

Summer/Fall 2012

Jacob's well



Jacob's Well

Summer/Fall 2012



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

Published with the
Blessing of His Grace,
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Table of Contents

THEME

Love the Questions	2
How Can This Be?	3
Active Listening to Enrich the Church	4
Pastoring the Titanic - Full Steam Ahead?	7
Freeing Ourselves from Assessments	9
Possessions	11
Wouldn't it be Nice?	12

DIOCESAN LIFE

Looking Back: A Year of Website News	13
Rutgers OCF and Friends Enjoy <i>Godspell</i>	14
Operation Buffalo Lives On	14
Happy Mudder's Day	15
OCF: Three Letters Make a Huge Difference	15
Remembering Stefan Nafranowicz	16
Archpriest Paul Shafran Celebrates 90th Birthday	17
Youth Ministry in East Meadow	18
Growing up with Friends in Brick	19
Holy Apostles Mission	20
Fr Nehrebecki - 60 Years of Ministry	21
Fr David Cowan and Family	21
Diaconal Formation Program	22
St Andrew's Camp	24

SPECIAL FEATURES

Do Orthodox and Mormons Believe in the Same God?	25
The New Jersey Self-Help Clearinghouse	25
The Way: A Parish Experience in Adult Education	26
St Vladimir's Seminary, Liturgical Music, & Our Church ...	28
Orthodox Faith in Action	30
St Tikhon's Seminarian Travels to Albania	31
Coming Home: Returning Combat Veterans	32
Extraordinary Work of Georgian Nuns and Monks	34
Tough Town - Camden, NJ	35
ONE BEGGAR TELLING ANOTHER BEGGAR... Savvy	36

Love the Questions

by Fr. John Shimchick

One sees it in marriages, especially those which are struggling. Present in nearly every political conversation, within our parish meetings, coffee hours, and internet discussion groups is the inability to have serious, yet respectful discussions on questions that matter. It seems that both sides often quickly draw conclusions about the other as being too liberal, too narrow-minded, too lax, or too rigid. And so we are frequently unable to hear and learn from each other.

Towards the end of a long series of podcasts on “Charles Darwin and Christianity,” Fr Thomas Hopko offered some recommendations on how to engage difficult questions and conversations:

1) Follow the example of Jesus:

It would be very instructive for us to see how Jesus spoke with people, how He dealt with those around him. Sometimes He could be very sharp, but He was never demeaning. He would say: “If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?” (John 18:23)

2) Let's be prepared to speak when the need arises:

We Christians are entreated in the Holy Scripture to be ready always to give an answer for the hope that is in us. It's written in 1 Peter 3:13, “Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?” We have to be zealous for what is right. We just need to be sure that it is right.

In Romans, St Paul wrote about some of his fellow Israelites/Hebrews: “I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened” (not according to knowledge – 10:2). So we need to be afraid of replacing the truth of God with a truth of our own – the truth of the Church with a truth of our own and putting the name of God on it. We have to be very careful, but still be zealous for the truth, zealous for what is right. We have to be careful that the devil hasn't inspired us into a false zeal upon which we put the name of Christianity, truth, Christ, God, or the Bible even.

The letter of Peter continues, “but even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do

not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready/prepared to make a defense (apologia) to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence.”

So here are the words we want to hear: with gentleness, reverence, and a clear conscience. That's what we want to have. So, let's beg God for that. (Ancient Faith Radio, June 5, 2010)

By proposing in this issue that we might not fear, but rather would “love the questions,” I am not suggesting a challenge to the essential doctrines of Faith, but rather supporting a courageous look at all that prevents us as a Diocese, parishes, and individuals from offering “a defense . . . for the hope that is in us.” As we discussed this theme over the past months, Bishop Michael insisted that the essential need must be for examining “the questions of reaching and keeping our youth, revitalizing our parishes, inspiring vocations, educating our faithful in better church attendance, more meaningful confessions, more responsible stewardship, and for dealing with life issues: sickness, suffering, broken marriages.” So, we have sought to present examples of where this is taking place and have encouraged deeper consideration of these issues from a variety of authors.

As we continue in the future to explore these and other questions we recognize that behind many of what an OCA Strategic Plan task force is calling “holy conversations” will be the need to clarify how one considers the role of Tradition. Is it a fixed method, with a clearly regulated beginning and end or does it represent a still continuous process? Is it stagnant or “Living” (Fr. John Meyendorff and others)? Does it indeed bear within it “the life of the Holy Spirit” (Vladimir Lossky)? Do we agree that it's not just the words of the Scriptures or of the Fathers that really matter, but the necessity to acquire a Scriptural and Patristic “mind” (Fr. George Florovsky)? Metropolitan Kallistos Ware has said that “creative fidelity to the Fathers” demands “we are not merely to repeat the Fathers, but to learn how to think like the Fathers.”

May a call to “love the questions,” indeed bring us into a deeper love and fidelity for all that is present in the mystery of Christ and His Church.

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Summer/Fall
2012

*“Be patient
toward all that is
unsolved in your
heart and try to
love the questions
themselves.”*

- Rainer Maria Rilke

How Can This Be?

by Bishop Michael

Questions face us *everywhere*. Each day, the discussions swirling around us in the news, and within the communities where we live, force us to face questions having to do with faith... with family... with moral and social conduct. Does life have a purpose? Why do bad things happen to good people? What is marriage? Does chastity mean anything anymore? Who decides when human life begins and ends? What constitutes charity, whether on a personal or national scale? When we encounter injustice and corruption – at work, at school, in civic life, around the world – do we respond with hostility, or with humility?

What are the questions we need to ask now – in parish life and in family life?

As Orthodox Christians, how are we to approach such questions... and how are we to approach the answers we find in the Tradition of the Church?

Perhaps these two simple questions – directed at ourselves – can steer us in the right direction: Am I looking for the Lord's answer, or my own? Once I have learned the answer, am I willing to let it change me?

Let us examine the motives, and the outcomes, of two pivotal questions recorded in the Scriptures.

The two voices asking these questions are very similar – two expectant parents, bewildered by the news of their coming children. The recipient of the questions, too, is the same – God Himself, through His messenger, the Archangel Gabriel. And most strikingly, the content of the questions is very similar too: “*How?*”

These questions were posed by two of the pivotal persons in the history of salvation – the priest Zacharias, the father of St. John the Baptist (Luke 1:18); and the Theotokos herself (Luke 1:34). Both would come to be known as holy people. But in that moment of questioning, one – Zacharias – was silenced; the other – the Most Holy Theotokos – was blessed. Why?

Zacharias' question had a precedent. As a priest, he knew well the examples of elderly couples giving birth. And yet, in the face of all that evidence, and in the face of the Messenger of God Himself, he responded to the Archangel's news with skepticism: “How shall I know this?” The Theotokos' answer to the angel was incredulous too: “How can this be?” But her incredulity was born not of doubt, but of childlike wonder – because there was *no precedent* in all of history for a virgin giving birth – let alone for *any* woman giving birth to the Son of God!

Like the Mother of God in that life-changing moment, our task is simply to accept: “be it done to me according to your word.” Our task is to accept the word of God in the Tradition of His Church.

Our task, too, is to ask questions that truly matter. What are the questions we need to ask now – in parish life and in family life? How is our Faith relevant in secular society? How successfully are we reaching out to the unchurched... to those who have fallen away... to non-believers? Are we inspiring our altar boys and laymen to pursue vocations as priests and deacons? Are we educating our faithful in better church attendance, more meaningful confessions, more responsible stewardship? Are we teaching and guiding one another in the Orthodox understanding of sickness, suffering, and death? Would our extended families, our neighbors, our employees, even our enemies, be *surprised to find out that we are Christians?*

And what about our young people? We all want to give our children everything we did not have – the best education; a comfortable home; a beautiful wedding; position and prosperity. But, are we giving them what we *did* have: the Faith? Are we giving them – through our own behavior – a rhythm of daily prayer, a habit of making our homes holy, of forgiving one another, of fasting and feasting not ac-

How will God's response to these questions – as revealed through Holy Tradition – strike us?

Continued on page 6

Active Listening to Enrich the Church

by *Albert S. Rossi, PhD*

“Listening is love delivered.” This statement is axiomatic in family life and visiting a patient in the hospital. Perhaps it is even more so during serious discussions about Church life.

I am a convert of 32 years and owe my very life and semi-sanity to the Church. I firmly believe that the Orthodox Church has “the fullness of the truth” and we need to do all we can to cherish what we have been given.

During my work on many committees and commissions in the OCA, active listening has been part of, and sometimes absent from, the deliberations. As a member of the SCOBA Committee on Social and Moral Issues for many years, I had the wonderful experience of working with members of other jurisdictions who actually listened to each other. Yes, the meetings were sometimes long and tense. Yes, I learned immensely about all the social and moral issues of the day. Some of my most prized convictions were challenged, and changed, by the interchanges and honest dialogue. I am forever grateful for the experience of working with other Orthodox Christians who had the love and sanity to listen to each other and speak from their heart.

