place of both physical and spiritual hospitality – is directly related to our willingness to be serious followers and lovers of Jesus Christ.”

Archbishop Michael provides a rich examination of Abraham’s hospitality as found in the Genesis story and developed within Orthodox iconography. We are pleased to welcome the contribution of Dr. Bruce Beck who, from the perspective of Christ’s encounter with His disciples on the road to Emmaus, reminds us how the “Master’s hospitality” can be received in the breaking of Bread and the gift of His Word. Fr. John Parker, guest presenter at last year’s Diocesan Assembly, and participant in Fr. Barnabas Powell’s podcast, helps us understand the connection between the love of strangers and evangelism. He points out that “we were all – everyone of us – born strangers; and each of us, by our Baptism has been given the gift of a name and of sonship.” Juliana Federoff shows how the local community can be a welcoming place for those struggling with addictions.

As part of our recognition of Diocesan life, we consider the 5th Anniversary of Archbishop Michael’s

consecration as our Diocesan hierarch. Several parishes have celebrated significant milestones: the 100th Anniversary of St. Nicholas Church, Cohoes, NY; the 50th Anniversary of Holy Trinity Church, Randolph, NJ; and the 50th Anniversary of the Chapel of the Transfiguration on the campus of Princeton University. We welcome the assignment of Fr. Peter Baktis as pastor of Mother of God Church, Princeton and reflect with sadness on the death of Fr. John Garvey. Special features include book reviews by Fr. John Diamantis and Professor David Ford and a presentation made by Professor John Burgess, a noted scholar of Orthodox life in Russia who has been on sabbatical in Princeton this year. We note the availability of new video interviews with Father Daniel and Dunia Hubiak, Fr. John and Eugenia Nehrebecki, and Fr. Stephen Siniari as part of the “Clergy Stories” section on our Diocesan website (nynjoca.org).

In identifying hospitality as a “spiritual discipline,” Fr. Barnabas helps us realize that like prayer, fasting, and almsgiving it can train us to see spiritual realities in a different sort of way. Revealing the presence of Christ in each person, hospitality must not become an end in itself or “performed for the sake of self-esteem” (St. Maximos the Confessor). It supersedes personal piety for as Abba Cassian learned from an elder, “When I receive Christ in the person of you, I am obliged to care for Him with full attention.” Finally, as expressed by Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, because it has to do with Christ, hospitality like almsgiving can begin on one level and lead us to a higher place and bring us more deeply into another relationship: “Christian love is the ‘possible impossibility’ to see Christ in another man, whoever he is, and whom God, in His eternal and mysterious plan, has decided to introduce into my life, be it only for a few moments, not as an occasion for a ‘good deed’ or an exercise in philanthropy, but as the beginning of an eternal companionship in God Himself.”

The key word in this issue, “philoxenia,” means “love of the stranger.” It involves the great work of transforming strangers into welcomed guests, capable of receiving the “Master’s hospitality.”

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The Hospitality of Abraham In Scripture and Iconography *by Archbishop Michael*

Then God appeared to him (Abraham) at the oak of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door during the noon hour. So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold three men stood before him, and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, and said, "O Lord, if I have now found grace in Your sight, do not pass by Your servant. Let water be brought, and let them wash Your feet, while You cool Yourselves under the tree. And I will bring bread for You to eat. After that You may pass by, inasmuch as You have come to Your servant." They said, "Do as you have said." So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quickly make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes." Then Abraham ran to the herd, took a young calf, tender and good, gave it to his servant; and he hastened to prepare it. He also took butter and milk and the calf he prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate.

Then He said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" He replied, "Here, in the tent." Again He said, "I will certainly return to you, according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son." (Sarah was listening in the tent door behind him). Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing. Therefore, Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "I have not yet had a child until now, and my lord is old also?" Then the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh within herself, saying, "Shall I surely bear a child since I am old? Is anything impossible with God? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son." But Sarah denied she had laughed; for she was afraid, saying, "I did not laugh"; but He said, "No, but you did laugh." (Genesis 18:1-15)

This reading from Genesis is the story commonly known as "The Hospitality of Abraham." In this account, three angels appear to Abraham and Sarah. They treat their visitors with great reverence, and prepare a meal for them. What Abraham and Sarah offer is, in Greek, "philoxenia," which means love for the stranger or "hospitality."

There are in the Old Testament other examples of showing kindness to the stranger – Lot, Rebekah, and Job who boasts: "But I was very kind. For the stranger did not spend the night outside, and my door was opened to everyone who came" (Job 31:31-32). In the Scripture, true hospitality is extended without commandment or reward. It is a self-evident duty, given precedence, over neighborliness. The general acceptance of this duty in later Judaism is proved by the Gospel accounts, which reflect the importance of hospitality in the life and message of Christ (Luke 7:36, ff.; 9:51, ff.; 10:38, ff.; 14:1, ff., etc.).

In his commentary on Chapter 18 of Genesis, St. John Chrysostom explains to us the meaning of Abraham's "hospitality" when he writes: "He (Abraham) was putting 'philoxenia' into practice to such a degree as to be unwilling to entrust to anyone else in the household the task of attending to the guests; instead, although he had 318 servants and was himself an old man, having attained advanced years ...

friendliness involves sharing one's possessions with all comers."

Chrysostom goes on to say that this was not Abraham's only instance of kindness to strangers: "Since he cast a wide net of hospitality, he in turn was judged worthy to welcome the Lord of all with his angels. Hence Paul too said, 'Do not neglect "philoxenia," for through it some people have entertained angels, all unawares' (Hebrews 13:2), referring precisely to the patriarch. Hence Christ said, 'Whoever receives one of the least of these in My name, receives Me'" (Matthew 18:5; 25:40,45).

St. John further explains what this means to us, when he says that we should not have regard to the station of the visitor, nor despise him on the basis of what we can see; instead, we should consider that in him, we are welcoming Our Lord. Abraham, he points out, willingly and with great enthusiasm became the "servant" to the visitors, not relying on his own servants to help him to care for them. "He bows to the ground" (v. 4), St. John says, "... as if making supplication and addressing an earnest prayer to them lest it be thought his appeal was made merely perfunctorily ... thus giving evidence by his posture and his words of his great ardor, his great humility, his insistent spirit of hospitality, his ineffable care."

The Spiritual Discipline of Hospitality

In verses 3-5, Chrysostom notes the washing of their feet as a humble offering made by Abraham: “See how he suggests the poverty of his hospitality instead of its extravagance ... I have only water to offer you to wash and rest from your great weariness under the tree.”

In his commentary, Origen points out this is a foreshadowing of Christ’s self-emptying love: “Abraham the father and teacher of the nations is, indeed, teaching you by these very things how you ought to receive guests and that you should wash the feet of guests. Nevertheless, even this is said mysteriously for he knew that the mysteries of the Lord were not to be completed except in the washing of the feet” (John 3:13).

In verses 6-8, Chrysostom sees Abraham and Sarah as servants of the highest order: “Men, on the one hand, to instruct their partners when they have the prospect of some spiritual advantage, not to have the task carried out by servants (hired hands) but to see to it personally; women, on the other hand, to be sharers with their husbands in such wonderful exploits and not to shrink from hospitality and attention to visitors but rather to imitate old Sarah, who was prepared in old age to take pains and perform the task of menials.” He points out that a life of comfort and luxury is what prevents us from being true servants to others.

In this hospitality, Abraham serves his visitors in a priestly way. He ran personally and selected the calf; he took and prepared the food and “set it before the guests.” He does not see himself worthy to recline with them, but sits under the tree. “What a wonderful extent of hospitality!” St. John writes. “What an extraordinary degree of humility! What a remarkable example of good attitude! This hundred year old person stands nearby while they are eating.”

In referring to the calf, Origen sees it as a type of the sacrifice of Christ. He writes: “And what is so tender, what so good as that one who ‘humbled himself,’ for us ‘to death’ and ‘laid down his life for his friends’? He is the fatted calf which the Father slaughtered to receive his repentant son. ‘For He so loved the world as to give His only begotten son for the life of the world.’”

In the second paragraph of this story, St. John Chrysostom points out that the “visitor” knows Sarah by name ... just as God knows each of us: “Since, being God He was now about to promise him something beyond the limits of nature, consequently mentioning Sarah’s name He suggested that the one

who had visited him in his tent was more than a human being.”

In verse 10, a son – their desired gift of a lifetime – is promised to Abraham and Sarah for their hospitality. Sarah laughs to herself, knowing her advanced years: “The spring has dried up ... with this in mind ... she was thinking this in her tent, the One Who understands unspoken thoughts of the mind wishes to show both the extraordinary degree of His power and the fact that none of our unspoken thoughts escape His notice; so He said to Abraham (v. 13) ... this in fact was what she was thinking.”

In verse 14, the Lord reveals His identity: “Is anything impossible with God? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.” Chrysostom points out that Sarah became fearful at what was taking place ... but the point is the son is promised, salvation is promised, because of “philoxenia.”

Chrysostom’s conclusion to his commentary is advice to us all: “You see, if we practice hospitality, we shall welcome Christ here and He will in turn welcome us in those mansions prepared for those who love Him ... Our Lord looks for generosity of spirit, not great amounts of food, not a rich table but a cheerful attitude, not simply attention in words alone but also love from the heart and a sincere mind. ‘Likewise a kind word is more acceptable than a gift’ (Sirach 18:16). In many cases, you see, attention in word has helped a needy person back on his feet more effectively than a gift ... What account could we give, we who each day spread a lavish table and often have more than we need, whereas with them we share not a scrap, even if by so doing we could win all these countless blessings.”

The early Church and the Holy Fathers recognized in Genesis 18 a “type” or “foreshadowing” of the Holy Trinity. By the 4th century the “Hospitality of Abraham” was understood as a meeting between God and man, and this theme is found in wall painting, dating from this period. The Church has had many different depictions of the Holy Trinity, but the icon which best defines the very essence of the Trinity is

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*Courtesy of
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the one which shows the Trinity as three angels ... the mysterious travelers to Abraham and Sarah. The Church chose this icon because it most fully expresses the divine revelation on the Holy Trinity – the three angels are depicted in equal dignity, symbolizing the tri-unity and the equality of all three Persons.

We find perhaps the deepest understanding of this teaching in the Icon of the Trinity painted by the venerable Russian monk, Andrei Rublev (1370-1430) for the Trinity Cathedral of the Trinity-Sergius Lavra. It is a masterpiece of Russian iconography, and it should not be surprising that the Church has established it as the model for depicting the Holy Trinity.

In Rublev's icon, the Persons of the Trinity are depicted in the order in which they are confessed in the Creed. The first angel is the first Person of the Trinity – God the Father; the second or middle angel, is God the Son; and the third angel is God the Holy Spirit. They are seated around a cube-shaped table, which represents an altar. All three are blessing the chalice, in which lies a sacrificed calf, prepared for eating; they share in the sufferings of the Son which are yet to come. The sacrifice of the calf signifies the Savior's death on the Cross, and its preparation as food symbolizes the Holy Eucharist. The self-giving love of the Triune God involves sacrifice; the Love of the Trinity is a kenotic love, a suffering love.

All three angels have staffs in their hands, representing their divine power. The golden haloes symbolize their holiness, and the circular pattern formed by the shoulders, the bending of the heads and the feet represents the "perixoresis" or round dance of the Trinity. Their faces are turned toward each other, and the theme is the "pre-eternal counsel" – the divine plan of the creation and salvation of the world.

The first angel, shown at the left, is vested in a blue undergarment which depicts His divine, heavenly nature, and the light purple outer garment signifies His unfathomable nature and royal dignity. Behind and above His head towers a house, the home of Abraham, and a sacrificial altar in front of the house. The house signifies God's divine plan for creation, and that it towers above this Person shows Him to be the head (or Father) of this creation. The same fatherly authority is seen in His entire appearance – the expression of His face, the placement of His hands, the way He is sitting, all speak of His fatherly dignity. The other two angels have their heads inclined and eyes turned toward Him, with great attention, as though they were conversing with him about the salvation of mankind.

The second angel is placed in the center of the

icon, a placement held by the second Person within the Trinity. Above His head extend the branches of an oak tree. The vestments of this angel correspond to those in which the Savior is usually depicted. The blue outer robe signifies the divinity and heavenly nature of this Person, and the undergarment of dark crimson color symbolizes the incarnation – the taking on of human nature by the Son of God. The second angel is inclined toward the first angel as if in deep conversation. The tree behind Him serves as a reminder of the Tree of Life that was standing in Eden, and of the Cross upon which the Son of God would offer His life for the salvation of mankind.

The angel on the right is the third Person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit. His light blue undergarment and smoky-green outer garment represent heaven and earth. They symbolize the life-giving force of the Holy Spirit, which animates everything that exists. The Church sings, "Every soul is enlivened by the Holy Spirit, and is exalted in purity ..." This elevation in purity is represented in the icon by a mountain above the third Person.

When Abraham speaks to these "three men," they respond as one ("they said"). In this event, the Lord appeared to Abraham, but when he looks to see who is there, he sees three Persons. They speak as one: the One God in Three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. At other times, when only one of the angels speaks to Abraham, He is referred to as "Lord."

What we have in Rublev's icon is a brilliant work of iconography, but even more importantly a "theology in color" – which instructs us in the revelation of the Triune God, the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity, Who first appeared to the patriarch in Genesis 18, the Hospitality of Abraham.

