

The Antidote of Service and Love for One Another on All Levels: *An Interview with Father Michael Dahulich*

[Note: Following his election to the episcopacy but prior to his consecration, Bishop-Elect Michael visited St. Gregory the Theologian Church in Wappingers Falls, New York, where he was interviewed for Jacob's Well by the Very Rev. Archpriest Alexis Vinogradov, pastor. Though this interview took place on December 11, 2009 it is included in this issue to offer our readers a glimpse into the views and perspectives on our Church held by the priest who became bishop.]

Fr Alexis Vinogradov [AV]: Fr Michael, what would you identify as the key factors leading to your acceptance of nomination for bishop of the diocese?

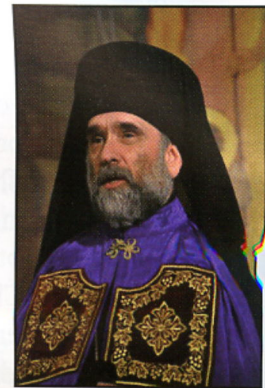
Fr Michael: I never seriously thought it would happen; I was truly content in my priestly life. I had wanted marriage and children. I loved being a parish priest. In my work at St. Tikhon's Seminary I enjoyed the challenge of helping to shape future priests. Both Metropolitan Jonah and Bishop Tikhon encouraged me separately to consider responding to the diocese's need for pastoral oversight and love.

AV: You are courageous, coming on the heels of difficulties experienced both in the diocese and the OCA. At this point there is good work being done to nurture a deeper understanding of hierarchical conciliarity on the basis of the life of the Holy Trinity. Would you comment on this work and challenge?

Fr Michael: The real key is the building of trust. There are several models in the Church's history. The Jerusalem Council in the book of Acts unites the whole Church and truly reflects Trinitarian life. Our own recent time of tensions of power will need the antidote of service and love for one another on all levels. The focus can be neither on me as bishop nor on anyone else except Christ. This will be a time of opportunity to rebuild aspects of Church life with the thinking of architects like Father Alexander Schmemmann who, coming out of the Russian tradition, saw the need to re-establish the Church after the ravages of the Revolution.

AV: Fr Michael, in your own ministry, who would you identify as role models?

Fr Michael: Before studying theology, I was strongly affected by my pastor, who was not formally a theologian, but it was very clear that he loved being a priest. It was shown in his profound love for the people he served. As a seminarian I visited hospitals with him. I once saw him severely criticized, and I was greatly affected by how calmly he accepted this treatment. He simply said that in the end everyone needs the hand of a pastor to hold. I learned from my seminary professors and Bishop John, who ordained me, that most importantly, you have to love the people. Bishop Basil, speaking at a seminary commencement, also underlined that the real job of the bishop is to love his priests and his people. As a teacher of scripture I am personally drawn to Saint John the Evangelist as my hero, and it turns out that my consecration will be on his feast day! I also teach a course on the theology of Saint Paul, and I hold him very dear as well.



AV: In this ministry of love for one another you naturally stress the pastoral dimension of our work, one on one. Could you shed some light on the institutional dimension, our larger witness among churches, to society and other faiths?

Fr Michael: It is essential to witness humbly that our faith is a great gift to the world. As we were being taught in seminary, we learned to witness to other faiths, but today the tragedy is that children have grown up without a church altogether. In a recent survey of youngsters, more five-year-olds recognized the McDonald arches than the Cross of our Lord. Our aim is not primarily to grow numerically-that may happen-but we must witness to Christ by the way we live and what we do. People must be drawn to our example, by how they see our attention and attitude towards the "least" in our society.

AV: Our communities no longer resemble the village church. Our parishes are far flung and our members commute long distances. This affects the life and shape of our communities; they are less organic and