My SCOBA experience has not been the norm for some of my other committee and one-on-one exchanges about serious Church matters. Oftimes I felt that the other person had an opinion and was going to “tolerate” my speaking until he/she could present the other side. And, I have no doubt that I have not always been a paragon of active listening. Lord, have mercy. We all have much to learn.

The OCA Today

We need to squarely face the facts of the OCA today. We are steadily shrinking. We have fewer members, less of a financial base, and gradually diminishing resources. Virtually all the established main-line churches are experiencing the same plight, but that is of little comfort. The question is, “Where do we go from here?” Two things are certain. First, we can no longer afford “business

as usual.” Second, we need to do this “together.” There is no other way.

I am convinced that if we learn from each other how and when to actively listen, then we can move Christ’s Church in an evangelical direction. A better way to say this is that if we listen to Christ speaking to us through the other, then the Christ in us can empower us to be more vital disciples of His message and work with the others.

Active Listening Defined

What is active listening? Active listening is being attentive to the basic meaning and the feelings in the statement of the other. Active listening absorbs the meaning and feelings of the other and demonstrates, to the satisfaction of the other, that we actually heard what was said. The response is usually a short declarative sentence.

So, active listening is not judgmental, nor critical, nor patronizing, nor advice-giving. Active listening does not try to

fix problems. Active listening is simply being fully present to the other as the other speaks and showing the other person that we heard what was said.

And, active listening, at its best, doesn’t ask many questions. Some questions for clarification are OK. But, questions can be a way of controlling the conversation and controlling the other. When I ask a question I put the other person in the position of having to answer or ignore my question. Adolescents often hate questions precisely because they sniff out the power-differential between the questioner and the person being questioned. If we aren’t careful, questions easily slip into interrogation. But, again, some few questions are acceptable during active listening.

And, of course, we need to honestly and candidly express our opinion. But, we can only do this constructively, that is, be listened to, if we have earned our way into the conversation by listening first. That’s often the rub. Many of us simply

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2012

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don't want to, or can't, listen first. That could spell Titanic.

I had a surprising experience of active listening when I was on jury duty. After days of honest and contentious debate we, the jury, came to an impasse. We began saying the same things, only louder. People got up and walked around the small jury room, exasperated. Then I suggested that we try an exercise. I asked that we indicate who thought the defendant was guilty and who thought she was innocent. The group was split, six to three. Then I asked the group that thought the defendant was guilty to gather in a corner, take an hour, and make a case that she was innocent. Then, I asked those who thought she was innocent to gather in the other corner and make a case that she was guilty. I said the purpose wasn't to convince the others, but simply to demonstrate that we were listening to each other and understood the opposing opinion. A spokesperson from each group made

"Seek first to understand, then be understood."

a report after an hour. Fascinatingly, some votes changed, including my own. More importantly, the atmosphere in the room changed dramatically as soon as we began the exercise. From a tense adversarial scene, the room became light and jovial. One person would call out, "You think you have a difficult job. We are making your case for you." Everyone laughed. In the end we came to a consensus with grateful unanimity. The old timers on the jury said they had never experienced such a dramatic turnaround and such a satisfying ending. Of course, the ball could have bounced the other way.

The point is, when we begin to fully listen we begin to be open to new spaces in our hearts for others to influence us and for us to influence others. As one author said, "Seek first to understand, then be understood." That sequence needs to be our common marching orders as we move forward, in the Spirit, to work in Christ's vineyard.

How Can This Be? continued from page 4

according to our own appetites but according to the calendar of the Church?

How will God's response to these questions – as revealed through Holy Tradition – strike us? This is predicated on the spirit with which we ask the questions. If, like Zacharias, we ask in the spirit of doubt... of placing *my* doubt, *my* skepticism, *my* vision of how things should be, over and above the precedents and guidance found in Holy Scripture, the lives of the Saints, and the rest of the riches of Holy Tradition... then, I can expect to struggle with the Lord's response, like Zacharias who was struck dumb for a time.

If, on the other hand, I bring my questions before the Lord, in the Church, in the spirit of childlike openness and wonder – of being *willing to be changed by the answers* – then I, like the Theotokos at the moment of the Archangel's Annunciation, may expect to be blessed and illumined by the answer revealed to me.

...[be] willing to be changed by the answers

asking questions about God's Revelation and the Tradition of His Church with an honest and open desire to truly learn, so that we may be transformed by what we discover. My task, and yours, is not to question the Revelation or the Tradition, not to challenge God or the Church – in the hope that I and my opinions may stay the same and the Church and her Tradition will change. Let our journey in *theosis* be the continuing quest to *want* to be changed by, and in, the Church. *I do not change the Church... Christ, and His Church, change me.*

It is my prayer that the *Lessons In Our Faith* video segments offered on our Diocesan Web site have been somehow helpful in responding to the common questions that I have encountered over the many years I have been learning, teaching, and preaching. And I encourage you to seek the guidance of your parish priest on the questions that face you, the dilemmas that trouble you, as you try to grow yourselves, your families, your brothers and sisters in Christ, in *theosis*.

So, we may enjoy exploring the questions... but I think that this exploration needs to be focused on

Pastoring the Titanic: Full Steam Ahead?

by *Archpriest Jonathan Ivanoff,*
Director, Commission on Mission and Evangelism

What would you do if your priest told you next Sunday the parish would be closing in one month? Or three? Or by next year? How would that affect you? Would you care? Would you be motivated to work toward a solution that might keep it open, that might help the parish not just survive, but thrive? Would you even be willing to work toward a solution? Or is it easier just to quit now and join another parish? I've often heard our parishes and even our entire national church referred to as the Titanic, and we all know how *that* story ended.

And if you did want to work toward a solution, then inevitably you would be asked: How do we bring more people to church? How do we get them to join? How do we grow our parish?

Well, for just a minute, let's talk about church "growth" in America. Consider the following:

- 120 million Americans have reportedly dropped out of "organized religion," no longer identifying with the church of their youth – if they grew up with a church in their youth.
- In 1990, less than 12 million Americans claimed no faith; in 2001 that number reached over 29 million, and is now estimated to be 12% to 14% of the population (making that number somewhere north of 36 million).
- More people are now *unchurched* – meaning those who have broken ties with any Christian denomination and who specifically do not attend Sunday services anymore – than there are Methodists, Lutherans and Episcopalians combined.
- Protestants have found that traditional, established congregations that are more than 40 years old are in steady and persistent decline, some dramatically.
- The percentage of the American public actively attending local congregations of any type is dropping precipitously. Despite self-reporting that suggests more than 40% of Americans are active attenders, research has shown that it might actually be less than 20% on any given weekend.

- And after decades of All-American Councils and Clergy-Laity Conferences and the like, in nearly all Orthodox jurisdictions, focusing on themes of evangelization, church growth, parish renewal, and generally "making America Orthodox," we still, after all that, comprise no more than perhaps 1.5 million faithful across this land.

But these numbers mask (and sometimes overwhelm) other realities. Orthodoxy may still be America's best kept secret, but not for lack of trying. We're doing everything we can (or think we can), and sometimes it makes a difference: sometimes people notice, they listen, and may respond. And it's working: there are parishes, even entire dioceses, where Orthodoxy has become the spiritual home and destination of many seeking true "life, faith and spiritual understanding."

But how do we reach out to those who haven't heard? And further, if we do reach out, how do we know what is the right thing to say? God forbid we say the wrong thing! And if they're dropping out, why in the world would they want to come to an Orthodox church, to our parish?

To answer these and many other related questions, Joe Kormos, Parish Health Facilitator for the Diocese of the Midwest, and I created a series of four internet-based "webinars" to discuss specifically this issue of the unchurched and how to reach out to them. Our aim was to explore the following questions, issues, and approaches in four sessions:

Session 1:

Who are the Unchurched? (July 18, 2012)

- Exactly what – and who – are these "unchurched"?
- Are they like what we call the "lapsed"? Is there a difference?
- What are some important things we should know about them?
- What are some important things they need to know about us?
- What are they looking for, and how should our parishes prepare to reach them for Christ?

Jacob's
well

Summer/Fall
2012

Session 2:

Inviting People to Church (August 22, 2012)

- Do we have the proper motivation for inviting people? What motivations are improper?
- What holds us back from inviting people, and how can we overcome that?
- Listening to others and giving your own personal narrative
- FRAN: Friends, Relatives, Associates, Neighbors
- What to do, and what not to do

Session 3: Engaging the Parish for Action (September, 2012; day tbd)

- Knowing where to focus efforts
- Stages of inviting: Guests, Inquirers, Catechumens, Members, Active Members
- Where is your bottleneck?
- Opening our doors: Having a Parish conversation
- Elements from early Christianity that made such an impression on the world

Session 4:

Assimilating (October, 2012; day tbd)

- What do we do with all these people?
- Conversation starters that invite inquiry
- Public/Household/Personal/Literary evangelism
- Levels of inviting

Each of these sessions has been or will be recorded and featured on both diocesan websites (Midwest and NY-NJ). Sessions, lasting approximately an hour, will contain interactive elements such as opinion polls. While the number of unchurched is large, and growing, reaching out to them is rather easy.