What do this icon, and this story from the Divine Scriptures, teach and inspire in us about hospitality – the love of the stranger? My prayer is this:

Having reflected on the relationship of self-emptying love that exists eternally among the three Persons of the Holy Trinity – and having pondered the humble, unhesitating response of the Patriarch Abraham to his three mysterious visitors – may we be inspired to seek, and to share, that same self-emptying love with all who come to the doors of our churches ... seeking a meal, or a smile, or a place to call their spiritual home. May we do all of this in gratitude to the Greatest Giver: our gracious and loving God, of Whom the Akathist "Glory to God for All Things" sings: "We can live very well on Your earth ... It is a pleasure to be Your guest." ❖

The Master's Hospitality and Receiving His Word

by Dr. Bruce Beck



*Come, O faithful, let us enjoy the Master's hospitality:
the Banquet of Immortality!
In the upper chamber with uplifted minds,
let us receive the exalted words of the Word, Whom we magnify!
(Hirmos, Ode 9: The Kanon of Holy Thursday Matins)*

What does hospitality have in common with hearing and receiving God's Word? This meditation looks at several examples from the Gospels where reception or hospitality is an underlying theme. We discover here a wonderful paradox: Christ plays both the role of Host and Stranger, both the Master (bidding us to enjoy His table), and the neighbor "not received by His own" (John 1:11). So, in terms of His Word, we are bid to become hosts, offering hospitality to His Word, letting it abide in us (John 15:7), while at the same time, we need Christ to "open up the Scriptures" in us (Luke 24:32).

Perhaps the story that best typifies this paradox of hospitality is the account of the two men returning home on the road to Emmaus following the crucifixion of Jesus. When He joins them along the way, not recognizing Him, they tell Jesus (a stranger to them) all that had happened to their group, and how their Master had died at the hands of the Romans, though they had hoped he was "the one to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21). (Note that the Greek word for hospitality is *philoxenia*, which, translated literally, means "the love of strangers.") The men go on to tell Jesus a remarkable thing: women from their group found His tomb empty that morning, and angels had even told them that Jesus was alive (24:23). Why then, after such a report by the women, would they be heading home dejected? Was this word from

the angels, transmitted faithfully by these women, not credible? Could they not receive such a word because it was too strange for them, coming from women and from angels? Why did Jesus Himself need to pursue them down the road, like the shepherd seeking the lost sheep, and teach them directly the fulfilled Scriptures? It was only after they had invited this stranger into their house for the evening that Jesus took on the role of Host, taking the bread, blessing, breaking, and offering it to them. Then, and only then, were their eyes opened, and they were able to recognize Him as Jesus their risen Lord, both the Guest and the Host. In this mystical encounter with Jesus as a stranger, the two men had the Word placed in their hearts, and their own bread placed in their hands. How marvelous is this depiction of the abundance of God's loving kindness!

Another example of hospitality and the Word comes from the majestic Prologue to the Gospel of John, where we hear the Evangelist say that the Word (Logos) was in the beginning with God, that through this Logos all things were created, and that the Logos came to dwell among us. But then John narrates an unsettling ending to this story, one which demonstrates not hospitality to one's neighbor, but rejection: the Logos was not received among His own (1:10-11). How could He not have been received? While the answer to this question

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*Plaque with
Scenes at Emmaus
Second half of 9th
century, Ivory,
The Cloisters
Collection, 1970.*

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continues to mystify us, we can hear in this beautiful Prologue a parable of non-hospitality; they did not receive Him, nor recognize Him, though He was one of their own.

The verb “to receive” in John 1:11 is used only two other times in John’s Gospel. Once it describes how Pilate handed over Jesus to the soldiers, so “they received” or took Him (19:16). This is not the kind of reception that we would want to see for God’s beloved Son (3:16). The next time is quite illuminating: John employs this verb (paralambáno) to describe Jesus’ invitation for His disciples to be invited into the heavenly mansion with many rooms, where He will be going after His impending death. He says tenderly to His disciples, “In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:2-3). This whole saying draws from the cultured practice of hospitality. Jesus tells them they are invited to His Father’s house, which has plenty of rooms for all of them. We learn from Him two characteristics of hospitality, which we can in turn apply to receiving His Word in our lives:

First, hospitality requires preparation for one’s guests. Receiving guests into our homes, without cleaning the house and preparing food, is not really hospitality but rather lodging. Jesus tells His disciples that he is making preparations to receive them. Likewise, like the good soil upon which the seed falls and bears fruit (Mat 13:1-9), doing our preparation for receiving the Word makes good sense. Good soil is not hardened (with prejudgments or preconceptions or pride), but is opened up, turned over, with the chance for the seed to fall deep in the heart of the earth. This work of “preparing the soil” anticipates the coming of the Word, and desires to be the bearer of growth, being challenged by new things.

Second, hospitality is personal or relational (and not merely providing shelter and food), since Jesus says “I will receive you unto myself” (and not just “into the mansion.”) The goal of being received is to spend time with each other, and not just to be admitted. This quality of hospitality is further strengthened when Jesus adds “in order that where I am you may be also.” So, following this model of spiritual hospitality, if we want to be listeners to the Word of God, receiving Him through His Word, then we would be wise to follow His example here of

receiving the Word personally and relationally (not just intellectually and historically). Like a close friend who, while visiting us, reminds us who we really are, God’s Word in our lives can fill us with desire for Him and shake off our false identities for the one we have when we are with Him.

Another trait of hospitality comes from the story of the Archangel Gabriel’s visiting the Theotokos in her home. Here, we see that Mary’s question about the word from Gabriel is a sign of earnest faith, rather than doubt, an emblem of engagement rather than disbelief. Mary was greeted by a stranger (Archangel Gabriel): “Rejoice, you who have received [God’s] grace; the Lord is with you” (Luke 1:28). Showing regard for the stranger, Mary did not shun this inscrutable greeting, though she was certainly in unfamiliar territory; rather she pondered and carefully considered what kind of greeting she received from the Archangel. She questioned not, “How can I know this to be true?”, but rather, “How can I apply or understand these words?” “What do I need to do?” since, as she told Him, she did not have a husband. In this dialogue we see the difference between unbelief and questioning, not asking for a proof or a sign, but rather asking: “How is this going to work? What do I need to do about this grace-filled word?” Learning to ask questions of Scripture is a way of letting God’s Word into our hearts, being hospitable hosts to His Word, as Mary received the strange word of Gabriel. She welcomed not only Gabriel’s word, but also the Living Word to dwell in her womb, bringing life to us all.

Lastly, let’s return to the idea mentioned above that hospitality requires preparation. What might this mean in practical terms for us within the Orthodox Church, one which honors the hearing of Scripture within all its services as normative? You see, we among all people are blessed, since we do not have to struggle over the question of what we should read in the Bible, or what we shall drink from its depths. We are a Church whose life is oriented by its liturgical calendar, celebrating the feasts and weekly celebrating the Divine Liturgy, each with its own selected biblical readings based on the ancient lectionary of our Church. We are invited by our Lord into His mansion of many rooms, which here in this life is manifested by the Church, to be with Him in the sharing of His Word and His sacred Body and Blood. Fr. Alexander Schmemmann in his influential posthumous book, *The Eucharist*, stressed that the rhythm of our week should be either in remembering the previous eucharistic celebration, or turning

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Evangelism and the Love of Stranger

by Fr. John Parker

They look at us like we from the zoo! This no work! This no work, Maria! They different people. So dry! That family is like a piece of toast. No honeys, no jam, just dry! My daughter! My daughter gonna marry Ian Miller.

A Xeno! A Xeno with a toast family! I never think this can happen to us!

Hidden in the midst of a dialogue between Mr. and Mrs. Portokalis in *My Big, Fat Greek Wedding* is an important Greek word: “Xeno.” Xeno is important because it forms, with “philo” – “love” – the name of the beautiful icon which inspired St. Andrei Rublev to paint, “The Old Testament Trinity.” The name of that icon: “Philoxenia tou Abraham” – “The Philo-xenia of Abraham.” In English: “The Hospitality of Abraham.”

Philoxenia literally means “the love of the stranger,” the love of the foreigner. Mr. Portokalis was at wit’s end because he could not imagine having a non-Greek son-in-law. A foreigner! With a toast family!

A person’s family name or heritage does not save him. In Charleston, South Carolina, the question, “Who’s your daddy?” is a question of prestige – Are you from one of the “first families” of Charleston? It is an effort to see if you are a “Protapoulos” or a “Protovich” of the Lowcountry.

According to our Lord, every family name on earth is fleeting: “Bear fruits that befit repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham” (Luke 3:8).

No, one’s “name” is only as valuable as one’s fidelity to Jesus Christ. We call to remembrance that by the Waters of Baptism, “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). This verse, in fact, is the very one which follows our beautiful baptismal hymn, “As many as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ! Alleluia!”

In Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek nor Arab nor Russian nor Ukrainian nor Mexican nor American. We can only realize this when we accept that, before the face of God, we were all – every one of us—born strangers; and each of us, by our

Baptism has been given the gift of a name and of sonship.

The New Testament makes use of the term “love of stranger” five times; two with respect to the qualifications of a Bishop, and three times as a general Christian command:

Now a bishop must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, sensible, dignified, hospitable (philoxenon), an apt teacher (1 Tim 3:2).

For a bishop, as God’s steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable (philoxenon), a lover of goodness, master of himself, upright, holy, and self-controlled (Titus 1: 7-8).

Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality (philoxenian). Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them (Romans 12:12-14).

Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins. Practice hospitality (philoxenoi) ungrudgingly to one another. As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace (1 Peter 4:8-10).

And perhaps the most well known in English:

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares (Hebrews 13:2).

It is this passage from St Paul’s letter to the Hebrews which exactly makes the connection to the subject of the Hospitality Icon, the whole story of entertaining angels unawares which can be read in Genesis 18.

Philoxenia, the “love of the stranger,” hospitality can be said to be at the center of the Christian life. How so? Because no one is born a Christian. Every one of us is a stranger, a sojourner, a foreigner, until we are baptized and welcomed into the Christian family.

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toward the one that is approaching the coming Sunday. Fr. Schmemmann reminds us that we are oriented by the Church's calendar, and thus when we read Scripture, one of the first things we might attend to is the Scripture that will be heard in the Divine Liturgy for the upcoming Sunday or feast day. In preparing for the liturgy by studying both the Gospel and Epistle readings, we are opening up our heart to receive the word, which includes both the hearing of the Scripture, and the homily given in the liturgy.

This way of showing hospitality, by receiving our Lord through His Word, is not a new idea. Our father among the Saints John Chrysostom admonished his own flock to prepare themselves for each week's Divine Liturgy by reading the coming Sunday's Gospel during the week. How marvelous is his idea, especially given the fact that in His time manuscripts were very expensive, and literacy was less prevalent than today. Let me end this reflection on hospitality and receiving the word with a selection from St. John Chrysostom's 35th Homily on Genesis:

...[No] time proves an obstacle to the reading of the divine sayings; rather, it is possible not only at home, but also moving about in public,

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As a matter of fact, conversations in our churches would be very different if we all realized that every single Orthodox Christian is a convert!

God loved us first, though we are sinners who have run far from him. Yet, as we remembered on the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, the Father does not treat us (as we deserve) as a hired servant, a foreigner, a lost one. He runs out to greet us, wraps us in royalty, grants us the family ring, and slaughters the best fatted calf for each of us who "was dead and is alive again, who was lost and is found."

The Spiritual Discipline of welcoming the stranger, the newcomer into our midst is made far, far simpler when we each realize, "That was me! I was one lost and am now found. I was once far away and was welcomed back. I once didn't know home and now do." In this case, we are passing along what was simply and generously given to us.

But it may also be the case that when we came to an Orthodox Church we were not welcomed.

making a journey, being in the company of a crowd and involved in business affairs to give oneself earnestly to these sayings so that by bringing our resources to bear, we too may promptly chance upon a mentor. Our Lord, you see, discerning our enthusiasm for spiritual matters, far from ignoring us, supplies illumination from above and enlightens our mind. Accordingly, let us not neglect reading, I beseech you; rather, whether we recognize the efficacy of the contents or are unaware of it, let us apply ourselves to it assiduously. Constant attention to it, after all, creates an indelible memory; and it often happens that what we could not discover today in our reading we all of a sudden come across the next day in returning to the task as the loving God in unseen fashion sheds light on our mind."¹ ❖

¹ St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on Genesis 18-45, trans. Charles Hill, *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 82 (CUA Press, 2010) p. 308.

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We were the "toast xeno," received coldly by Mr. or Mrs. Insert-name-has-been-here-forever. In this case, overlooking his or her sins (see the first sentence of the 1 Peter passage above), you and I are called to be the agents of welcome. That sad cycle can be broken with us!

The distinction between hospitality and haughtiness can be seen in two versions of the same question:

Haughty: "What brings YOU here to visit today?"

Hospitable: "What BRINGS you here to visit today?"

The Lord God has given every Orthodox Christian an immeasurable and free gift: the fullness of the Christian Faith! It was not given to be put under a bushel basket. It was not given to hoard. It was not given because we are special. It was given to us because God is love!

Spread the love!

"Freely you have been given, freely give!" ❖

When a Welcome Requires Knowledge: Addiction, Honesty, and Service

by Juliana M. Federoff

I struggle with pride. I would much rather never do wrong than have to admit that I was wrong. I would also prefer that my mistakes go unnoticed than have to suffer the embarrassment of apologizing and the sadness of realizing that I'd hurt someone. But this, of course, is the very pattern of our Christian life – the axiom of falling down and getting back up again. When I admit that I am “down” and the particulars of the fall, I can then get back up.

This image was centrally present the first time I went to an open Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) meeting. I heard person after person tell their life's story, including their furthest and greatest falls. I knew, because of my Orthodox upbringing, how important honesty is for healing in Confession, but the extent of their honesty during that open meeting humbled me.