The vast majority of the unchurched respond very positively to one very simple strategy: They want to be invited. That's it; that's as difficult as it gets.

However, many will question such a simple strategy. "Does this mean I have to go knocking on doors?" No, we all have family, friends, neighbors and co-workers that we can reach out to when the time is right. Others may object: "Isn't this all programmatic? Programs don't grow the parish!" True enough, but none of this is programmatic. The Scriptures themselves still clearly state that it is the Church's job to "equip the saints for the work of ministry" (Ephesians 4:11-13). We all – clergy and laity alike – must engage in proactive ministries that equip and prepare our saints for the work God calls us to do (preach, teach, baptize, make disciples), realizing that, shocking as this may seem, prayer, while the heart and core of all of this, is still, by itself, not enough (read, for example, Joshua 7 regarding the Sin of Achan).

So, the Titanic after all? Really? Your parish *can* grow, if you remember that it is God Who gives the growth, and that we are, in spite of that, still His fellow workers (read 1 Cor 3). And this is, and will require, real work, beginning with both personal and corporate prayer. Remember, the Titanic didn't sink right away. But it did eventually.

"Captain, iceberg, dead ahead!"

Your call.

Note: The theme for this article was suggested by Bill Wilson, "When You Pastor the Titanic," ABP (Associated Baptist Press) Oct. 25, 2012.

How to Deal With Reality in a Healthy Way

by Bill Wilson

Resist the blame game. One of the reasons clergy are hesitant to point out the truth of declining metrics is that they know there is a high likelihood that the congregation will point an accusing finger at them. My observation is that, when confronted with the painful truth about their metrics, most congregations react with predictable knee-jerk reactions and seek a quick fix to a deeply complex set of issues. If leaders can agree to hold off on blaming and focus on understanding and prayerful analysis, then honest and helpful conversation is a possibility.

Reclaim your heritage. Living in the mid to late 20th century has spoiled us. The church of Jesus Christ has always had its best days when facing the steepest odds or under the most intense persecution. We have grown lazy and sloppy in our outreach, discipleship and stewardship. Our heritage as God's people on mission reminds us: "When we are weak, then we are strong." Many of us will have the chance to live out that historic lineage in the near future.

Freeing Ourselves from Assessments and Finding the Joys of Giving - An Orthodox Parish's Journey Toward Tithing

by Reader Symeon Combs

[Note: This article develops comments made by Reader Combs at the NJ Parish Council Conference on "Financial Stewardship" held on June 16, 2012 at Assumption Church, Clifton, NJ.]

Saints Peter and Paul Parish in Manville, New Jersey, has a twenty-two year history of addressing issues of stewardship and proportionate giving as an alternative to assessments and "head taxes." In 1990, Fr. James Parsells, the rector of Saints Peter and Paul, first distributed a booklet entitled *The Theology of Stewardship* and offered stewardship education over a three-month period. At that time, our parish dropped a whopping thirty-four (34!) specialized gift envelopes from its annual gift-envelope packet, reducing the annual packet to envelopes for fifty-two Sundays, Nativity, Pascha and Missions. Further, the Rector began to devote several homilies annually to the spiritual importance of a "first portion" or "first-fruit" offering – dedicating to the Lord the first portion of our income as an "offering of thanksgiving," separate from obligations for food, shelter, utilities, education, etc., which belong to the secular realm of "bill paying."

Further, Fr. James stressed that a self-determined percentage applied against our income—whether gross or net—was the best way to give. In short, he recommended proportionate giving, where a fixed percentage is taken "off the top" before any other uses are made of our income. Our gifts should be like Abel's offering—acceptable to the Lord because they are offered in a true spirit of thanksgiving, as an expression of faith, and as a genuine offering of first fruits, not as token gifts or afterthoughts.

When my wife Theodora and I became members of the parish in fall of 2006, Fr. James was in the midst of another series of homilies on the theology of giving, as well as redistributing the booklet on *The Theology of Stewardship*. His teachings bore fruit, thank God. From the early 1990s to 2006,

giving increased by \$35,000, rising from \$85,000 to \$120,000 annually, even though membership had declined from over 125 to about 90. Obviously, through God's grace, the concepts of stewardship and proportionate giving were taking hold in our parish and among our faithful parishioners.

Then the recession hit, and giving decreased again. We were blessed by the rental of our upper social hall to a Coptic Christian congregation (see the article in *Jacob's Well*, Spring 2011, page 14), as well as by an investment account funded by the bequest of a pious parishioner, so the parish was able to get by in a bad economy.

What better time than the recession to take a leap of faith and completely adopt a tithing model? In a bad economy, the only way our parishes can survive financially is if we give the "first fruits" to the Lord! Plus, our parish was mature in its understanding of Christian stewardship, and parishioners

were making some really generous commitments to special appeals for our parish's needs, as well as for missions and other Orthodox institutions, such as seminaries, monasteries, and IOCC/OCMC appeals.

So, the Rector asked for Bishop Michael's blessing to embark upon a tithing model and leave "head taxes" behind. Here's the gist of the plan we developed: (1) drop the assessment, (2) ask each parishioner to give a proportionate gift, a regular percentage of his/her income, (3) tithe 10% of our operating income to the Diocese of New York and New Jersey, and (4) make sure that we gave the Diocese at least as much as the assessment would have been.

The median per-capita income for Manville in the 2010 Census was \$50,000. We knew that if our 89 members "tithed" regularly at only 3% of their gross income, that would be \$133,500 (\$50,000 x

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... America's religious
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3% x 89 = \$133,500), enough to meet our annual budget without using any funds from the bequest mentioned above. With His Grace's blessing on our endeavor, Fr. James and the Parish Council began planning in mid-2011 and completed our initial plan at the Parish Council meeting in November 2011.

We decided that November would be "Stewardship Month" and that the Priest would offer homilies on the theology and practices of stewardship on all the Sundays – November 6, 13, 20, and 27. Further, a Parish Council member would offer brief comments during the announcement period on tithing and stewardship, with an emphasis on regular, "percentage giving" of the first fruits. During November, *The Theology of Stewardship* booklet was distributed again, and the Rector attached articles on the theology of giving to each Sunday's bulletin.

We hit hard in our comments on the fact that America generally is a country of "voluntary association" – we join the groups that we believe in and we pay our own way. Also, America's religious freedom – the right to worship as we choose without interference from the federal government – also carries with it the responsibility to support our churches. There is, thank God, no central government or powerful oligarchy that supports our churches. Our parishes are entirely dependent on our parishioners.

New member orientation began to include *The Theology of Stewardship* and information on proportionate giving. We wanted to make sure that new parishioners, particularly those from cultures where state support of churches was a tradition, would understand that in America, it's up to us! Further, in 2011 we began to send letters to all parishioners along with their quarterly giving statements, which are prepared by the Assistant Treasurer. These quarterly letters have three versions – a letter for those who give generously, a letter for those who give nominally, and a letter for those who have no gift record. The letters offer appreciation, encouragement and counsel, as appropriate. Finally, at the Rector's suggestion, we decided to distribute weekly offering envelopes to our church-school children (twenty-two have become regular weekly donors!).

At the Council meeting on November 17, 2011, we completed the stewardship plan and approved

our recommendations to the parish for the upcoming annual meeting:

Recommendation on Tithing and Assessment:

- Discontinue assessment envelopes.
- There will be no "membership dues," or "head taxes," in our parish – we must transition to tithing and proportionate giving.
- Support of the Diocese and national church is part of who we are as Orthodox Christians!
- Replace the assessment with a Diocesan tithe of 10% of operating income.
- Include the Diocesan tithe as a line-item expense in 2012 operating budget.

Definition of Operating Income for the Diocesan Tithe:

- Altar wine, candles, and temple oil contributions;
- Holy Day gifts (Nativity and Pascha);
- "Loose Cash" not identified with a particular person;
- Parish Event Income;
- Sunday Envelopes from members.

Following each completed month, starting with January 2012, 10% of the total income from the lines above has been remitted to the Diocese. (In order not to fall short, if our tithes are less than the amount that would have been generated by the assessment, we will make up the difference by remitting special checks twice a year.) Our parishioners' donations for parish cemetery upkeep, capital improvements to the church and social hall, Orthodox missions, and alms for the poor are not included in our definition of "operating income," since they are gifts with a restricted purpose.

At the 2012 Parish Annual Meeting, our parishioners took a leap of faith and endorsed the plan! A few said that the plan wouldn't work, and that the assessment was a necessary tool. However, through May 2012, the parish was slightly ahead of budget in gift income and had exceeded the pro-rata amount of the assessment to date in its tithing to the Diocese. Glory to God for all things!

As our Parish's 100th Anniversary approaches in only three years, many opportunities and challenges are present. The parish's sanctuary and other facilities will present some capital needs, and a plan for capital improvements and an estimated

capital budget over five years need to be prepared. We all must try harder to tithe and ensure that the parish is fiscally stable through our annual and capital giving.

And, we all must pray for our parish to grow stronger and larger! Our future is bright, and we must be courageous in welcoming those who are seeking the Holy Faith. Bishop Michael has challenged us to focus on mission and evangelization, and our Priest has challenged us to broaden and deepen our knowledge of the Holy Faith to prepare ourselves for this task.

Our founders who came to America in the early 20th century brought a priceless legacy. As we approach the 100th anniversary of our parish, we seek to honor their memory by a renewed commitment to the Holy Faith and to our parish through embracing the principles and practices of Orthodox Christian stewardship.

Rector, Father James Parsells; Senior Warden, Symeon Combs; and Parish Treasurer, Daniel Torrisi; will be glad to share materials, plans, and documents referenced in this article. Please contact Symeon Combs at symeoncombs@yahoo.com.

The 2012 Parish Council Conferences on “Financial Stewardship” were conducted in June at Clifton NJ, Endicott NY, and Whitestone NY. More than 150 parish council members from Diocesan parishes attended. The guest facilitator, Maureen Jury of the Diocese of the South, offered well-received and information-packed discussions. The Endicott NY Conference was recorded and videos of the event are available at: http://nynjoca.org/parish_council_2012.html. It is hoped that all parish council members, and interested faithful, who were unable to attend one of the Conferences will take the opportunity to view the videos.

Possessions

by David Frost

I want to talk about the product of our work: money and possessions and the power they give. If you are a Christian, you are called (as at baptism) to “turn to Christ” and to keep turning to Christ. Don’t let me disguise from you the reality of what that means. Conversion to Christ means also conversion of the wallet. The Christ we have talked so much about will not allow you to call anything your own: sooner or later He will make it clear that you have given Him a right to all that you are and all that you possess. Anything you have is what Christ has given back, permitted you to use. And for all that He has given or returned, He will expect an account. Did you use it for His purpose?

That is a crunch-point for many people. The Jews established a principle of tithing: one tenth of what you have is for God, the rest is your own. Many of the Protestant churches follow this rule of a tenth for the Church, and that is why their churches have funds for so many good works, in education, health care, social service and the like. If we Orthodox began to imitate them, there is so much we could do.

I say it’s a crunch-point because the thought of turning everything over to Christ terrifies us. We

want security. I will only feel secure when the mortgage is paid off, the house is mine, and there’s also that little bit in the bank that no one can touch but me, just for any emergency. But (as I once heard the former Anglican Bishop of Salisbury, Joe Fison, say) keeping a little hidden away in reserve is a major cause of faith going dead. He said that when people came to him complaining that Christ, God, and religion were starting to mean less and less to them, he almost always found it was a case of what he called “lumber in the attic”: areas of one’s life, of one’s concerns or activities or possessions that you weren’t prepared to let Jesus get His hands on. “Keep off, Jesus – that bit’s for me.”

Christ demands your all – and giving your all to Christ is the essence of Christian behavior. The rewards are far more than we can imagine: a life cleansed and fulfilled, because we are being turned into the likeness of God in Christ.

David Frost is Principal and Administrator of The Institute for Orthodox Christians Studies, Cambridge, England. This is taken from: THE WAY: Talk 11 – Christian Behaviour; Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies, 2004, 2010.

**Jacob's
well**
Summer/Fall
2012

Wouldn't it be Nice?

by *Matushka Mary Buletza Breton, Diocesan Treasurer*

This lyric from a famous Beach Boys song invites people to dream of situations other than the present. Probably each of us at one time or another has daydreamed about a situation or an opportunity that is statistically improbable (winning the lottery) or physically impossible (playing on a major league sports team.) Wishful thinking and dreaming is human. Too much indulging in this activity can be harmful. But daydreaming can also be a useful way to begin identifying goals. Once goals are defined, quantified and prioritized, we can begin to develop a game plan for achieving each goal.

I dream a lot, sometimes silently to myself, sometimes openly to my family or whoever is in hearing distance. Often, people express disbelief at my dreams. However, that does not discourage me. Let me share with you one of my "dreams" and some of my ideas to make this dream into an achievable goal: **Adequate seminary student housing.**

When my father entered seminary as a single young man, he lived in dormitory style housing with the other seminarians – all single young men like himself. When my husband entered seminary, we were already married, and our first child was one year old when he graduated. We have seen changes in demographics in many areas of life, so a change in the demographics of seminarians is no surprise.

The case in point is different types of housing needed for different types of students, or rather, students in different stages of their family lives. Plans to build married student housing at St. Tikhon's Seminary have been discussed for several years now. Where, what, how, how many, are questions that have been addressed. One major impediment is funding. Some funds have been donated and raised, but much more will be needed. **Wouldn't it be nice** if our biggest concern was constructing the apartments instead of paying for them?

One idea for funding would be for a diocese, or a deanery, or a parish, or a group of families, to sponsor and fund the construction of one apartment. Consider the following funding example: **Wouldn't it be nice** if each adult in a diocese of 2,500 souls donated \$1.00 per month towards that apartment? In four years, \$120,000 would be accumulated! That works out to \$48 per person, or \$96 per couple, total for the four

year period. A program like this could eliminate the need for long term financing and significantly minimize or eliminate interest costs. If a diocese or deanery sponsored an apartment, a benefit could be that a seminarian from that area would live there rent-free while in seminary and then return to that area to serve for a period of years (with appropriate compensation). What is given away comes right back!

A variation on the strategy could be applied to people who sell a residence, especially if downsizing into retirement. **Wouldn't it be nice** if each house sold by a diocesan parishioner had, as another closing cost, a donation from the sales proceeds to the seminarian housing? In our hypothetical diocese, each year for four years, if 30 families sold houses and each donated \$1,000 from their sales proceeds, we would accumulate \$120,000.

Another variation could involve families fortunate enough to pay off their mortgages. I know, that is a dream in itself...**wouldn't it be nice?** But it does still happen. Several families with no mortgages could join together and continue to make mortgage payments, but on the seminarian apartment instead of their own home.

Now, **wouldn't it be nice** if we began doing this now, ourselves, one by one, not waiting for an appeal, a mailing, a brochure, a sermon, a groundbreaking ceremony? Not waiting to be sure that everyone around us was joining in and giving their fair share, that everyone agreed on exactly what method we would follow? SO WHAT if one quarter of the diocesan souls gave \$1.00 per month, while 15 house sales per year generated \$1,000 donations, several families with no mortgages began donating a replacement mortgage payment, and realistically some people did not participate? We could achieve our goal with a little of each strategy discussed and maybe some we haven't even discussed. We can get there from here. **Wouldn't it be nice** if we could accumulate funds and say, "Here is funding for a married seminarian apartment; when will it be complete?"

I believe this can be done. I am willing to do this. **Wouldn't it be nice** if enough people believed this to make it happen? Please let me know what you think.

To be continued...

Looking Back: A Year of Website News

by Fr. Ken James Stavrevsky

Diocese of New York and New Jersey, Director of Communications

It is a great honor, indeed a profound privilege, to serve as the Communications Director for this incredibly blessed Diocese. It is not, however, without its challenges; primarily, in the tremendous amount of energy and activity requiring adequate coverage and dissemination through the diocesan website. As hard as I try to keep up, as they say in the radio business, “the hits just keep on coming!” The labors and efforts of Bishop Michael, the Diocesan Council, the Council of Presbyters, the Commissions, the Departments, and the many uniquely gifted pastors, laity and parishes are “breathtaking.” I have been told by some that we have the best Diocesan website in the OCA. If there is any truth in that, it is because there is so much going on – wonderfully good things going on – things which fill the website with meaningful content revealing the vitality and dynamism of the Diocese.

I have been asked to reflect upon the past twelve months of website news and offer my “TOP TEN” list. As I contemplate this request, the period of time encompasses July 2011 to July 2012. The difficulty of the task is not in selecting ten really great news items; it is in having to leave out so many really great news items along the way. The task, however, remains to be accomplished. So, without further ado, here it is:

THE DIOCESAN WEBSITE TOP TEN LIST (July 2011 - July 2012)

NUMBER TEN: “Kick-off” of the 2012 Distinguished Diocesan Benefactors Program

http://nynjoca.org/vision_for_future_2012.html

NUMBER NINE: “A Miracle on Ideal Street”

http://nynjoca.org/news_111128_1.html

NUMBER EIGHT: Second Annual Altar Servers Retreat

http://nynjoca.org/news_120316_1.html

NUMBER SEVEN: Choir Appreciation Day

http://nynjoca.org/news_111014_1.html

NUMBER SIX: First Annual Diocesan Youth Day

http://nynjoca.org/news_110830_1.html

NUMBER FIVE: Commission on Liturgical Music

<http://nynjoca.org/files/2012/2012%20Releases/Release-2012.13.1.pdf>

NUMBER FOUR: Diaconal Formation Program Graduation

http://nynjoca.org/news_120601_4.html

NUMBER THREE: 2012 Parish Council Conferences

http://nynjoca.org/news_120629_1.html

video: http://nynjoca.org/parish_council_2012.html

NUMBER TWO: “Lessons in Our Faith”

http://nynjoca.org/lessons_in_our_faith.html

NUMBER ONE: “OPERATION BUFFALO”

http://nynjoca.org/news_110923_1.html

I cannot muster words to adequately thank all those who have shared their “good works” and “good news” with the rest of us by submitting them for publication on the diocesan website. May God continue to bless you abundantly! I have only one request: “*Keep the hits coming!*”