As they told their stories, many people explained how they had blamed fall after fall on the other people in their lives and the situations they had to face. However, in the present they were focused on the joy of life now unburdened by alcohol. They gave thanks to the A.A. sponsor and group who had first helped them find sobriety. They gave thanks for lives that were no longer governed by their own will, but by God's Will (the 3rd Step) and giving back (the 12th Step). They gave thanks for the opportunity to give back to the A.A. Fellowship that continues to support their sobriety and the opportunity to be there with other alcoholics who want to become sober.

They told their stories for the express purpose of giving thanks and encouraging each other; it reminded me of the community of our Church. The amount of honesty (about serious falls), the lack of bitterness, and the focus on joy, thanksgiving and service were an encouragement to beef up my own spiritual life and start praying to God a bit more honestly and sincerely.

It's likely that you know someone who suffers from the disease of addiction to alcohol or another drug—or that you yourself have or continue to suffer from this much misunderstood disease. It is likely because: 1 in 4 children under 18 live in a family with alcoholism or alcohol abuse (*National Institute on Alcohol Abuse & Alcoholism*, 2000); countless others have drug-using parents. Picture the

children in your church: 25% of them face addiction every day. That covers a significant portion of our families. Twenty-two and a half million Americans ages 12 and older have diagnosable alcohol or drug dependence or abuse (*National Survey on Drug Use and Health*, 2005).

However, addiction is a largely misunderstood disease that confounds those who suffer from it, much as those who want to help. Without the right understanding it's possible to do more harm than good. For this reason it is important to learn all one can about alcoholism and drug addiction in order to become a truly welcoming presence. I work for a substance abuse program of the United Methodist Church that aims to educate churches enough so that parishioners whose families have been affected by addiction can support each other and so that clergy can share resources with parishioners who want to stop drinking. I have learned a lot from my boss who has 20 years of experience in treating clients for addiction. Getting to know A.A. members and familiarization with some facts about addiction can be enough to save a life or to remove a family's shame and isolation. Here are a few of these facts about addiction and treatment that I've learned:

- Addiction is a brain disease. Persons who become addicted initially use drugs or alcohol in the exact same way as persons who do not become addicted. However, drugs or alcohol affect certain people's brains differently; these persons become addicted.
- Biology or brain chemistry (not amount of use) separates persons who become addicted from those who don't.
- The abuse of drugs and alcohol looks very similar to drug or alcoholic addiction. The key difference between abuse and addiction is that once a person has developed the disease of addiction, drinking or using drugs is no longer a choice.
- High-tolerance for alcohol (the ability to consume many drinks before feeling an effect) is a risk factor for alcoholism.
- Addiction is a family disease because it affects the non-addicted family members of those persons who are addicted. Al-Anon provides

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Twelve Step-based support for anyone affected by someone else's addiction – or impacted by the generational effects of addiction in their parents' or grandparents' homes.

- The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous are twelve principles or actions that remind me of the Orthodox Christian spiritual journey and have helped many alcoholics reach and maintain sobriety. "A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, religious organization or institution," however, many of A.A.'s steps, traditions, and philosophies are in line with Christian teachings and principles. For example, the 4th Step – "Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves" – and the 5th Step – "Admitting to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs" – remind me of preparing for and experiencing the Sacrament of Confession. (*Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous*)
- A.A. and Al-Anon are not the only options. Residential treatment and/or out-patient counseling can be very helpful and effective. Some people also require medical detox from alcohol because in some situations, death is a risk after the body has developed a dependency on the alcohol.

Connecting with Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon (for persons affected by someone's addiction) is an easy, yet significant way for our parishes to reach our communities and serve our Church.

Outreach ideas:

- If you are a priest or a lay leader, know, and visit the community resources, counselors, and treatment (both in-patient or residential and out-patient) options in your area so you can be ready with references that you trust when parishioners come to you with a concern about addiction. Try a Google search on your city or town and "community addiction resources." Your local "drug and alcohol council" or "council on drugs and alcoholism" will also be helpful.
- Attend local A.A., Al-Anon, NA (Narcotics Anonymous), AlaTeen (for teens affected by a parent's addiction) meetings. If you are not concerned about your own drug use or your own drinking, attend only meetings marked as "open." Introduce yourself by your first name only: "I'm (your first name), and I'm a visitor."

- Get to know people in recovery. Persons who are in recovery are exponentially more effective than those who have never faced addiction themselves in supporting someone who wants to find and maintain sobriety since they have experienced first-hand the craftiness of the disease, the effort of working the Twelve Steps, and the relief from addiction.
- One foundation of Twelve Step programs is to be of service to other people. Doing service helps its members stay sober. Because they personally know the agony of addiction and are committed to serving others, they are often willing to support those struggling with addiction at any time of the day or night.
- Persons who are in recovery, usually with at least a year of sobriety (because it takes about a year to work the Twelve Steps), become sponsors for people who want to stop drinking. Familiarize yourself with local Twelve Step groups and ask if there are people who regularly attend these groups who would be willing to meet parishioners who are concerned with their drinking.
- Let Twelve Step groups know they can host their meetings in your church. (Do this after developing a relationship with the groups.)
- Learn about the similarities between the Orthodox spiritual journey and the effort it takes to go through the Twelve Steps.
- The Twelve Steps lend themselves to Christian spiritual lessons, often addressed in homilies. Consider connecting your homilies with the Twelve Steps.

[Note: I can be contacted below with resources and samples regarding these last two points.]

Some may be hesitant to host Twelve Step meetings in their church, afraid that people will come to the church drunk, will steal, or otherwise defraud the church. While this is possible, persons in recovery are well-equipped to respond effectively to an intoxicated person. A.A. members are focused on being of service and having a positive impact on their community. The meeting space is very important because if they don't have a place to share their stories of addiction and recovery with other alcoholics, they will drink. Members make commitments at the meeting to ensure their meeting space is maintained and kept safe, such as putting

Parish Hospitality

by Fr. Alexis Vinogradov

I am a parish priest in a typical semi-suburban, quasi-rural neighborhood, for which the term neighborhood is somewhat inaccurate. Yes, the houses stand side by side with mailboxes like soldiers in rows along tree-lined streets. But the neighbors move in and out not on foot, waving to and conversing with one another, but in vehicles that disappear behind garage doors, as do their owners behind the facades that shelter so many secret family mysteries. And in this neighborhood of silent houses, other cars, from various other neighborhoods arrive at my church, commuters from many other such neighborhoods as the one I live in.

And in this building, in this church, is where the real neighbors gather, for it is here that one face encounters another, one soul acknowledges another, one person's long and complex personal history meets and joins an equally precious and complex history of another individual. Each one coming into this church has had to deal with thousands of encounters, day after day, in schools, at work, in family – encounters that have blossomed into great friendships while other encounters have led to unmentionable mourning and loss in divorce, in death, or in failed professional life.

Isn't it natural then, that each one considers the next encounter with patience and understandable hesitation: Will this person be kind to me? Will this one understand? What will that one want from me? Is not hospitality then, first and foremost, the deliberate creation of a space of quiet peace? A space that places no immediate demands, but that suggests in its unimposing respect: You are welcome to sit here with us. No "Sunshine Committee" of well-meaning greeters will descend upon you with pamphlets and questions.

I think how quick we are at times to saturate visitors with historical timelines of Orthodoxy's fidelity, dos and don'ts of stewardship and finances, and of course the proverbial prohibitions: who can and who is forbidden to approach the Chalice! Before a newcomer has had time to feel the compelling presence of saints living along the painted walls and those breathing next to them in prayer, he or she may sense: I think I am not wanted here...

That initial experience is extremely important precisely because today we confront an entirely new paradigm of the idea of neighborhood and community. And any community, especially the

community of the Church, has two aspects that are ironically, mutually exclusive! The one obviously positive one, is that it thrives on the fact that its membership must be replenished – without which it is simply fated to die. Thus it has to be open and receive. On the other hand – and here is the irony – it has also to remain in some measure closed and distinct, or it ceases to be a specific community. In any given geographic locale in this our fallen world of distortion, confusion, and death, the local Church is meant to be a beacon of Life, transcendence, hope, and the presence and power of God's Love. That reality is the pure gift of God's crucified and resurrected Son, but it is a gift that remains closed to every free-willed soul that desires something other than this gift. Hence, the local gathering of Christians must provide the context where there is a mutual discovery – a discovery on the part of the visitor, and a discovery about the visitor by the community.

We often bend backwards to make every stranger feel welcome, and we desire not to impose any barrier, but there is an alliance that is to be formed. As much as the stranger becomes more and more welcome, his or her responsibility towards the church community will also increase, for the Body of Christ is whole only in the proper functioning of all her members, and the visitor grows from status of stranger to that of a functioning and much needed member of Christ's Body, in this specific place. That process and its goal of integration is the ultimate foundation of all healthy hospitality in parish life.

A healthy community will be solid enough in its own integrity and conviction that it will give the stranger a wide berth, patience, and time. But in its desire to bring him into the wholeness that it knows and by which it lives it will also slowly begin to make of this visitor a true neighbor. Such a community will afford this and each visitor the dignity of offering him the responsibility of the children of God, the possibility of growing into the full stature of Christ. And in that attitude will come a true transformation, for we will no longer be scattered people "going TO church" but we will become what we are called to be: the people of God called to BE the Church.

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*St. Gregory's
eldest member
Dan Sopchak (94),
greeting
Alex Girko (93)
with his daughter
Matushka Tanya
Danilchick.
Photo by:
Peter Wilkie*

The Spiral Shape of Archbishop Michael's Episcopal Ministry: Celebrating the First Five Years

by Fr. John Shimchick

The 5th Anniversary of Archbishop Michael's consecration as our Diocesan hierarch took place on Saturday, May 9, 2015. It began with a Divine Liturgy served at St. John the Baptist Church, Passaic, New Jersey and included a reception at The Brownstone in Paterson. While recalling an event that took place at Jersey City in 2010, it is fair to say his ministry could be described both as moving in a linear direction and yet as following the reoccurring path of a spiral, which moves outward, returns in, and then moves even farther out, repeating elements while encompassing and adding more and more.

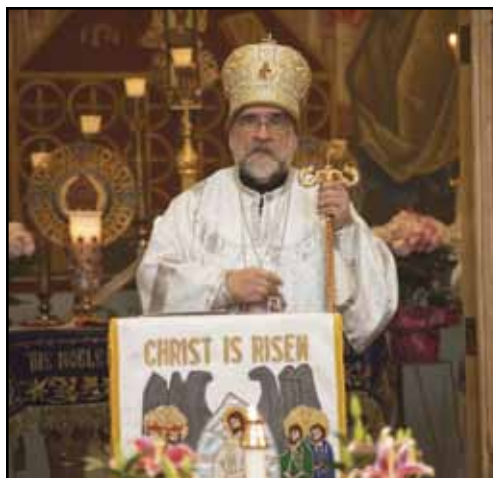


photo by John Savastinuk

This was clear at the reception as he described how the assembled guests represented important phases of his life. At a family table were his mother, Ann Dahulich, his sister, Barbara Dahulich

Knighton, and his childhood friend and fellow seminary student, Fr. James Dutko, with his wife, Pani Kathy. Fr. James is now the pastor of Vladika's home parish, St. Michael's Carpatho-Russian Church, Binghamton, New York. He is also the son of Vladika's initial mentor, Fr. Stephen Dutko, who had been St. Michael's pastor as Vladika was growing up. Other guests at this table included: Theresa Slovesko Koast, of St. Michael's Church and Protodeacon Peter Skoog and daughter, Marija, of Holy Trinity OCA Church in Pottstown, Pennsylvania (his former deacon). Present also were administrators and

students from St. Tikhon's Seminary, where he has served as dean, professor, and now rector. Some of these students now serve as clergy in our Diocese.

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away chairs, sweeping up cigarette butts, and watching the door.

We take courage from Philippians 2:1-5: "If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete... Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others..."

When loved-ones have died or I have faced trials, I have needed my brothers and sisters in Christ to encourage me, pray for me, and be with me. Addiction, like other illnesses and trials, affects our parishioners and communities. In this, too, I am grateful for the Church where together we work to "encourage one another and build up one another"

(1Thess 5:11). In the case of addiction, this building up of each other begins with the work of research and learning. Approaching someone with a basic understanding of addiction may be enough to save a life or remove the isolating experience of shame and stigma. I know of no welcome greater than that. ❖

Juliana (Mecera) Federoff is a member of Holy Virgin Protection Cathedral in New York City. She graduated from St. Vladimir's Seminary (Master of Arts in Theology, 2009) and Union Theological Seminary (Master of Sacred Theology, 2010), where her research focused on ecumenism and women's ministries in the Orthodox Church. She enjoys hospital chaplaincy, group facilitation, and has worked as an executive for the United Methodist Special Program on Substance Abuse and Related Violence in New York City since 2010.

She can be contacted at juliana.mecera.2007@owu.edu.

Holy Trinity Randolph – 50th Anniversary

The Parish Council, led by Rev. David R. Fox and Senior Warden Suzette Eremin at Holy Trinity Church in Randolph, knew that a 50th Anniversary Hierarchical Liturgy and Banquet were “givens” for their celebration planning. So, early in 2014, they requested His Grace, Bishop Michael’s presence on the anniversary celebration weekend and they established a committee to focus on the banquet arrangements.

But then they set about planning a whole year of other celebrations!