Jacob's well

Summer/Fall
2012

Rutgers OCF and Friends Enjoy Godspell

Members of the Orthodox Christian Fellowship (OCF) at Rutgers University joined by other Orthodox college students and friends travelled to Broadway on April 20 and attended a performance of the musical, *Godspell*. They were accompanied by Fathers David Garretson and John Shimchick. Here are a few reactions:

Going to see Godspell on Broadway this spring was such a great experience! Our group came together from a variety of parishes throughout New Jersey to be a part of the trip. It was a great way to spend time with fellow college students in the Orthodox Christian Fellowship, as well as meet some high school seniors heading off to college in the fall. We all had a chance to get to know each other over dinner before getting a back stage tour of the theater and seeing the play. On the train ride home, we



all had a chance to discuss the modern take on the ministry of Christ and His parables that Godspell presented. A few of us even had a chance to discuss it with Bishop Michael at a later date since he had at one point directed a version of the play. Thanks to the suggestion and kindness of Bishop Michael, and the coordination of Fr. David Garretson and Fr. John Shimchick, we were all granted the opportunity to get an up close look at a play in New York City! (Sarah Berger)

The trip to see Godspell was a great experience. Since the OCF group at Rutgers is relatively small, it was nice to join together and get to know other Orthodox students. It was also great to be with Fr. David whose parish, Saints Peter and Paul in South River, has welcomed our visits. (Steve Shimchick)

Operation Buffalo Lives On

One year ago, His Grace Bishop Michael initiated "Operation Buffalo," a Diocesan-wide effort aimed at revitalizing one of the oldest Orthodox Churches in Buffalo, NY – Saints Peter and Paul Russian Orthodox Church. The response to Bishop Michael's initiative was overwhelming and many parishioners from across the Diocese traveled to Buffalo in support of the two week project.

A year later, "Operation Buffalo" lives on, according to Fr. Volodymyr Zablotysky, the acting rector. "The 'jolt' of energy and enthusiasm our parish received during those two weeks from a year ago are still felt in the parish," said Fr. Volodymyr. "Our parish is still faced with major renovation and maintenance projects, and the memory of support and love our parish received through 'Operation Buffalo' sustains us as we face what some may see as an impossible task."

On June 9 -10 of 2012, Bishop Michael made his yearly pastoral visit to Saints Peter and Paul Church. Prior to the Bishop's visit, parishioners finished the renovation of the parish hall. All the work was accomplished by the parishioners and friends of the parish.

"In 2014 our parish will celebrate its 120th anniversary and we have much work ahead of us. We plan to replace the parking lot adjacent to the church's building as well as addressing some structural issues in both of the bell towers of the church building," explained Fr. Zablotysky.

Saints Peter and Paul Orthodox Church was founded in 1894 and is one of the oldest parishes in our Diocese. For more information, news, and ongoing projects at Saints Peter and Paul Orthodox Church you may visit the church's official website at <http://www.peterandpauloca.com/>.

Happy Mudder's Day!

Fr. Stephen and Matushka Jessica Evanina participated in the *Tough Mudder* event on Mother's Day – May 13, 2012 in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania. The 12 mile course was designed by the British Special Forces and includes 23 military-style obstacles, which is perhaps why it has been coined "Probably the Toughest Event on the Planet." This event is held in various cities throughout the world with the proceeds donated to The Wounded Warrior Project.

"We were happy to complete the course without getting injured," said Fr. Stephen, "but knowing that the proceeds are going to help our wounded soldiers truly makes all of the training and effort worth it for us. Matushka Jessica and I had two soldiers who are amputees in our group who were very inspiring to everyone! We finished the event with a great sense of purpose and pride!"

For more information on the *Tough Mudder* event, visit - www.toughmudder.com



OCF: Three Letters That Make a Huge Difference

by Rebecca Oliver

On Saturday, August 18, 2012, I attended *The Fields are White for Harvest: Welcome to College Ministry Conference*, which was held at Holy Trinity Church, Yonkers, NY and presented by our Diocesan Department of College Ministry and the OCA Department of Youth, Young Adult, and Campus Ministry. Clergy, students, and volunteers gathered to learn more about how we can play a role in this vital stage of a college student's life. We heard from Ed Ryan, a current student from The University of Connecticut; Mr. Andrew Boyd, Director of the OCA Department of Youth, Young Adult, and Campus Ministry; and Dn. John Diamantis, our Diocesan Director of Campus Ministry. Topics included OCF experiences, how to start an OCF, and strategies for parishes and chapters. Participants were given many useful materials to strengthen or start an OCF chapter. It was a wonderful day of learning and fellowship as everyone joined to grow in this ministry.

I am entering my senior year of college at Pennsylvania State University and am very active in my OCF chapter. Over the years, I have come to love Orthodox Christian Fellowship and have realized it has played a very important role in my life. College brings happiness and adventures but it also brings struggles. When those struggles happened, my church, OCF chapter, and faith are what got me through them. I value my experiences with my chapter and genuinely enjoy being with others who understand what it means to be a college student in the Orthodox faith. I have participated in College Conference, OCF Real Spring Break, and several events. I would not trade it for anything.

It is critical that college students are cared for as they approach this time of their lives. College campuses bring temptation, confusion, and distractions. Therefore, it is important that there is something to keep them connected to the Church. After all, if there is not, the Church will lose them. With dedicated clergy members, willing volunteers, and supporting faithful, Orthodox Christian Fellowship can be phenomenal and make a huge difference in many college students' lives. With the grace of God, I pray for this wonderful ministry and all who participate in it.

Rebecca's home parish is Saints Peter and Paul Church, Manville, NJ.

Jacob's
well

Summer/Fall
2012

Remembering Stefan Nafranowicz

by Archpriest Thomas Edwards

I believe that it was a providential encounter that Fr. Stefan Nafranowicz and I should meet. This happened in November 1980 when, because of a banquet table assignment at the Sixth All-American Council in Detroit, my Matushka and myself found ourselves sitting across the table from this very kind and interesting priest.



As we engaged in lively conversation between banquet speeches, we found that we had much in common. We had both served as pastor of Holy Annunciation Church in Maynard, Massachusetts and at Holy Transfiguration Cathedral in Brooklyn, NY. We had a special connection through Fr. Igor Tkachuk of blessed memory; I had served Fr. Igor as his assistant; Stefan had served as his altar boy in the DP camp in Germany. Our providential encounter in Detroit was the beginning of a long and steadfast friendship.

From his youth Stefan had always wanted to be a priest. Born in Belarus in 1936 he endured the hardships of World War II. Stefan was educated in Munich and after time in the DP camps he and his parents came to the U.S. He was twenty-one and the family settled in Rockford, Illinois because they had family there. His mentor and spiritual father was Archbishop John Garklavs of blessed memory for whom Stefan had the utmost respect and devotion. Until his final days, Stefan would always tell me how Archbishop John would handle this or that.

Fr. Stefan Nafranowicz was ordained by Archbishop John of Chicago. He served parishes in Lublin, Wisc., Portage, Pa., Maynard, Mass. and Brooklyn, NY. For most of his priesthood Fr. Stefan was a single parent raising three children. While in Maynard he worked the graveyard shift at Digital Equipment Company to support his family. As Stefan told me, he chose this shift so he would be available for his parish. A man of exceptionally strong character and will, Stefan did what he did to serve the needs of his parish while providing as best he could for his children.

Stefan and I had many conversations over the years. In these conversations he expressed his great love and devotion to the Church. He loved the Divine Services and delighted when they were

served reverently and correctly. He would always impart some wisdom that Archbishop John had told him about being a priest with love for God and His people.

After having raised his children to adulthood and while pastor of Holy Transfiguration Cathedral in Brooklyn, Fr. Stefan petitioned +Archbishop Peter to be laicized. The archbishop blessed him in this and eventually Stefan married Barbara Kraskowsky. Upon the counsel of Archbishop Peter the couple were married in Brooklyn's other church, Holy Trinity, on Feb. 17, 1985. Their marriage was not only about their love for each other but their love and devotion for the Church and its people. Together Stefan and Barbara worked tirelessly for their parish and the Church.

Stefan and Barbara moved to a comfortable house in Westfield, NJ. Here they were active members of Holy Trinity Church, Rahway, NJ. It was during this time that Stefan and Barbara began the *Warm the Children* program to knit mittens, hats and scarves for orphans in Romania, Belarus, Russia and Ukraine. They did all of this out of their little cottage on N. Cottage Place. At any given time Barbara and Stefan would have as many as twenty-five individuals from New Jersey to the state of Washington knitting away for the orphaned children. Their house became a warehouse of boxed handmade goods to be sent to the orphans. Several times a year they published their *Warm the Children* Newsletter which is full of letters of thanksgiving and many photos of the orphans wearing their American made warm clothing. One of the best ways to honor Stefan's memory is to continue this important work of mercy...

Stefan was a familiar face at diocesan & OCA functions including parish mission services and picnics. He enjoyed meeting people and having good conversation. He will be sorely missed by all who knew, loved and admired him. Whenever Stefan and I would speak in person or by phone, he would always sign off with his signature good-by, "S'Bohom!"

S'Bohom to you dear Stefan, ...may you find rest among the saints...

Archpriest Paul Shafran Celebrates His 90th Birthday

The Very Reverend Paul Shafran turned 90 on July 2, 2012. He celebrated with his extended family and a few close friends in Pennington, NJ on July 7th, and later that month, was presented with a special gramota signed by His Grace Bishop Michael. Father Paul is Pastor Emeritus of St. Vladimir Orthodox Church in Trenton, New Jersey, having served there as Pastor from 1948 until 2002. Later, he heeded the call to serve the parish as Pastor full-time twice again, for 6 months in 2007, and for about 10 months in 2008. He has been known throughout his life as a dedicated, faithful servant of Christ, devoted to flock and family.

Father Paul remains very active in the priesthood and does not at all think of himself as retired. When not serving in Trenton, he substitutes for (or serves with) his brother priests in the NJ Deanery and has also frequently celebrated the Divine Liturgy on Sundays at Saints Cosmas and Damian Home, Staten Island, NY. He is on the Home's Board and, after several decades as a Trustee on the Board at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary (SVOTS), he continues to contribute to the work of the Seminary as Trustee Emeritus.

For Father Paul, the Holy Priesthood has never been a job or career, but rather has been a calling from God – a calling he was keenly aware of even in childhood. He would serve as the priest in “weddings” with friends who acted as the brides and grooms, and in “funerals,” burying pets in the neighborhood. He and his twin sister, the late Matushka Pauline Warnecke, were the youngest children of pious immigrant parents, Stephen and Rozalia, and the young Paul sang in the choir and was an altar boy growing up at All Saints Church in Olyphant, PA. He notes that Russian and Church Slavonic classes were mandatory every day after regular public school.

With the help of his Pastor, the Very Rev. Joseph Pishtey, he applied and was admitted to SVOTS, which in those years used classrooms at General Seminary (Episcopalian) in New York City. Father Paul was also accepted at Columbia University and concurrently pursued his studies at both institutions (a 5-year program). Father Paul feels especially privileged to have done post-graduate study at SVOTS some years later with pre-eminent Russian theologians and scholars who had come to the

United States from Europe – notably the Very Rev. Fathers Georges Florovsky, Alexander Schmemmann, John Meyendorff, and Professors George Fedotoff, Nicholas Arsenieff, Sergius Verhovsky, Sectorsky and others. He also did graduate work at Columbia, earning his Master of Arts degree.

Father Paul was ordained nearly 65 years ago to the Holy Priesthood on December 28th, 1947 at the Holy Protection Cathedral in New York. He still marvels that it came to pass on schedule, as the city was crippled by its worst blizzard in the recorded history of 200 years (and record holder until 2006)! He also recalls with fondness and admiration his first parish, St. Michael's Church in rural Robbins, Ohio, and two nearby rural parishes to which he ministered at the same time because they lacked priests. They were tiny congregations and the housing and salary were meager at best, but the people made up for it, he notes, in their strong faith and their love for the Church.

It was Father Paul's interest in studying with the new wave of émigré faculty at SVOTS and his yearning to increase his knowledge of Orthodox theology that led him to seek assignment to St. Vladimir Church in Trenton, which also allowed him to travel by train to do graduate coursework. Under Father Paul's strong pastoral leadership, the Trenton parish kept growing and parishioners were inspired to give generously, leading to several expansions of the church building, the construction of a parish hall next to the church, the church's interior beautification by iconographer Pimen Sofronoff during the mid-1950's, and restoration of the iconography in the 1990's during his tenure. Being fluent in Russian, he is also well-known for the help he has provided to many immigrants from Russia and Eastern Europe, especially “Displaced Persons” after World War II – aiding them not only in their spiritual life, but also in their quests for housing and employment.

Religious education has also been a special area of interest for Father Paul. In addition to developing the parish school program for the children, he accepted the invitation to serve as the Orthodox Chaplain at the University of Pennsylvania, and

Jacob's
well
Summer/Fall
2012



Continued on Page 20

Youth Ministry in East Meadow - A Community Effort

During the past several years, Holy Trinity Orthodox Church, in East Meadow, NY, has been working to build youth programs that intensify people's commitment to the pillars of our faith. In the process of living out these experiences, though, we've come to realize that, although we designed these programs primarily for youth, it is vital to engage the whole parish. A parish represents the whole Body of Christ; so we learned that no program can truly succeed unless it engages the entire community in deepening their commitment to worship, education, evangelism, service, and fellowship.

Each of our activities is built around at least two of the four pillars. For instance, when we go mini-golfing, the invitation is extended to the entire parish, as well as their friends. In addition, the event is scheduled just before or just after a liturgical service, so that in addition to fellowship, participants can worship together. And of course, food is always involved.

By extending the invitation to the whole parish, we've found a practical side as well. Parents who have younger children can bring them all--no need for babysitters. Older parishioners whose families are grown, or singles with no local family can also enjoy the warmth of a Christian family experience. When we have barbecue evenings, as we do on the fast-free Fridays following Pascha and Pentecost, as well as on Thursdays throughout the summer, each age group has an opportunity to spend time together. More often than not, though, as the night goes on, all ages end up mixing and mingling. We also have community pot-luck meals every Wednesday Lent after the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts. These

gatherings are not only a chance for fellowship, but give people an opportunity to learn more about how fasting meals can be prepared and shared. All of these are great ways to get the generations together, and to promote love for each other.



Over the past year we baked Christmas cookies that were delivered to our home-bound parishioners as well as handed out to the hungry on the streets of Manhattan during the parish's weekly soup run. We dipped candles and blessed them for the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. Father Martin demonstrated how prosphora is made and then the participants submitted names of loved ones to be prayed for. For Transfiguration over 100 apples were purchased and blessed during the service. The apples and additional fruit brought in by the faithful were distributed on the weekly soup run.

Additional activities slated for this upcoming year are trips to St. Vladimir's and St. Tikhon's Seminaries, a CROP walk for hunger, participation in a Habitat for Humanity House and preparation of a special Thanksgiving meal for the Wednesday soup run. The church also participates in Di-

ocesan Youth Day and is looking to send a group to St. Andrew's Camp next summer. Movie nights, bowling and mini-golf are also on the schedule for the upcoming year. And we are planning an "Orthodox Jeopardy" tournament as well.

For more information on our projects visit our website at htocem.org or email frmartin@htocem.org.

Growing Up with Friends Youth Activity in Brick

by Mary A. Breton

I am one of the lucky ones, and hopefully stories like mine are not rare in our parishes across the country or even across the world. Many of my closest friends are adults and young adults I have met through my Church, our Church. They are the people with whom I share many of my fondest childhood memories. We have laughed together, cried together, prostrated together, fasted together, celebrated together, and prayed together. This is an abridged version of our story.

In my time at Annunciation Orthodox Church in Brick, NJ, our group of kids of various ages has thrived. From stories, it seems this is a common thing in our parish's history, as there was a near continuous stream of pregnancies, with specific clusters. Despite age differences sometimes as large as 15 years, even the youngest was always treated as an integral member of our little clan. As families moved in and out of the area, there were always a few of us who stayed around to welcome the new kids and indoctrinate the younger ones into our ways.

Over the years, our pastimes have evolved. After Vespers, when none of us was older than high school and the youngest were still in elementary school, we played HORSE and Knockout at the increasingly worn basketball hoop with decreasingly inflated basketballs. Long into the cooler and colder months, we were out there shivering and playing by the light of the parking lot lamps until our parents called us to go. Baseball was also popular in the early years. Often the girls would be as integrated into the teams as the boys were, although we reserved time to walk in circles around our parking lot to discuss our lives at different schools.

My age group (10-17 years old at the time) had sleepovers, almost always on Saturday nights.

Sometimes it was just the boys or, other times, just the girls, but many times it was all of us staying over the Bergers' house, playing board games into the wee hours of the morning until we were too exhausted to think straight. Occasionally, we went bowling to mix it up, playing until our arms hurt, then just one more string for good measure.



Sundays were our most honored days of the year. All of the kids could be found snarling down bagels after Liturgy in our rush to get out to our weekly touch football game. Our 12-20 person games featured complex strategy and routes, being "Butterfingers!" for the day, running in heels, formerly white button downs, and torn stockings. Many of us learned to play catch on that field; you learn quickly once you've dropped one or two crucial passes that result in a turnover and your team's attempts to mask disappointment.

Things have changed as we've grown older. Most of us are now in college, with some already in the real world. We still have game nights and sleepovers when we are reunited from college and real-life, during holiday breaks and the summer. Usually the board games group is all there, whether in person or by Skype. Most of us are able to return for the major holydays and our Pascha, when we pick up where we left off last. Even as geography and time may keep us apart, I am confident that many years from now we will still be reminiscing and will have even more memories to share with our children. Hopefully, they will have what we had, too.