Holy Trinity’s goal was to have an event or accomplishment each month of the 50th year, involving the many and varied interests and assets of the parish. Here are some of the plans, small and large, that came to fruition for the church during its 50th anniversary year in 2014:

- Large-scale renovation of the Parish Hall, renamed and dedicated as Founders Hall, in honor of those who established the parish in 1964.
- Kickoff of a Capital Campaign to fund much needed upgrade, repairs, and renovations to the church’s aging facilities, including the Hall and the stained glass windows.
- Production of a professional 10-minute video featuring interviews with parishioners, both long-term and new, about their memories and the impact of the church on their lives.
- A concert by the Konevets Quartet, widely advertised and attended by a full house of parishioners and local community residents.
- Production of a new CD, *Rejoice in the Lord Always*, by the parish choir; its current Rector, Rev. David R. Fox; and V. Rev. George Hasencz, Rector from 1965 to 2009.
- Publication of a laminated, tabbed prayer book containing texts of services and prayers for

congregation use. Installation of book racks in the church pews to hold the new books.

- A celebratory summer picnic, featuring traditional foods prepared by members of the internationally diverse congregation.
- Publication of a 130-page full-color Anniversary Book describing the history of the parish in 5-year increments, with vintage and current photos. After the celebration, publication of a second book with photos of the events.
- Design and installation of a banner announcing the anniversary to passers-by.

The celebration culminated on October 5th, with a joyous Hierarchical Liturgy presided over by His Grace Bishop Michael and celebrated by V. Rev. John Nehrebecki, who sparked the establishment of Holy Trinity and numerous other North Jersey parishes. Celebrants and guests included: Fr. David Fox, Fr. George Hasencz, and “sons of the parish” – Fr. John Jillions, OCA Chancellor, and Protodeacon Peter Danilchick.

Looking back on the church’s 50th year, Fr. David said, “It is an amazing thing to be part of a parish’s golden anniversary. Our people worked incredibly hard all year. We’ll try to fulfill the jubilee prescription to rest this year! Glory to God for all things!” ❖



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In this distinction lies our entire future. For it is true that today for the most part, the Church’s members attend in order to have their occasional religious needs provided by the institution called Church that is there with or without them. But when we will begin to sense with our whole being

that we gather each time to actually become, to actually constitute, Christ’s Body, to recognize our priestly duty towards the world and not to our own sentimental religious needs, then the Church herself will become a beacon of hospitality to a world starved for true Life and the transfiguring joy that only Christ-bearers can bring! ❖

Recent Events at St Martin's Chapel, West Point

On September 14, 2014 it was our joy to welcome His Grace Bishop Michael once again to St Martin's Chapel at the United States Military Academy at West Point. Serving with Vladika Michael were Archpriest Joseph Frawley, Protodeacon Paul Sokol, and the subdeacons Mark Federo, Zach Sokol and Alexander Vlachos. We were also joined by the Vlachos and Brasowski families from Christ the Saviour Church in Paramus, NJ, who added their voices to our small choir, and by the Warner family, David, Cvietta, Tatijana and Elena who have been



worshiping with us for about a year. In honor of Bishop Michael's visit, a VIP parking space was reserved for him with a sign reading: "Commandant."

Also visiting from Virginia were Col. Douglas Matty, his wife Deanna, and his sons Thomas and

Johnathan. Col. Matty, a former instructor at West Point, and a special part of our chapel family, made a surprise presentation of an ipad for Father Joseph so that he may keep in touch with the cadets during those times when he cannot get to a library to check email. The photo accompanying this article was, in fact, taken with the new ipad.

Following the Divine Liturgy and coffee hour, we went to the Thayer Hotel for brunch. The food was a most welcome change for the cadets, who usually eat in the Mess Hall, and the experience was enhanced by the beautiful views of the Hudson River through the windows. Vladika Michael always makes it a point to ask the cadets about

themselves and their future plans, offering words of encouragement and support, and thanking them for their service to our country.

The older cadets have met Bishop Michael before, and so they welcomed him as an old friend. The newer cadets soon relaxed and felt at ease as they had the opportunity to speak with him. We know that all of them are grateful to His Grace for visiting us several times since he became the diocesan hierarch, and they appreciate the edifying spiritual counsel which he gives in his sermons. It is readily apparent that Vladika Michael also derives much pleasure and satisfaction from meeting the cadets who will become the future leaders of the Army, and they can tell that he really means it when he says that they will be in his prayers both now, and when they graduate.

After three weeks off for Christmas Break, the Orthodox cadets returned to St Martin's Chapel on January 11, 2015 for the first service of the new semester. After the Divine Liturgy we adjourned to the Fenton Room where we had the service of the Vasilopita, the special bread made in honor of St Basil the Great. The Vasilopita, which is made by the nuns of Holy Protection Greek Orthodox Monastery in PA is very popular with our Orthodox cadets. According to tradition, the person who receives the slice with the coin will have St Basil's blessing for the year.

This year we have been blessed with two catechumens who are receiving instruction in the Orthodox Faith. We are all looking forward to the day when they will be united to Christ's one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, and will be numbered with His chosen flock. God willing, these will be the fourth and fifth converts received by Father Joseph during his time at West Point. May it be blessed. ❖

Abba Cassian related: "Coming from Palestine to Egypt, I and the holy Germanus visited an elder there. Having received us as his guests he was asked by us: 'How is it that, when you are entertaining brothers from elsewhere, you do not observe our rule of fasting as we received it in Palestine?' 'Fasting is forever with me,' he said in reply, 'but I cannot keep you with myself forever. Fasting is a useful and necessary practice, but we do it by our own choice; whereas the law of God enjoins the practice of charity as obligatory. When I receive Christ in the person of you, I am obliged to care for him with full attention. When I send you on your way, I can resume the rule of fasting, for 'the companions of the bridegroom cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them; but when he is taken away from them, then will they fast' [Mt 9:15] legitimately." (*Give Me A Word*, SVS Press, 2014, 165)

100th Anniversary of St. Nicholas Orthodox Church

St. Nicholas Church celebrated 100 years of Orthodox Christianity in Cohoes, NY on October 11 and 12, 2014. A Memorial Divine Liturgy was served on Saturday with Fr. Stephan Mack for the founders, benefactors, and beautifiers, including priests and starostas who shaped the growth of St. Nicholas over the last century. We will always carry in our hearts their memories. Bishop Michael, Fr. Michael Fritz, Fr. Peter Olsen, PDn Paul Sokol, and the pastor, Fr. Terenti Wasielewski, celebrated the Divine Liturgy on Sunday. Grammotas were presented to Stephanie Stroyen, Paula Patrician, and Gregory Walko for their outstanding work in preparing the church for the 100th anniversary.

The first Divine Liturgy was celebrated in January, 1914 in the upstairs meeting room of a bank in Cohoes. We need to be ever grateful for the Grega, Kopcha, and Guba families who remained steadfast in their Orthodox faith and decided to leave the Greek Catholic Church on Ontario Street in Cohoes, NY and begin a new church for those who wished to remain Orthodox. These three families spearheaded the formation of our church.

The new Orthodox parish bearing the name of St. Nicholas became a beacon for new immigration from Lemkovyna and Russia. Cohoes offered them a future in the new land of opportunity. With manufacturing booming at the turn of the century, Lemkos settled here and joined the church.

During this time the metrical books record an era where marriages were performed regularly, baptisms were abundant, and funerals were few. We nurtured a "Little Lemkovyna."

St. Nicholas Church offered a piece of the old country, where they could use their language, practice their culture, and thank God for all the blessings they received. It gave them comfort to know that they could still be Lemkos in a strange land and not have to assimilate. *Po-nashomy* was heard everywhere, while English was slow in being adopted as their "every day" language.

This first wave of immigrants had nothing on their backs. They came penniless, expecting no handouts, did not know English, and often came with no relatives to greet them with open arms. This story is so typical of many of our parishioners who ventured across the ocean. They were hardworking and determined to have a better life here in America.

As the first generation Americans emerged, some of them assimilated by intermarrying and leaving the church, while others married within the church and carried on another generation.



Over the last 100 years the Geleta, Shewczyk, Cherniak, Kobylar, and Serbalik families, among others, have been particularly dedicated. As the parish became larger, organizations began to prosper and socialization surrounded the church.

Within those families each was known by their nickname like: Bronko, Clem, Duck, Lefty, and Dolly.

This new generation propelled new ideas and with it came the longing for a new church building. Despite not having much, people pooled their resources, and the project emerged. Construction, though prolonged because of a shortage of steel during WWII, eventually was completed and the present church was consecrated in 1942.

As time went on, many from the first generation wanted English in the Divine Services, and some wished that Christmas would coincide with their American friends. We began to see English used in the Sunday Liturgies with Fr. Eugene Serebrennikoff in the late 1950's. By the early 1980's the church adopted the newly revised Julian calendar which shifted Christmas to the 25th of December. The assimilation process had taken its course, and an American Orthodox church established its roots here in Cohoes.

It is estimated that the average life of a church is only 40 years. We can see that we have doubled and

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St. Gregory parish is a regional one – members come from several counties, numerous municipalities, and school systems. Not a “village church,” it was never connected to just one ethnic group. In fact, the founders wrote into their by-laws that the language of the services, of all other activities was the language of the land – English. This said, members come from at least two dozen ethnic and church backgrounds, so it is truly an “ecumenical” community. And, in recent years, St. Gregory’s has been



Philip
Durniak, John
Czukkermann, Josyf
Hayda, & Mark
Durniak

committed to outreach, to helping those in need in the communities around. First and foremost, this means the neighborhoods where members live – in Dutchess, Orange, Westchester, Putnam, Rockland, Ulster counties. But it also has meant *The Lunch Box*, the free cafeteria or “soup kitchen,” linked to Dutchess Outreach,



Preparing Eggs

and located in a former Catholic school in downtown Poughkeepsie, NY. Funds from our Christmas Food Fair, where home made foods, including stuffed cabbage, pirogi, baked goods, soups, craft items are sold at the start of December, are given to local philanthropic agencies.

The Lunch Box is one of these, and parish support enabled the purchase of a commercial freezer, among other items. In the photo, parish members serve a hot lunch also prepared by them, this done several times a year. Not only our young people, but all of us at St. Gregory have learned ways in which to be of service to brothers and sisters in need. ❖

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Finally, there were the rest of us who have come to know and love him.

Each of these groups represents overlapping periods of his life that remind him not only of his spiritual roots, but of continued friendships, support, the overcoming of difficulties, and the power of Christ’s love for us. He spoke of St. Michael’s parish as his “Hagia Sophia.” This is not for its physical resemblance to the great church in Constantinople, but because like the representatives of Prince Vladimir it was where he was first overwhelmed by the experience of the Church as “heaven on earth.”

Vladika Michael likes to remind us to “share our story.” It was intriguing to view all of these components of his story in one place because, as he shares the details and encounters of his own life to an ever-growing audience, he is himself renewed in the retelling.

One final aspect of the day took place during the Divine Liturgy where in his sermon Archbishop Michael presented the areas where, based on all that this day represented to him and to us, he feels our Diocese should direct its attention and energy.

Here are the areas that he would like us to move forward with him:

- 1. Church Attendance:** We must teach our faithful to love the divine services and grow the active membership of our parishes.
- 2. Our Youth:** We need to teach our youth the importance and relevance of the Orthodox Faith in their lives.
- 3. Vocations:** We must encourage vocations, as the number of priests and deacons to shepherd and serve the flock is never enough.
- 4. Stewardship:** We must encourage a greater giving of time, talent and treasure to strengthen the health of our parishes.
- 5. Parish Growth:** We must reach out and minister to those outside our Church, who are being led to Orthodoxy by the Holy Spirit.

This day of reflection and celebration offers us both the historical review of Archbishop Michael’s life and work and the opportunity to surge forward with him in a cooperative effort of what still is necessary and possible to be done. ❖

MOPS: Helping Mothers of Pre-Schoolers in Trenton

On Tuesday, February 10th, the parish of St. Vladimir held the first meeting of a brand new ministry - Mothers of Pre-Schoolers (MOPS)!

MOPS meets here the second and fourth Tuesday of each month from 9:30am-noon, providing free childcare for mothers

of children aged birth to pre-school, as well as expectant mothers, during which time the moms gather for a few hours of fellowship, activities, discussion, and fun! MOPS had a profound impact on me and I wanted to share the blessings I received with others in our parish and the surrounding community. As a new mom, you often feel overwhelmed and begin to neglect

yourself and your own needs. I am excited about the possibilities of helping other mothers and am hopeful that the time they have with us will benefit not only the moms, but their children and entire families!

Each meeting we watch a video provided by MOPS that has a Christian message or lesson. Since people are more likely to feel free to share their thoughts while their hands are busy, we also have a craft. While doing the craft we discuss ways to incorporate what we learned and how we can apply it to our lives. One recent meeting we watched a video on forgiveness and made “keys to forgiveness.” As the women share and connect with one another they build a lasting bond and are more likely to return again. Statistically if one mother makes two or three friends in a group she has a 70% chance of joining your parish.

Fr. John Diamantis, the pastor, commented, “Our parish strives to be constantly aware of the needs of the community around us. It is my hope and prayer that by reaching out to mothers, whether they are stay-at-home moms by choice or necessity, that we can help to replace some of their stress with

Christ’s love, warmth and comfort – if only for a few hours every month.”

Our parish is blessed to have so many helping hands to get this going. We’ve reached out to members from another local MOPS to help get us up and running, and we are so grateful for the dedicated experience of people like Charlotte Toth who brings a decade of youth work, program

management, and childcare with her from her MOPS experience, Ann Kasmer and Tahara Ortiz, who as a grandmother and mother will be helping as “Mommy Mentors,” and all of the moms who have boldly stepped forward to help us launch so successfully! In the first month we have had two new mothers from the neighborhood join us and two volunteers from the surrounding area offer to volunteer with childcare.

To learn more about MOPS here in Trenton, or to become involved, please contact Matushka Andrea Diamantis at: MOPS@saintvladimir.org. Discover more about MOPS International at: www.mops.org. ❖



Jacob's
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All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for He Himself will say: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (*Rule of St. Benedict, Chapter 53*).

Education Conferences Recently Offered in Our Deaneries

The 2015 Annual Department of Christian Education Deanery Conferences took place in June throughout our Diocese. Organized by the Department's chair, Matushka Andrea Diamantis, the Conferences took place at Christ the Saviour Church, Paramus, NJ, Holy Trinity Church, East Meadow, NJ, and St. John the Baptist Church, Rochester, NY.

The same schedule was offered at each location. The morning featured a presentation by Cindy Heise of the Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Training Program, *Stewards of Children*, which has been recommended for all OCA parishes. Following lunch, two sessions were offered, each with two tracks: 1) "Child Development and the Exceptional Learner" or "Adolescent Needs" 2) "Enriching the Classroom Experience" or "Moral Issues Overview.

The presenters included: Fr. George Alberts, Matushka Myra Kovalak, Khouria Anna Timpko Hughes, and Nike Bach. ❖



Khouria Anna Timpko Hughes and Matushka Myra Kovalak Photo by Matushka Eugenia Nehrebecki.

Parish Sound Financial Practices

Matushka Mary Buletza, CPA, our Diocesan Treasurer recently presented Parish Council Workshops in all our Deaneries on the topic of "Parish Sound Financial Practices." Here is a list of some valuable websites she recommends:

OCA Best Practice Principles and Policies for Financial Accountability:

<http://oca.org/PDF/finances/Best Practices Policy vl.01.pdf>

OCA Diocese of the Midwest Parish Financial Practices: <http://domoca.org/financialtools.html>

2015 Clergy Tax Guide (for 2014 tax returns) by Church Pension Group (of the Episcopal Church):

<https://www.cpg.org/redirects/tax-resources>

IRS: <http://www.irs.gov>

IRS Publications:

Churches and Religious Organizations: Pub 1828 <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/pl1828.pdf>

Soc Sec A Info for Clergy: Pub 517 <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p517.pdf>

Charitable Contributions: Pub 526 <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p526.pdf>

Charitable Contributions-Substantiation and Disclosure requirements: Pub 1771

<http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/pl1771.pdf>

NJ Division of Taxation: <http://www.state.nj.us/treasury/taxation>

Form ST-5 Application for Exempt Organization Certificate for Non-Profit Exemption from Sales Tax:

http://www.state.nj.us/treasury/taxation/pdf/other_forms/sales/regle.pdf

NYS Department of Taxation and Finance: <http://www.tax.ny.gov>

Form ST-119.2 Application for an Exempt Organization Certificate from State and Local Sales and

Use Tax: http://www.tax.ny.gov/pdf/current_forms/st/st!19_2_fill_in.pdf

Five Tips to a Better Website

In today's digital age, no one asks the question anymore, "Does our church need a website?" Thankfully, everyone knows that having a website is a must for every community, except perhaps for the most remote sketes of Mount Athos. The real question people are asking nowadays is, "How can we make our website better and use it more effectively?" We offer the following five tips:

1. Follow the KISS principle (Keep It Simple Silly)

Make your website simple and easy to use. Everything must have a place and that place cannot be the home page. Organize your content into logical divisions of pages and sections. More than 7 pages, create subpages. Offer a simple noticeable menu and search area. Highlight the name of the church and contact information.

2. Keep It Updated

Don't be beholden to the techie who built the website years ago but has since moved on or has become too busy. Take control of the website yourself using a good, simple CMS (content management system). Declutter by removing/archiving old content. Archive news and photos by date and/or categories. Keep contact information and schedules current.

3. Go Mobile/Responsive

Websites designed only for desktop computers do not work well on smart-phones, tablets, and pads. Every day more people are visiting your website with a handheld device. Offer a mobile version, or better yet, use a responsive design which automatically adjusts your website to fit the device which is viewing it.

4. Connect to Social Networks

Connect Facebook, Twitter, Google+, and other social networking sites with your website using RSS (Really Simple Syndication) so that posts to your website will automatically appear on your social networking sites too. It is super simple to set up and then requires no more work. Let people "like", "share", and "follow" your church. Their friends will see you, and who knows, you may eventually see them in your church too!

5. Look Good

Your website is the first and perhaps only encounter many people will have with your church. Be sure that your website reflects the timeless beauty of Orthodox Christianity. Leave a good first impression; otherwise you may not get a second chance! ❖

Fr. John Parsells is the founder and lead developer at Orthodox Web Solutions, which has been providing website design and hosting services to Orthodox churches, institutions, and businesses for over 10 years. As a son of the diocese, growing up in Manville, NJ, he is pleased to extend to all parishes, missions, and institutions of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey, a free website setup (normally \$125), which includes all of the above and more. This limited time offer is available from Pentecost through the Church New Year on September 1st. Please visit orthodoxws.com to sign-up or see more information.

We must grasp the truth: you and I were meant to be together. We were meant for Communion. We were meant for fellowship. We were meant to embrace one another, to learn from one another, to grow with one another, to share our gifts with one another. Each of us must work together, forming that one new man – which the Apostle Paul talks about – out of all of these different groups of people, languages, cultures, and backgrounds.

We are meant to do the hard work of pressing out what it means to be together. The Spiritual Discipline of Hospitality invites us to take that truth seriously.

Fr. Barnabas Powell

50 Years at Princeton

On the campus of Princeton University the start of the 2014-2015 academic year was specially marked by the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Orthodox Chapel of the Transfiguration. This milestone was highlighted with Vespers and the Divine Liturgy served by His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon and Diocesan Hierarch Bishop Michael the weekend of September 20-21. The Sunday after the Elevation of the Cross, designated as National College Student Sunday in all Orthodox churches in the United States, is considered the birthday of the Princeton OCF and Chapel, founded in 1964 to serve the University and local community.

The services included Bishop Michael's tonsure of Theogenes (Adedoyin) Teriba as Reader; he is a graduate student originally from Nigeria, presently earning his doctorate in the History of Architecture department. After the Liturgy, Bishop Michael



presented Diocesan Gramotas to four members of the congregation for their long standing devoted service, and Metropolitan Tikhon presented a Synodal Gramota to the Chapel community as a whole.

The Chapel is considered a Diocesan "institution" rather

than a parish, as services are conducted only during the academic year, starting the first Sunday after Labor Day and continuing every Sunday through Pentecost. In addition to Sunday Liturgy, services are held on Wednesdays during Great Lent, Holy Week and Pascha, Christmas, and Epiphany Eve. OCF meetings take place regularly on campus and include special lectures, Bible study, social events, and community service endeavors. Special mini-retreats have been sponsored on campus as well as trips to several monasteries.

The congregation, ever-changing due to its academic nature, includes undergraduates, graduate students, faculty and staff, and a large number of local residents, some but not all with ties to the University. The town and local area include numerous other academic institutions which contribute members to the congregation: the Institute for Advanced Study, Westminster Choir College, Rider University, The

College of New Jersey, and Princeton Theological Seminary. The Chapel is truly Pan-Orthodox and includes members of a plethora of nationalities and jurisdictions. Weddings, Baptisms and Chrismations are regularly celebrated, along with typical parish social functions.

Transfiguration Chapel's initial chaplain was Father Constantine Buketoff, appointed upon retirement from his parish in Brooklyn. In the summer of 1965 Professor John Turkevich was ordained as Chaplain, serving through 1988. Father John, the eldest son of Metropolitan Leonty, was the Higgins Professor of Chemistry at Princeton, a renowned educator and scientist. An eminent lecturer at the national level, Father John was also known for his succinct and thought-provoking three minute sermons. An award was established in Father John's memory to perpetuate his dedication to higher levels of scholarship and devotion to the Orthodox faith. This year, at the banquet following the Liturgy, Metropolitan Tikhon presented eight Turkevich awards. Over the years, dozens of deserving Orthodox students have been recipients, thanks to the generous donations of alumni and members of the Chapel community. Similarly, the Chapel has supported member participation in OCF and OCMC sponsored missionary trips over the years.

In 1989 Father Daniel Skvir, Princeton '66 and one of the founders of the Chapel, succeeded Father Turkevich. Protodeacon Michael Sochka has assisted him for the past fifteen years (even though he is a Yalie!). Other initial OCF members in the early 60's include Timothy Ware (now Metropolitan Kallistos), Michael Danchak, Michael Warhol, Fr. Anatole Lyovin and Fr. Arthur Liolin. (Another active presence from the beginning has been Tamara Turkevich Skvir, presently leader of the talented Chapel choir.) Before the founding of the Chapel, OCF members would attend services in other Orthodox churches, frequently journeying down to Trenton where they were warmly welcomed by Father Paul Shafran, who remains after a half century a close and special friend and benefactor of the Chapel, often joining to con-celebrate the Liturgy. Prior to the Chapel's founding, occasional services were conducted on campus by visiting priests from the area.

For the first eleven years, Father Turkevich was frequently joined at the altar by Fr. Georges Florovsky,

First Confessions at Holy Resurrection Church

Over the winter months between Theophany and the start of Great Lent, children at Holy Resurrection Church in Wayne, NJ worked with their Sunday school teachers to prepare for their first confessions. On the Saturday at the end of the first week of Great Lent they each completed the Sacrament of Confession for the first time with the community's pastor, Fr. Paul Kucynda. ❖



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*Fr. Kucynda with
teacher, Tanya Reese
and the children
offering their first
confessions*

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outlived that statistic. We might ask ourselves, what has been the driving force in preserving St. Nicholas Church over these years? The answer is that we are a family. Even though we have our ups and downs as every family does, we are not strangers to each other. There is a connection between our people just as if we are 4th and 5th cousins living in that village in Lemkovyna. This connection is evident whenever we have our flea markets.

The new members of our church have said that they chose St. Nicholas as their parish because they feel comfortable here. It is interesting that it is not the outward things such as having an operatic choir, a robust Sunday school, a golden mouthed priest, or a fancy cathedral, but it is comfort, something that is inward. Comfort is home; home is where the family is, and home is where God is.

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distinguished Orthodox theologian/scholar/author. It has been noted that Fr. Florovsky spent more time in Princeton than in any other locale during his 86 years. Transfiguration Chapel and the OCF sponsor the Florovsky Memorial Lecture, inviting prominent theologians and artists to speak on their areas of interest as they pertain to Father Georges' career. Speakers have included Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware), Peter Brown, Jaroslav Pelikan, Oleg Grabar, Vladislav Andrejev, and Bishop Michael among others. Princeton being an international magnet, the Chapel has also hosted an impressive number of clergy and lay visitors: two Patriarchs, six Metropolitans, countless Bishops and priests, many

If we look back at the church of our grandparents and compare that culture to what we have now, we have further evolved. Today, parishioners not only have Slavic names or roots, but our church is populated with Anglo-Saxon, Italian, and French surnames to name a few.

On October 12th we remembered the past 100 years, but we also celebrated the beginning of our future. The future can be likened to a relay race where the runner puts all of his efforts to pass the baton to another with precision. The baton is being passed, and the course is in motion for the next 100th year anniversary.

As the years increase, the church will have new opportunities and challenges. The pierogi making, coffee hours, and flea markets will survive, but the cast of characters will change. We are confident that when 2114 comes around, we will all see a vibrant St. Nicholas from our resting place above. ❖

being alumni of Princeton, and, of course, scholars from the world over.

Perhaps more than most parishes, Princeton's Chapel of the Transfiguration is a transient community: students graduate, academics on sabbatical at the University or Institute come and go. But for important periods of time, for students and many others, the Chapel is a vibrant spiritual home for Orthodox faithful on an especially beautiful and famed university campus.

At the same time, the Chapel has been blessed with a devoted core group of faithful who have supported this community for decades. It continues to thrive and welcomes short and long term visitors to join in its Orthodox worship and programs. ❖

The Blessing of Animals

“Blessing of Animals” was held at Saint John the Baptist Orthodox Church in Rochester NY on Saturday, October 4, 2014. The parish’s Evangelism Task Force [ETF] delivered, by US Mail “Every Door Delivery,” over 2,400 invitations to residents within a half-mile radius of the church as an outreach of neighborly welcome. Parishioners were also asked to bring flyers to their neighbors, friends, and coworkers with a warm and welcoming invitation. A highlight for those attending was participation by members of the Mounted Unit of the Rochester Police Department.



The service of blessing featured the reading of Scripture, traditional prayers and litany from the Book of Needs, singing (of course!), and sprinkling with Holy Water. The local newspaper featured the event in its Sunday edition with the headline: “Blessing Bestowed on the Mighty and the Meek.”

Several neighbors joined parishioners and Father Ken James Stavrevsky (parish rector) for the blessing, followed by a fellowship where hot chocolate and goodies were enjoyed. Some visitors also attended Great Vespers later that day and Divine Liturgy the following day (Sunday).

The following description was provided in the official news release sent to local media outlets and Rochester area churches:

The offering of blessings is significant and customary in the Orthodox Christian tradition. Reflecting the transforming and sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit within the Body of Christ, these blessings act as manifestations of God’s presence and activity in our lives as witnessed in everything we encounter in creation. Thus, we bless all sorts of things, dedicating and sanctifying them (and ourselves) to the glory of God and our loving communion with the Lord. To bless animals, especially our pets, is a realization that all things are gifts from above intended for our good and to our delight. As God’s children, the blessing bestows on us the obligation to be good and faithful stewards of that which has been given to us in love. In blessing our pets we make a commitment to care for the life (be it dog, cat, hamster, gecko, rabbit, bird, ferret, fish, pot belly pig, ???) entrusted to our care. The service of blessing involves the reading of Scripture, prayers of supplication, and the traditional sprinkling with Holy Water. ❖

The event was announced and featured on the parish website:

<http://www.saintjohnorthodox.org/pets-animals-blessed/>

Coming Up: 100th Year Anniversary in Manville

Saints Peter and Paul Orthodox Church, of Manville, NJ, will be celebrating its 100th anniversary over the weekend of October 3-4, 2015. In anticipation of the Anniversary, the children celebrated a birthday party for their parish on Sunday, May 3, 2015. They participated in many events such as a kickball game, photo booth, balloon toss, chalk drawings, and other fun activities. The children were given the opportunity to celebrate their parish’s anniversary in a way that was fun for them.