Mary A. Breton is a junior at MIT, majoring in Material Science and Engineering.

Jacob's
well
Summer/Fall
2012

Holy Apostles Mission

by Fr. James Worthington

This summer has been exciting for Holy Apostles Mission in Lansing, NY.

Many visitors from throughout the diocese and the community have come to be with the faithful of the mission through the summer. On June 30th, the patronal feastday of the mission, Bishop Michael visited to celebrate the Divine Liturgy. We were also joined by Fr. Timm Holowatch, and many of the faithful of our mother parish of Saints Peter and Paul Church in Endicott, NY.

Just a few days later, the mission hosted the New York State Deanery Clergy Family Picnic on July 5th. Being situated in the beautiful Finger Lakes region, the picnic was held at nearby Myers Park, which is just down the road from the parish. Together with Bishop Michael, clergy from as far away as Ballston Spa and Buffalo, as well as neighbors from Elmira and

Auburn, came and spent the day laughing, fishing, eating, and enjoying each other's company.

Soon after this, it was time for the youth of the parish to head off to St. Andrew's Camp. Half of the eligible youth of the parish spent time at this long-running camp, and they enjoyed it very much.

As August dawned, Fr. James spent his time at St. Andrew's Camp where he led Teen Week for the third consecutive year.

All of this was done in the midst of the parish looking for a permanent rectory in town. While this has not been an easy project, it reminds us that we are dependent on our Lord, Jesus Christ, who provides for His faithful. Hopefully, the acquisition of a rectory will be a sign of God's continual blessing on the Holy Apostles Church.



Father Paul continued from page 17

then later at Rider University in Lawrenceville, NJ. He also taught liturgics at SVOTS.

Father Paul is honored to wear the Silver Cross of St. Innocent, bestowed on him by Metropolitan Theodosius on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of his ordination, and he and Matushka Mary each received a gramota at that time for their many years of faithful service to the Church. Ten years later, to commemorate his 60th anniversary of ordination, Father Paul was presented with a special gramota signed by all the bishops of the Holy Synod of the O.C.A. Father Paul is also grateful to the parishioners of St. Vladimir Church for their generous gifts over the decades. Notably, they presented him and Matushka Mary with a trip to Russia to celebrate the Millennium of the Baptism of Rus in 1988, and Father Paul is still driving the automobile they presented to him when he retired as Pastor in 2002.

In addition to being a dedicated priest, husband, father, and grandfather, Father Paul is an avid and talented gardener, patiently producing (from seeds) tomatoes and other vegetables that he enjoys sharing with family and friends. His store of knowledge also extends to the intricacies of various team sports and their histories, and together with Matushka Mary, he looks forward to Yankees games on TV. He and Matushka Mary are to celebrate their 65th wedding anniversary in November of this year.

We heartily congratulate Father Paul on his 90th birthday, we wish him joy and peace, and we ask God to bless him with good health so that he may continue to labor faithfully in the vineyard of Christ's Holy Orthodox Church in America for many more years!

Fourth of July Celebration in Paramus *Remembering 60 Years of Ministry*

His Grace, Bishop Michael visited Christ the Saviour Church Community in Paramus, New Jersey on July 4 to honor Archpriest John Nehrebecki on the occasion of his Ordination into the Priesthood. Father John was ordained by His Eminence, Archbishop Dimitri (Magan) of New England on the 4th of July, 1952 in Lynn, Massachusetts.

His Grace, Bishop Michael celebrated the Divine Liturgy with the Rector, Father David Vernak, and twelve Priests robed in red vestments to commemorate the Royal Martyrs of Russia and those with them who were murdered by the Bolsheviks.

Many friends, parishioners and family were communed by His Grace and Father John.

At the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy, Father John and Matushka Eugenia were presented Grammoti and awarded Silver Medals of the Order of Saint Innocent of Alaska in grateful recognition of their commitment to the life and mission of the

Orthodox Church in America. In addition, Father John was honored by the Synod of Bishops for sixty years of Priestly service, of which forty were as Dean of the New Jersey Deanery, and with the organization of ten Parishes.



Following the Divine Liturgy there was a festive reception in the Refectory of Christ the Saviour Church hosted by the extended Nehrebecki Family.

Welcome Fr. David Cowan and Family

Father David Cowan is Secretary to His Grace, Bishop Michael. He was appointed to that position in January, 2012, and was also assigned at that time as the pastor of Holy Trinity Church in Yonkers, NY. He succeeds Archpriest Yaroslav Sudick, Rector Emeritus, who retired in December after more than two decades of service in Yonkers.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of Fr. David's reception into the Orthodox Church (from the Episcopal tradition), as well as his 20th anniversary of marriage to Matushka Tamara. In 2008, having followed St. Raphael of Brooklyn's guidance, they adopted their son, Gabriel Kyrill, in Pskov, Russia. Gabriel, an energetic 5-year old kindergartener, loves his German Shepherd puppy, Bella, and (as of this writing) wants to be a chaplain to the fire department when he grows up!

Before coming to New York this year, Father and Matushka served the parish of All Saints Church in Olyphant, PA, where they worked

alongside the faithful for five years to restore that church following a devastating fire in 2006. That labor culminated in September, 2011, with the joyous Reconsecration of All Saints Church (which features the stunning iconography of Ivan Rumiantsev, now working in the Church of the Annunciation in Brick, NJ).

Father was ordained priest in 2006. He and Matushka have been active in numerous OCA parishes, having lived in Alaska, California, Maryland, and Pennsylvania. They both grew up in Anchorage, Alaska, where they met at summer camp. Fr. David is the son of James and Jane Cowan, who came to Alaska in 1970 with James' job in the oil industry. Matushka is the daughter of Fr. Nicholas and Mat. Anastasia Molodyko-Harris, now retired; Fr. Nicholas was the founding priest of St. Innocent Cathedral in Anchorage, AK. Father David is a former speechwriter, editor, musician,



Continued on page 29

Jacob's
well
Summer/Fall
2012

Preparing to Serve the Church: Our Diaconal Formation Program

by Reader Dr. Mark Hoeplinger, St. George Church, Buffalo

Over the past year, I have been most privileged to attend Theology classes every Saturday in Endicott, NY. I do this as part of our Diocesan Diaconal Formation Program (DDFP), which is a satellite of a similar program established by His Grace Bishop Michael at St. Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary. At the conclusion of this four semester course, I and all of the other students hope to be deemed worthy to be ordained to the Diaconate! I would like to tell you a little bit about this wonderful opportunity, but first, kindly allow me some personal comments.

Each of the students involved in the DDFP has his own and probably different reasons for joining in this endeavor. Yet, they are also probably in certain ways all the same. For me, I had wanted to serve the Church, and have done this, but wanted to do more. It was always "someday," that is until our beloved parish priest became sick. He then became very ill. He then became completely disabled. All of us in the parish were frightened. We prayed for him and

we all sought ways to be of help. I heard about the DDFP and took the plunge. Since doing so, this has been one of the most wonderful experiences of my entire life!

It is evident that there are not enough clergy. A Deacon can be an extremely helpful person to any parish, or to any priest. Few of our parishes these days have a Deacon and the office of Deacon is gradually becoming forgotten. The Priest and the Matushka alone cannot do everything. The entire parish community has to be of assistance and has to be involved. In particular, a Deacon and his Matushka can be a great help.

This DDFP affords me the opportunity to attend seminary one day per week, without selling my home, resigning my job, leaving my entire family,

and moving to a faraway seminary. I have many obligations which bind me to Buffalo, not the least of which are my aging parents. If I could leave everything behind and attend seminary full time, I would. But it is not possible. The DDFP allows me the opportunity to study for the Diaconate while fulfilling the obligations of my job, my family and my home. Perhaps this is something you would consider.

I am 58 years of age. Some of the students are much younger than I, others are much older. Some of us are educated professionals, some are not. We come from every aspect of modern society. I can tell you definitely, however, there is tremendous affection among the students for one another. I am sure of this because the power of the Holy Spirit pervades our classroom, our program, and every aspect of our time together. We have even more affection for our beloved program director, Father Alexey Karlgut.

What do we care about? We care intensely about the beauty of the liturgical service. We care that it is orderly, and respectful to God. We want only to serve in a way that is pleasing to Him.

I carpool with my Brother in Christ, Sean McNulty from Rochester. He and I enjoy excellent fellowship the whole way as we drive there and back. We leave our homes early every Saturday morning and arrive in Endicott at about 9 AM. The Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 and that is where we learn the Liturgics, the Rubrics. However, it is a great deal more than learning where to stand, when to light the candles, and how to hold the censer. Try to imagine, if you will, the tremendous spiritual power one feels when one is serving at the altar of God. Try to imagine what it feels like to have 11 Diaconal students, along with several priests, perhaps a Deacon or two from St. Tikhon's, and at times even His Grace all serving, chanting, and praying together. Then there is the beautiful choir from Saints Peter and Paul Church in Endicott. The service is fairly well attended, even on a Saturday morning, by local parishioners. I'm telling you, it's a beautiful experience.