Because most guests bring a gift to a birthday party, the children were asked to bring a gift to donate to St. Andrew’s Camp of Jewell, NY. The children brought various gifts including sports balls, bubbles, games, chalk, and more. The gifts will be delivered to St. Andrew’s Camp in time for the 2015 summer camp season.



The children of Saints Peter and Paul had a fabulous time at the birthday party, and are looking forward to the upcoming Anniversary. As a parish, we thank you for your continued support and prayers as we get closer to our 100th anniversary. ❖

Back to Eisenhower Park for the 5th Annual Community CROP Hunger Walk

The 5th Annual CROP (Communities Responding to Overcome Poverty) Hunger Walk took place in Eisenhower Park, East Meadow, NY on October 18, 2014. Sponsored by the humanitarian aid organization, *Church World Service*, some 80 Long Islanders from six churches and two organizations began the Walk with prayer, given by Fr. Martin Kraus, and stepped off to a one or two mile course. The Walk's goal was to raise funds from sponsors to feed the hungry, and more especially to provide seeds, tools, and methods that help people in impoverished countries to grow better crops and themselves raise their standard of living.

One of the best features of this year's walk was the growth in the number of groups participating and their diversity. Fellowship among the walkers offered new connections and budding friendships. They included Holy Trinity Orthodox Church, OCA, East Meadow (Arlene Kallaur, Coordinator) and their priest, Fr. Martin Kraus, St. Andrew's Orthodox Church, OCA, Dix Hills (Virginia Jerosh, Captain), Holy Resurrection Greek Orthodox Church, Brookville (Sophia Niarchos, Captain), St. Paul's Greek Orthodox Church, Hempstead (Steve Pontickio, Captain), St. Abraam Coptic Orthodox Church, Woodbury (led by Fr. Moses), the United Methodist Church, East Meadow, (led by Pastor Paul Smith),

the Uniondale High School Key Club (Daniel Ruano, President), and the organization "Abilities," with their Advisor, Jillian Bianco. Sponsorship also came from members of the St. Sergius OCA Chapel, Syosset.

Refreshments served after the Walk included Matushka Dennise's hot and tasty soup and pizza. An impromptu songfest followed, led by popular Karaoke DJ, Barry Hoffman, who volunteered his services. Help with directing cars to the right park area was offered by Boy Scouts Troop 225 and their leader, Gil Suarez.

Coordinator Arlene Kallaur stated that some 1,200 walks are held across the country each year, 9 walks on Long Island. Treasurer of the Walk, Ron Ousman, reported that this year's Walk raised the most funds in its 5 year history, over \$9,000. Twenty five percent of the funds remains locally and is given to an outreach group chosen by the Walk Committee. The Long Island Council of Churches will again receive this year's funds. Among the many services that it offers to the needy, it runs food pantries in Freeport and Riverhead. It continues to assist victims of Hurricane Sandy who are still recovering. Grateful thanks to all who supported the Walk, helping to erase poverty "one step at a time." ♦



Every family should have a room where Christ is welcome in the person of the hungry and thirsty stranger.

St. John Chrysostom

Incarnation and Christian Culture

By Dr. John Burgess

[Note: This is a summary of the presentation delivered by Professor Burgess at the Advent Vespers held at the Orthodox Church of the Holy Cross, Medford, NJ on Sunday, December 14, 2014. It is available at: <https://vimeo.com/holycrossmedford/burgess>]

Ten years ago I began immersing myself in Orthodoxy in Russia. In 2004-05, my family and I lived for a year in St. Petersburg; in 2011-12, we



Dr. Burgess and wife, Deborah

spent nine months in Moscow. I am a Protestant, I have no Russian ancestors, and I am a theologian, not a historian or political scientist. I have nevertheless deeply wanted to understand what is happening in

that part of the world after 75 years of atheistic communism. By now, I have attended hundreds of services; visited dozens of parishes and monasteries; and made abiding friendships with priests, monks, nuns, and lay people. I give thanks to God for my encounters with a different expression of the Christian faith in a foreign part of the world because they have decisively shaped my faith in the God who is with us.

God in Culture

The Creed declares that for us and our salvation God came down from heaven, was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and became man. The Creator entered the creation. Eternity intersected with time. God became flesh.

To be human, however, means more than just having a human body. We are human because we are embedded in a culture, a network of human aspirations and achievements. Every culture – whether that of ancient Egypt, medieval France, or contemporary India – is characterized by distinctive language, art and music, and customs and traditions.

Because God truly became man, God in Christ entered fully into the culture of first-century Israel. Christ spoke Aramaic and observed Jewish rituals. His parables drew on images of life in the Galilean countryside. He walked the narrow alleys of the great city Jerusalem and prayed in its temple courts.

Christ belonged to a specific time and place, but as He lived and worked in His culture He also “Christianized” it. He cultivated what was beautiful, good, and true about it, what showed forth God. We might say that Christ divinely “enculturated” human culture. We might even say that Christ shows us what it means to be a truly “cultured” person.

Sometimes Americans think, “Oh, a cultured person, that’s somebody who is an elitist, an intellectual snob, maybe someone who listens to Beethoven and Brahms and drinks fine French wines.” Christ, however, was cultured in a different, more profound sense. He was cultured because He was not driven by self-interest or selfish desire. He knew the difference between lasting beauty and passing taste, eternal values and temporary accommodations, truths that are worth dying for and those that are not. And those who follow Him will heed the words of the Apostle Paul: “Whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” (Philippians 4:8)

The Church has always declared that Scripture and Church tradition point to God with us, as does the book of nature with its plants and animals, stars and planets. Let us add that human culture, too – when dedicated to God – proclaims Immanuel.

God in Russian Culture

I cannot claim originality about this point. It is what Orthodoxy in Russia has taught me. As a Protestant, I grew up thinking about God with us in a more psychological way. I knew that the God who was once born to Mary had also been born in my heart. In the words of Martin Luther’s famous Christmas carol, “Away in a manger, no crib for a bed, the little Lord Jesus lay down his sweet head. . . [So] be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask Thee to stay, close by me forever, and love me I pray.” Immanuel meant something happening inside of me.

In Russia I learned, however, how Christianity can embed itself in a culture. I came to understand Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s wonderful description of the Russian countryside:

The key to the sense of peace that the Russian landscape generates is in its churches. . . . Wherever you are in the fields or wandering in the meadows, far from any habitation, you are never alone . . . the cupola of a bell tower always beckons. And people were always selfish and even bad. But the bells for evening prayer rang . . . and reminded them to set aside trivial earthly matters and offer the moment to eternity.

Over the last decade, I have seen for myself how Russians are restoring this enchanted landscape. Everywhere, churches and monasteries again dominate the landscape. Gold and silver onion domes shine in splendor against the horizon.

Some people criticize the Church for spending so much money on itself, for regarding icons and buildings and monastery gardens as more important than justice and human rights. These critics make an important point. I must confess, nevertheless, that places such as the Church of the Veil of the Protection at Moscow's Martha and Mary Monastery have touched me to the quick, as the sisters gather beneath the remarkable icons and murals of the great Russian painter Mikhail Nesterov and dedicate themselves to serving Moscow's needy and poor.

And I will never forget how a small wooden church in Russia's far north once spoke to me of God with us. It was night, and the light of a few flickering candles made the icons of the Pantocrator, the Theotokos, and John the Baptist and Forerunner glow like burnished gold. Their eyes looked into mine and asked me to repent, fall down, and worship the God who had entered also into this time and place.

Russia has taught me how culture can make a witness to Immanuel, and why Christians should be cultured. I think of St. George's Parish, a long night's train ride outside of Moscow along the banks of Russia's mighty mother river, the Volga. Since the fall of communism, the surrounding countryside has been abandoned. Only the poor and elderly remain. In the early 90s, however, four monks began recultivating, "reenculturating," this wonderful place. They rebuilt the church and parish house and again celebrated the Divine Liturgy.

One day a young man knocked on their door and pleaded for help. He was trying to quit drugs. The monks took him in. They soon concluded that God was asking them to help other addicts. Today, eight young men live in the parish for up to a year

and a half; receive individual and group therapy; and work, eat, and pray with the monks. One of the most important dimensions of their treatment is becoming cultured human beings.

The community cultivates basic etiquette. The young men wait to eat until everyone is seated and a blessing has been offered. They speak normal Russian, rather than the street language and slang with which they grew up. They listen to Church hymnody, rather than the violent rock or rap that once accompanied their drug use. They read spiritual literature, even literary classics. And in that remote but glorious place, the young men encounter the sheer beauty of the natural world. They revel, for perhaps the first time since childhood, in rocks and trees, skies and seas. They become cultured human beings, and in so doing, become bearers, messengers, of the Gospel.

God with Us

Today in the United States we have largely abandoned the idea of Christian culture. It is certainly right for us to acknowledge that we have always been a nation of many cultures and religions, many styles of living and systems of morality. But Christians can never agree to mere cultural relativism. We will always be looking for values that are transcendent and enduring.

When we as Christians cultivate a beautiful garden in our backyards, we are making a witness to the Gospel. When we choose our words carefully for an e-mail or a phone call, we are pointing to God with us. When we treat others with respect and dignity, we are proclaiming Immanuel. When we live in the way of the Beatitudes – with mercy, peace, and patient endurance – we are creating a Christian culture.

I would add one other possibility. My time in Russia has taught me that we can honor the God who entered into human culture when we ourselves are willing to step into another culture. If we are going to understand the joys and sorrows of people who are different from us, we cannot be mere tourists. We may have to learn their language and how things look from their point of view. But if we take the time to enter deeply into those places that at first seem very foreign to us, I believe that we will find signs of God's truth, beauty, and goodness that will move us to tears.

For me it has been Orthodoxy in Russia. For you it may be as close as the neighborhood next door. If

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Book Review: The Grace of Incorruption
The Selected Essays of Donald Sheehan on Orthodox Faith and Poetics by Daniel Sheehan

Reviewed by Dr. David C. Ford, St. Tikhon's Seminary, South Canaan, PA

From start to finish, this beautiful book is a spiritual “powerhouse,” a grace-filled stream, a gift of joy – from the tender, perceptive heart and mind of the author, the lay poet-theologian Donald Sheehan (1940 – 2010), into our own hearts and minds! And it’s a double labor of love: first, Don’s very careful crafting of the articles, writing as a true wordsmith; and second, the superb editing work done by his beloved wife, Xenia, after his repose in the LORD. I use their first names, because I knew Don personally (though not really well), and Xenia is now part of our community at St. Tikhon’s.

In the first half of the book, entitled “Reflections on Life, Literature, and Holiness,” Don begins with a profoundly touching autobiographical sketch. Then he takes us through fascinating studies of various aspects of the deep spiritual wisdom of Saints Ephrem and Isaac of Syria, St. Dionysios the Areopagite, St. Herman of Alaska, Feodor Dostoevsky (through Alyosha, Dmitri, and Elder Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov*), and even in William Shakespeare’s *Winter’s Tale* and Robert Frost’s *An Old Man’s Winter Night*. In these reflections he interweaves his deep knowledge of these sources with his keen spiritual sensibilities to open many spiritual vistas for the reader.

In the second half of the book, entitled “Orthodox Poetics and the Great Psalm (LXX 118),” Don uses his extensive knowledge of poetical syntax, and of Biblical Hebrew and Greek, to magnificently explicate many fascinating nuances in the construction and content of the Septuagint version of Psalm 118, which he describes as an extended “drama of intimacy” (p. 189) between the Divine “Thou” and the human “I” (p. 187). He helped me much by explaining that this psalm’s repeated use of nine words for God’s law, and the ten-fold

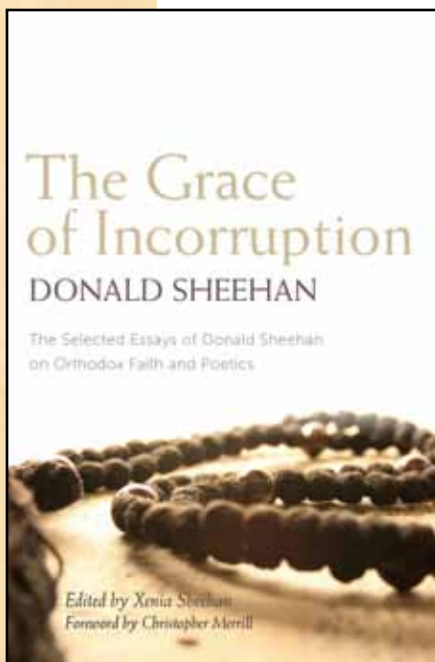
inclusion of the phrase “Teach me Thy statutes,” are by no means part of an exercise in monotony, but rather a majestic crescendo of intensification in the psalmist’s ever-deepening relationship with the LORD. And not just ever-deepening through moments of joy, but also through periods of depression and despair – which the psalmist comes to see as gifts from the LORD (“It is good that Thou hast humbled me/ That I might learn Thy statutes” - v. 71; in Don’s words, “the experience of His fury and terror utterly unmakes you” - p. 123) to convince the psalmist of his utter desolation without GOD’s ongoing love and support (“I have gone astray like a lost sheep/ Seek out Thy servant” - v. 176).

In an earlier chapter, in intensifying the dynamism of the imagery used to describe one’s growing relationship with God, Don calls it a “dance” (p. 109) – indeed, “a dance of blessedness” (p. 111). This dance transforms our entire being; as he writes, for instance,

In the same way, our depression can move into the dance with God’s wisdom. Whenever we can turn our tears of depression toward God – or our anger or fear or even our joy; indeed, all that we do or think or feel or say – then we meet Him coming toward us in mercy, in teaching, in opening our eyes, in gracious judgment, in quickening, in strengthening, in enlarging our hearts, in bestowing wisdom and hope and genuine stillness” (p. 113).

Don’s many vivid insights about various aspects of the life in Christ ring so true because they flow out of his own ongoing powerful, mystical experience of the living GOD, even as he bases his descriptions in the Scriptures – especially the Psalms, and in particular Psalm 118 – and in the Church Fathers, especially St. Isaac the Syrian. It all combines to compellingly invite, and indeed, draw the reader into the same dance of blessedness with our Creator and Savior. As Don writes, referring to Psalm 118,

Now, as we move through the 176 lines of this poem, we see affirmed the truth that God never has and never will utterly abandon anyone, *never*. He is always moving toward us



Book Review: The Rise of the Nones

by James Emery White

Reviewed by Fr. John Diamantis

Are you wondering how today's youth form their beliefs about God? Do you struggle targeting young adults or having young families come into your church? Is it a mystery why, when on those rare occasions, a young person or family does visit that they don't stay and become part of your parish?

If you've answered "yes" to any of these questions, you should know two things: First, you're not alone. You're simply admitting to struggling with "the fastest-growing and now third largest constituency in the United States" (*The Rise of the Nones*, p. 21).

Secondly, help is available!

There is a worthwhile book that you might consider reading as an introduction to the topic of reaching and retaining this elusive demographic: *The Rise of the Nones*, by James Emery White.

About the Author

White is both a professor of theology and culture and a pastor who has spent the last 20 years focusing on the group who are today our young professionals, college, and high school students. He has successfully managed to reach and incorporate into his church these Nones.

Is White an Orthodox Christian? Nope. He leads a non-denominational church with lots of young people. Some of what he writes might sound foreign to an Orthodox Christian ear; there are portions of the book with which we could become entangled in theological disputes. Still, he knows what he is doing and the vast majority of what he includes in his book can be applied regardless of denomination. He's passionate about reaching and ministering to the Nones and has a proven track record of doing so effectively.

This 200-pageturner is written in a straightforward, easy to understand style.

What is a "None," Anyway?

A better question, and that which this book addresses is "Who is a None?"

White writes, "The short answer is that they are

the religiously unaffiliated. When asked about their religion, they did not answer 'Baptist' or 'Catholic' or any other defined faith. They picked a new category: none" (p. 13). Would it surprise you to know that Nones are typically white, male, socially liberal or moderate, not necessarily atheist, not very religious, and young? (p. 23)

Throughout, the book employs helpful graphs and images such as that depicting the "Percentage of Americans Claiming No Religious Identity." In 1990, that number was 8.1%. In 2008, the number jumped to 15%. In 2012, the number was 19.3% (p. 17).

Why Does This Matter?

Learning about the Nones and how to target them is crucial to the life of our parishes today. Yes, we need to root ourselves in prayer, our parishes need to become houses of prayer, and no, we should not compromise on our faith. Actually, in many ways

it is the authentic living out of our Christian faith in a dynamic way for which these youngsters are searching (and to which we are all called – p. 123). It is possible to have a theological discussion/debate with a None and win. You might even be able to get them to visit your church as a result. Getting them to return or to stay is another matter.

Nones are not impressed merely with theological truth, rather they expect us to "show them our faith by our works" (Jas. 2:18). Those who do target this group are often frustrated because Nones are content with what they believe and how they are living. Finding a way to break into their world (or invite them into ours) seems more difficult now than in the past. Simply getting them to converse is quite different today than it was even a generation ago. Sometimes those of today's older generations see this as being "disrespectful" when, in fact, to the None, it is simply being their authentic selves.

To translate some of what White writes into a language for many of our own parishes: If your parish has infighting, doesn't serve the community in any way, is absorbed with the number of pierogies

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"...in many ways it is the authentic living out of our Christian faith in a dynamic way for which these youngsters are searching."

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in every way possible. What is necessary is that we move also and always toward Him (p. 111; his emphasis).

And what is also necessary is for us to come, as the Psalmist David did, to the vivid realization that we are indeed helpless without our LORD to guide and strengthen us. As Don writes,

God reveals Himself as wholly beyond us at the very moment He wills us wholly into Himself. And the single – indeed, the one and only – capacity we possess to respond rightly to God's infinity and calling-forth is our capacity for humility: our capacity, that is, to be nothing before God, and therefore deeply responsive to Him (p. 224).

This includes putting aside, through “holy asceticism” and “sovereign ascetical love” (p. 58), our own “endless desirings”; as the Psalmist says in Psalm 118, “Incline my heart to Thy testimonies/ And not to endless desirings” (v. 36). And as Don says of Dmitri Karamazov, “The result in Dmitri is the rush of understanding that, as the false freedom of self-willed autonomy vanishes, genuine joy arrives” (p. 26).

The book is also graced with Don's own magnificent, powerful translation of the Septuagint

version of Psalm 118 (with the original Greek provided), which, along with his translation of the entire Psalter (published by Wipf and Stock; 2013), is enriched greatly by his intimate and intense knowledge of the Psalms, gained in large part through his practice for years of reading through and meditating upon the entire Psalter every week.

Throughout the book the author interweaves brief accounts of particularly moving personal spiritual experiences, such as when he visited St. Herman's Spruce Island, and when he venerated the incorrupt relics of St. Sergius of Radonezh at his Holy Trinity Monastery in Russia. Glimpses into Don's last years fighting the depression that came with suffering from Lyme Disease are poignantly revealed through entries from his diary, and his final days and funeral are vividly described by his young goddaughter's mother.

Acute pain, acute joy, moments of darkness, and moments of radiant, triumphant light all suffuse this truly remarkable book by a truly remarkable man – mystic, poet, teacher, translator, sage, and ardent lover of Christ. He is one who has already deeply touched the lives of many through his own unforgettable life. Now he lives on in a very real way in this book – through which, I'm sure, he will touch the lives of many more, by the grace of our LORD Jesus Christ. ❖

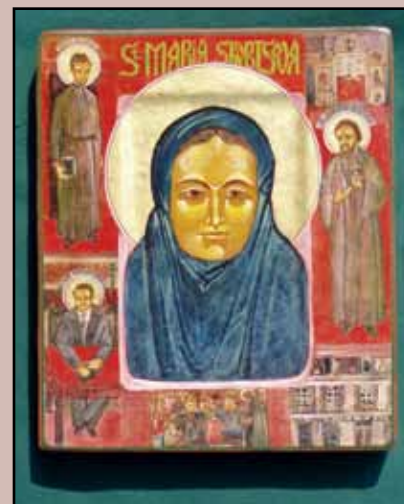
She saw that there were two ways to live. The first was on dry land, a legitimate and respectable place to be, where one could measure, weigh and plan ahead. The second was to walk on the waters where “it becomes impossible to measure or plan ahead. The one thing necessary is to believe all the time. If you doubt for an instant, you begin to sink.”

The water she decided to travel on was a vocation of welcoming and caring for those in desperate need. She began to look for a house of hospitality and found it at 9 villa de Saxe in Paris....

Her credo was: “Each person is the very icon of God incarnate in the world.” With this recognition came the need “to accept this awesome revelation of God unconditionally, to venerate the image of God” in her brothers and sisters....

She would sometimes recall the Russian story of the ruble that could never be spent. Each time it was used, the change given back proved to equal a ruble. It was exactly this way with love, she said: No matter how much love you give, you never have less. In fact you discover you have more — one ruble becomes two, two becomes ten.

[from: *Mother Maria of Paris: Saint of the Open Door*
by Jim Forest]



Icon by Olga Poloukhine

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pinched for a fundraiser, or proud of the fact that Bingo is a long-standing custom, the odds are you'll drive Nones away. If a None wants to find conflict, they can probably find it in their workplace or home life. They don't need to come to church for that. If we really believe that gambling and home-made food in a church are going to compete with the same pleasures outside the confines of a religious community, we're fooling ourselves. Our churches must be more than clubs, museums, or extensions of the world around us. Rather, a community of people who truly love and who demonstrate that love for God, one another, and the greater community (And, yes, it is necessary for Nones to see us loving in all three categories!). Otherwise they might see our antiquated, law-laden, community following the traditions of their mothers (since dads not attending church is another epidemic). The distinction of being in the world and not of the world (Jn. 15:19) is vital for Christians to understand and preserve as part of our authentic tradition.

If your parish simply isn't friendly to newcomers Nones will not stick. If you manage to get a None's attention, win a discussion, and then get them to church at which time they don't experience the love of Christ that you've just expressed, they'll simply leave. And the love of Christ needs to be manifest in every possible way. Our parishes need to truly emanate unity, our focus has to be on our own (personal and parochial) spiritual growth as well as serving the community around us. Did I mention that Nones love to serve and feel compelled to do so?

If, on the other hand, a None should come (whether because of our intentional outreach or God's providential hand) and Mr. or Ms. None is greeted with a smile, forms bonds with parishioners who with good intentions take a genuine interest in them, and if the parish demonstrates that Christ's love is manifest through service to the general

community, your chances of keeping that young person have dramatically increased.

More good news...Retaining Nones takes work – and the work that needs to be done is largely within our control!

Why This Book?

White does a fantastic job of compiling statistics and information from a variety of credible and established entities (such as the Pew Forum and Gallup Poll), incorporating real life examples of situations he's encountered (and which could easily happen to anyone involved in ministry), and he communicates his experience in a way that makes one believe we can actually be successful in reaching and retaining the youth of today! His passion for doing the Lord's work and reaching the young people of our day shines time and again. Throughout, he is quite candid about the potentiality, difficulties, and opportunities that one will expect to experience when venturing down the path of targeting today's youth. As well, the book contains helpful questions

and reflections at the end of each chapter, perhaps to be used as a tool in discussion with a None or to get us thinking more critically and honestly with ourselves.

If you have a passion for reaching people in the name of Jesus Christ, if you want to grow your church, if you want to re-invigorate your parish, or if you simply have questions about why the "same old" methods aren't working on people of the same ages as they used to, please read this book. In addition to the Holy Scriptures and writings of the Fathers, this book should help to form our understanding of who we of the 21st century are targeting, and offers realistic ideas and insights about engaging the Nones.

Now, go get your copy, read it, be honest with yourself, and be prepared for God's blessings! ❖

"Nones are not impressed merely with theological truth, rather they expect us to 'show them our faith by our works'"

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we will enter fully into culture – whether our own or of a different class, race, or ethnicity – we will find Immanuel. ❖

John Burgess is Professor of Systematic Theology at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. Over the past

year he has been a Resident Fellow at the Center of Theological Inquiry, Princeton. His project has been to write a book about the efforts of the Orthodox Church to bring Christian values into post-communist Russian society.

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Our Diocese Welcomes Fr. Peter and Jeanne Baktis

Archpriest Peter Baktis has been assigned as Rector of Mother of God, Joy of All Who Sorrow Mission, Princeton

Fr. Peter is a native of Valley Stream, New York. He was ordained as a priest in the Orthodox Church on June 29, 1985. His pastoral assignments include: Associate Pastor, The Cathedral of the Holy Virgin Protection, New York City, and Rector, Saint Nicholas Orthodox Church, Jamaica Estates, New York. Chaplain Baktis was elevated to the rank of Archpriest in March 1999 by the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church of America. He entered into the active duty Army Chaplaincy with a direct commission in June 1990 at the US Army Chaplain Center and School, Fort Monmouth, New Jersey.

He holds a Bachelor of Arts from Concordia College, Bronxville, New York. He holds a Master of Divinity Degree from Saint Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, Crestwood, New York, and The General Theological Seminary in New York City, and a Master of (Sacred) Theology from The General Theological Seminary, New York City. He also holds a Masters of Strategic Studies, from the US Army War College.

His military education includes Defense Strategy Course, Command and General Staff Officer Course, Chaplain Officer Advance Course, Chaplain Officer Basic Course, Small Group Leadership Course, and Instructors Course. from the US Army War College.

His assignments have included: 3-321 Field Artillery Battalion, Fort Sill, Oklahoma; 2nd Forward Support Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division,

Camp Hovey; Korea, 15th Forward Support Battalion, 1st Calvary Division, Fort Hood Texas; DIVARTY, 1st Calvary Division, Fort Hood Texas; 3/58 Aviation Battalion, Wiesbaden, Germany; DIVENG, 1st Armored Division, Bad Kruznach, Germany; Small Group Leader Chaplain Officer Basic Course, Officer Task Analysis US Army Chaplain Center and School; Deputy Brigade Chaplain, Victory BDE Ft. Jackson; 18th Military Police Brigade, Mannheim, Germany; Chief of Operations, USAREUR OCHAP, Heidelberg and Deputy Command Chaplain USAREUR/7th Army, Heidelberg, Germany; Senior Chaplain, Team Bliss, Ft. Bliss, El Paso, TX. His deployments include: Iraq, Kuwait, Kosovo, and Bosnia. He was appointed as the pastor by the USAREUR Commander for the prisoners held during the Kosovo Campaign. Chaplain Baktis was selected by the Chief of Chaplains to represent the Chaplain Corps as a member of the Operation Iraqi Freedom Study Group, and contributed to the writing of the Historic Book, ON POINT. He currently



serves as the Command Chaplain, Intelligence and Security Command.

He is a member of the North American Academy of Ecumenist, board member of the Dialogue Institute, (Temple University) and a member of the Orthodox Theological Society in America. He has published over 17 articles and book reviews both in theological journals nationally and internationally as well as in the professional Army Chaplain Journal: *The Chaplaincy*.

Fr. Peter and his wife Jeanne (Komenko) have two children, Kristina, and Dimitri. ❖

Many human activities, good in themselves, are not good because of the motive for which they are done. For example, fasting and vigils, prayer and psalmody, acts of charity and hospitality are by nature good, but when performed for the sake of self-esteem they are not good.

St. Maximos the Confessor

Fr. John Garvey, 1944-2015

by Fr. Alexander Garklavs

I first became acquainted with Fr. John Garvey when I read his article about the Orthodox Church in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1989. He had become Orthodox a few years earlier and the article highlighted the recent entry into the Orthodox Church by groups of formerly evangelical Protestants. That such an article appeared in a prestigious magazine like *The Atlantic* was uncommon, and many of us greeted it as one more sign that Orthodox Christianity was making an impact on North America life. In fact, it was a time when the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) was beginning to have a brief but glorious period, which coincided with the celebration of the Millennium of Christianity in Russia in 1988. That event initiated a process of the revival of Orthodoxy in Russia, and the OCA, as the loyal daughter of the Russian Church, was there to offer whatever assistance it could. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Patriarch of Moscow, Aleksy II visited the United States several times as a guest of the OCA. There were press conferences, meetings with VIPs, media events, banquets large and small, and a great deal of excitement was in the air. It was about this time that I met Fr. John Garvey when he came to St. Vladimir's Seminary to study Orthodox theology and where he was ordained to the Holy Priesthood.

I don't think that Fr. John was too impressed with the "heady atmosphere" in our OCA at that time, but his coming into our Church seemed to be one of God's special gifts to us. Here was a noted and gifted writer whose talents could be put to immediate use in the Church. Providentially, Fr. John was assigned to St. Nicholas Albanian Orthodox Church in Jamaica Estates, NY so that he was able to begin his pastoral ministry in proximity to the OCA Chancery in Syosset. He was called on frequently to write various speeches, presentations, and reports for OCA officials, most of which were not credited to him. But he was likewise wholly committed to pastoral life and took it seriously. Being older and a convert, his adjustment to parish life was not easy. Still he persevered and when, after setting a ten-year duration record, he retired from St. Nicholas Church, he had all the makings and marks of a seasoned and competent Orthodox pastor. He was especially satisfied in being at that community to welcome and facilitate the entry of immigrants into the Church.

Because we were neighbors on Long Island, we had collegial interactions while he was still at St. Nicholas Church. On his retirement from the parish he was assigned as assistant at Holy Trinity Church in East Meadow and it was here that I got to know Fr. John well. There is a special relationship that is established by priests who serve at the same altar table over a period of several years – a spiritual, brotherly bond which is one of those rare "blessed gifts" that clergy only sometimes receive during their ministry. Fr. John was such a brother in Christ. In addition to our priesthood and pastoral ministry, we shared an interest in politics, literature, music, and art. He was a consummate conversationalist on a seemingly inexhaustible range of subjects. He became less involved in direct work at the Chancery, but for a good ten years he was part of the editorial group of priests who produced the *Pastors to Pastors* newsletter, writing several articles and reviews for it. Of course, he had a life outside the OCA, writing books and regular pieces for *Commonweal*. He did not often speak of, let alone brag about, his life in that "non-OCA" sphere in which he was well known and much esteemed. In that sphere he actually was an articulate Christian missionary and spokesman for Orthodox Christianity, effectively reaching the American public square in ways that most of us OCA priests could not. His several books are likewise a testimony to his significant contribution to spreading the "good news" of Orthodox Christianity.

Fr. John and his wife Regina were Midwesterners who came to love and enjoy life in New York City. I note this fact because some would say that being an Orthodox Christian in the "crazy, rat-race paced, hedonistic mecca" that is the Big Apple is not conducive. In fact, an Orthodox pastor can thrive in precisely such places not only because God wishes that "all be saved and come to the knowledge of

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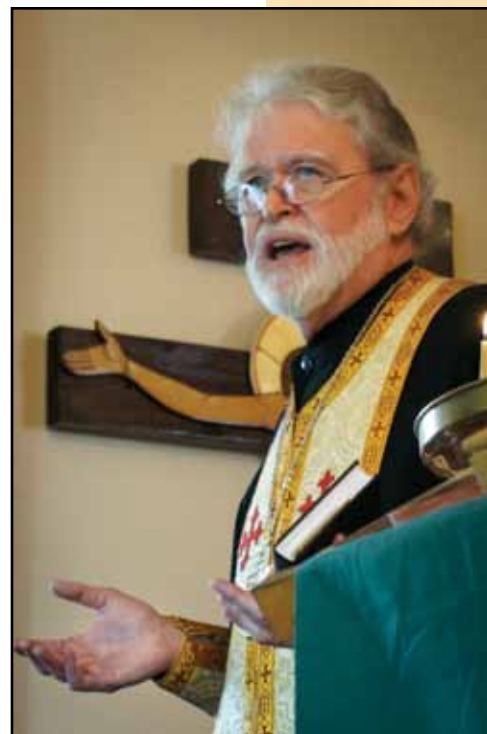


photo by
Patty Rebne

Gift and Grace: Clergy Stories

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Recently the pastoral stories of Fr. Daniel and Dunia Hubiak, Fr. John and Eugenia Nehrebecki, and Fr. Stephen Siniari were added to the “Clergy Stories” section of our Diocesan website: nynjoca.org

These video interviews reveal not only the dynamics and details of personal lives, but shed a broader light on the particular opportunities that the grace of the Holy Spirit has provided in the experiences of pastoral life, the history of theological education, and the responses to the challenges of being an Orthodox Christian here in North America. ❖



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truth,” but because pastoral skills are sharpened in a place like New York City, making for sensitive, multi-tasking ministry. Fr. John exemplified what is meant to be a “modern” Orthodox priest, comfortable in his skin as a contemporary American and at the same time a totally devout and committed Orthodox Christian. Intelligent and very well-read as he was, he was a “people person” with a heart. He carried his Orthodox priesthood with dignity and humility, and whether preaching or in conversation, low- or high-brow, he was a man who was indeed a “good steward of God’s varied graces.” It was my privilege to call him a friend and a great joy to share in the

“mysteries” of the Mystical Supper with him.

Wishing to live near children and grandchildren, Fr. John and Regina retired to Washington State, where he continued to serve and preach at Holy Resurrection Church in Tacoma. He fell asleep in the Lord on January 20, 2015.

May Our Lord give him rest with the saints and make his memory to be eternal.

Please read the moving tribute to Fr. John, written by Peter Steinfelds and posted on January 26, 2015, that appeared in *Commonweal* at <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/not-ours-mend>. ❖

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She’s there, she loves the work, it gives her something to do, she knows the code. For goodness sake, she devised the code!

And it saves others from... Well, us, I guess, from... I mean, understand, hospitality, relationship, love, these things require sacrifice, and discipline, and time, I mean, we have families, jobs, responsibilities.

Philoxenia, she does so much, granted, everyone who sees her coming runs the other way. Okay, so she has all these rules. Maybe she just needs a little compassion, a little time, someone to sit with her, to put her at ease with herself, to make her feel welcome, someone to love her and someone for her to love. After all, her name does mean hospitality, doesn’t it? ❖

Fr. Siniari recently retired from his pastoral ministry and work with Covenant House.

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How perfect Father Sophonismos thought. To show our gratitude for all the years Father Mathetes served our people... To depict in color and egg-tempera on a specially prepared board requiring 10 or 12 precise applications of warmed natural gesso, a liquid concoction of chalk dust, marble dust, and animal-skin glue, smoothed carefully as it dries to remove bubbles, and sanded between coats for an even surface...

A long learned discipline to marry all these diverse elements together to show the unity of love in God's Kingdom...

And wasn't this the goal of the little parish? Wasn't this the difficult calling of the priest, to harmonize the many different people and personalities, even the irascible ones, even Philoxenia?

And weren't the people called to cooperate with and support the priest in what is called Synergia, a cooperation of human will and God's grace, not for individual salvation, but for the blessing of all?

Of course everyone would get behind Father in his attempt to help old Father Mathetes. With a little effort, self-sacrifice, and prayer, the little parish could be an icon of relationship and hospitality.

The relationship of the Persons of the Holy Trinity needs no preparation, no discipline, no gesso, it just is...

But this icon that Father Mathetes would make, and the process to make it, thought Father Sophonismos, will show our community the model, the typos of kindness, of loving one another. "We love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). This was hospitality and relationship in action.

But not everyone was navigating by the same Bright Morning Star.

Along with all the elders of the parish, Philoxenia had been consulted beforehand. The reasons had been explained. She had given her approval. But for some reason it was not in her to follow the compass-heading set by the priest for what he saw to be the good of the little parish as a whole, for all the people and their diverse needs.

St. John Chrysostom says, "It is like a captain having pirates sailing with him on board ship and continually plotting hour by hour against him and the sailors and crew."

So what was the splinter that irritated her eye where Father Mathetes was concerned?

He picked bad times to come into her church.

It interfered with her nocturnal sojourns.

He had bad breath and talked too much.

His nervous laugh was too loud and his joking out of place.

His children scuffed the floor and drank the last of the juice.

Cookie crumbs were everywhere in the church hall. The mice would complain when those children finally departed.

Moreover, he did not match her understanding of the temperament of an iconographer nor the iconographic process she knew to be authentic... why, he didn't even have a psalm reading while he worked, the man used a CD player for goodness sake... And the way he dressed! This is how a priest and an iconographer dresses?

But at the same time she prepared him little meals, followed the children with her broom, and offered to read if he would prefer a real singer, after all, many people, she recalled, said the singing was actually the only reason anyone came to the little parish anyway.

But after a short time her tolerance grew thin. She said Father Sophonismos had not received proper authorization to spend this money. He had been bribed with fasule money. She questioned his choice of iconographic subjects, the parish wasn't called Holy Trinity, was it?

In the end Father Mathetes was accused of using certain rags stored in Philoxenia's bags for paint clean-up and this violation of the paradox of our little Philly sent him and his unfinished icon out the door of the little parish.

"He touched her rags!" People winced. Who wanted to argue? What if she walks out? Who would fill her place? She does everything!

After this incident Father Sophonismos thought perhaps the community would join him in finding a way to widen the community's concept of welcoming and hospitality. And so, by way of example he paid his brother priest out of his own pocket.

But people would just tilt their head and smile, "Well, that's our Philly." Whatever it is that she's doing alone there in the little parish all these years, and even overnight, let her keep the key. If her husband doesn't complain, why should we?

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Philoxenia Means Hospitality

by Fr. Stephen Siniari

“...the standard or criterion for distinguishing existential authenticity from existential alienation, that is, good from evil, is relation – Existence constituted by relation as love...” (*Relational Ontology* by Christos Yannaras)

Of all the people in the little parish the one who contributed the most was also the one who detracted the most. Philoxenia.

No one spent more time in church. She had a key and knew the code.

“What does she do in there?” People would ask.

No one knew but they were certain it must be something important. After all, she’d been doing it for years. She’d grown old in the community, gone from school-bags, to handbags, to back-bending oversized canvas bags of things even her husband was not permitted to touch. A mysterious collection of churchy things that smelled like incense and oil.

Father Sophonismos, always came to her defense. “She irons the candle wax out of the rug with brown paper bags, on her knees.”

But he knew she was merciless in her scolding of those who tilted a drop of beeswax. Even he was afraid and would rather it drip on the page of his Sluzhebnik. Service books, after all, a new one he could buy.

“Look how organized she’s made our library,” he would say.

But heaven help the person who disturbed or disrespected the order of the shelves. Dewey himself would have received a parcel of Philoxenia’s disciplinary demerits right down to the last decimal. His system indeed!

“And flowers, see how she decorates the temple.” Father would say.

Yet he knew the canons regarding flowers in certain places, but she worked so ardently. Well, it gave her such satisfaction... I should say something to ruin her joy, over such a little thing?

And at the same time he knew that at the sight of the first stranger or visitor or inquirer, there she would go, skirts billowing, speeding over before he could button the collar of his cassock.

And by the time he arrived every “negative rule and discipline,” from fasting to burial rituals, would be presented as Gospel, along with 100 prostrations.

The wilting and withering of potential catechumens, choir members, children for the church school, and candidates for the clergy made Philoxenia a coffee-hour Calamity Jane. As good as she was with flowers and things... Indulgent Father Sophonismos kindly called it the paradox of our little Philly...

One day, a priest called. His name was Father Mathetes, a friend of the community, who had stepped in to rescue the parish many times, serving funerals, weddings, baptisms, and liturgies, when there was no priest at the little parish. Now he had fallen on hard times. His wife had died. He was raising the children on his own. He had received a blessing from the Bishop to start a business writing icons and had done well, but now his health was not so good, the quality of his icons had diminished, and the family was in danger of losing their home.

Mary made the best fasule, some said, in the history of the little parish. How she got the beans so tender, no one knew. Father Sophonismos, during the Great Fast, had to restrain himself eating bowl after bowl.

After all, what kind of a fast is it if one floats with fasule? But with a good loaf of bread, ah... there was nothing better. And when Mary died her daughter, knowing Father’s predilection for the Lenten soup, gave him Mary’s secret recipe along with \$3,000 to spend however he saw fit.

“Father Mathetes, don’t worry, I have a project for your iconographic talents in the little parish. We need an icon of the Hospitality of Abraham. I’ve spoken to the Board. Let’s do it.”

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