Upon conclusion of the Liturgy, we have breakfast together. We sit together, all the students and priests, at a long table, and enjoy wonderful fellowship. Sure, we talk about theological and religious subjects, but we also talk about personal things. There is lighthearted humor, wonderful fellowship!

After breakfast we go to our classroom where we are joined by seminary faculty and some other clergy, including Fr. Leonid Schmidt, who have come to teach us. The afternoon lectures are consistently excellent. In the first semester this year we completed courses on Orthodox Doctrine as well as Homiletics, and this past semester we studied Orthodox Spirituality and Church History.

In the afternoons we have dinner together, again amidst wonderful fellowship. After that we can either remain for Vespers or can be excused if we have a long distance to drive, or if there is inclement weather. I arrive home between 8 and 9 PM where my wife is waiting with dinner. She is eager for me to tell her about the classes and events of that day. I pull up my notes and we discuss as we dine. It is impossible for a student to do well in this program without the complete support of his wife. It is a sacrifice for her and for one's children, but the student's family is not the only one making sacrifices. His Grace greatly extends himself to make this program a success. He is a frequent lecturer and cares deeply about the students. Father Alexey and his family make huge sacrifices every week, as do the teaching faculty and their families. Father Timm Holowatch is always with us. A lot of people are making sacrifices for this program.

Speaking of sacrifices, somehow I do not think this is such a difficult thing. As I arrive home each Saturday night I feel invigorated, and I am already

preparing myself for the Divine Liturgy at my home parish the next morning. This program provides me with the opportunity to get away from the noise and distraction of my secular life for one day per week, and to study The Word. What's not to love?

Endicott is about 3 hours each way from where I live in Buffalo. My three Brothers in Christ from NYC travel 4 hours each way. With summers and time off for Advent through January, we attend classes for about 6 months each year. The entire program comprises four semesters over two years.

The Fall semester begins, like any college, in mid September and ends in the third week of December. The Spring semester begins the third week of January and goes to mid May. However, during each semester there are scheduled weeks in which there are no classes such as the first week of Great Lent, Holy Week, and Bright Week. Furthermore, for any significant inclement weather, classes will be canceled.

If you have an interest in finding out more about this program, and belong to a Canonically Orthodox parish, you must first ask for and obtain the blessings of your local parish priest. If the church is not within the OCA, then the blessing of one's priest and bishop must first be obtained. Ordination would normally take place in one's home parish. It should be understood that the completion of the four semesters of study does not automatically guarantee that one will be deemed worthy for ordination. Women are welcome to audit most of the courses, but of course cannot be considered for ordination.

For more information, you can consult the Diocesan website, or you can feel welcome to contact me directly at wnyent@aol.com.

**Jacob's
well**
Summer/Fall
2012

Congratulations to the Class of 2012...



...who received the Certificate in Diaconal Formation:

Gregory Aidinov	Ilya Arnopolskiy
Mark Bohush	David Chow
Sean McNulty	Simeon Peet
Michael Pylypciw	Gregory White
Theodore Gregory (Philadelphia PA campus)	

Saint Andrew's Camp Wraps Up the 2012 Season

The lake is cool (SAINT ANDREW'S CAMP!)

The sun is hot (SAINT ANDREW'S CAMP!)

We learn and pray (SAINT ANDREW'S CAMP!)

And play a lot (SAINT ANDREW'S CAMP!)

"From the Rising to the Setting of the Sun, the Name of the Lord be Praised!"

– Chorus from the Saint Andrew's Camp Song, Basil Kozak, 2012

Saint Andrew's Camp in Jewell, New York held four weekly sessions of camp this summer. Against the backdrop of Lake Oneida and a newly-restored chapel interior, and under the leadership of camp director Paul McDonald, the camp and staff offered a traditional Orthodox Christian-based worship and religious education program. This year included a few new activities and surprises during each of the weeks – Horse Week, Music Week, Ecology Week, and Teen Week. In attendance for several days each week was His Grace, Bishop Michael, who led the staff, campers, and volunteers in worship and religious education. The camp also welcomed several new visiting clergy this summer.

Horse Week, which usually falls later in the camping season, opened the 2012 season with Fr. Leonid Schmidt from Syracuse, New York serving as clergy. This was Fr. Leonid's first year as the camp's resident priest. Fr. Leonid was engaging and energetic in answering campers' many faith-based questions at mealtime.

Fr. Kilian Sprecher of St. Gregory Palamas Church in Glen Gardner, New Jersey served and led the religious education program.

Ecology Week activities were led by Tara and Gary Paxton of Brick, New Jersey. The Paxtons arranged for a pontoon boat ride on Lake Oneida in order to study the water, plant and wildlife! In addition, the campers took a trip to Green Lakes State Park, about one hour away from the camp premises, where they toured the surrounding area of the glacial lakes on a nature walk and swam in the water. Bishop Michael treated campers to mini golf and ice cream as another special outing. In addition, His Grace acknowledged John Kozak with a gramota as thanks for his longstanding service to St. Andrew's Camp.

Teen Week was led by Fr. James Worthington. Fr. James and the teens blessed Lake Oneida on a beautiful, sunny day. Teens were assigned to their posts in the lake to fetch the cross after it had been tossed by Fr. James. In addition, the teens were also led on a "Prayer Walk," at dusk. This prayerful activity involves posting prayers on trees through a defined path, and following a lighted candle at each tree. The group travels together to each tree to read the posted prayer. It is a silent activity that allows for prayer and closeness to God. The teens also participated in an off-campus excursion to Howe Caverns.

Popular among the campers, as always, was the opportunity to spend time with Bishop Michael, as well as swimming in the lake, the off-campus excursions and activities, and the opportunity to participate in the Chapel services by serving, singing and reading.

May God grant many years to the campers, staff and supporters of St. Andrew's Camp! Please follow our blog to stay tuned into our latest activities (<http://saintandrewscamp.wordpress.com>).



Music Week was full of vocal and instrumental music, thanks to Basil Kozak and several other musically-talented staff and volunteers. Under Basil's direction, an official St. Andrew's Camp song was written in verse and with accompanying music, and was sung at the campfire with instrumental accompaniment! The lyrics from the chorus of this piece are at the top of this article. Fr. Jason Vansuch of St. Vladimir Church in Trenton, New Jersey and

Do Orthodox Christians and Mormons Believe in the Same God?

by Fr. Herman Schick

Recently Mormonism has been brought to the fore in the consciousness of many who would otherwise never be giving it a second thought. Parishioners have been asking “What is Mormonism?” and “What do Mormons believe?”

The differences between Mormon beliefs and the beliefs of Orthodox Christians – and of virtually all Christians, for that matter – are far too numerous to relate here. So let us consider here only what Mormonism believes about God – surely a crucial matter for any religion.

Unlike Orthodox Christians, Mormons do not believe that “God is spirit” (John 4:24). Instead, they teach that God was once a physical human being, born of another physical god and his wife (also an embodied god). This God they refer to as “the Heavenly Father” or “Elohim” (which is simply one of the Old Testamental Hebrew words for God). This “Elohim” was born on another planet, living and growing up as any human being would normally do. At some point, he converted to the form of Mormonism current in his alien world. This enabled him to progress, or evolve, to the state of godhood he now enjoys. “As man now is, God once was,” Lorenzo Snow (1814-1901), 5th President of the LDS Church famously stated it in his oft-quoted couplet.

Having become a god – be it noted, one among many – Elohim and his goddess wife were then able to create a universe of their own (the one we live in), and filled it with spiritual offspring. These spirit-children were then able to come to earth and become flesh-and-blood human beings. This was the origin of the human race. Then, by becoming observant Mormons, they themselves in their turn could become gods and goddesses, able to create

their own worlds and populate them with spirit-children, thus starting the whole process all over again. “As God is now, man may be,” Snow said in the second half of his couplet.

Mormon teachings about the Holy Trinity likewise diverge widely from Orthodox beliefs. The persons of the Holy Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – are in no way “one essence and undivided,” as the Orthodox Church sings at every Divine Liturgy. Rather, they are three completely separate gods. We know of them because they are the gods who have concerned themselves with this world, just as countless other gods have their own worlds/universes.

This brief summary of basic Mormon doctrine about God gives us some idea of how far Mormonism has departed from the beliefs of not only Orthodox Christians, but of all other Christians. Their “God,” one among many, is a human being who has evolved – or “progressed,” as they say – to a state of godhood. He is definitely not “without beginning, invisible, incomprehensible, indescribable, changeless” as the Church confesses at Saint Basil’s Liturgy. Mormons don’t just differ from all Christians in their beliefs about God; they believe in a different God altogether.

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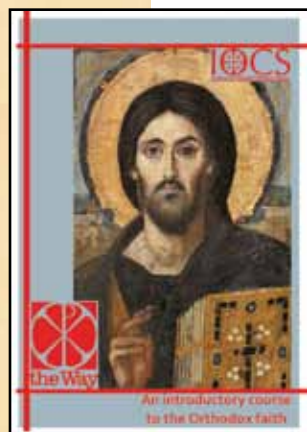
The New Jersey Self-Help Clearinghouse

The New Jersey Self-Help Clearinghouse, a program of Saint Clare’s Health System, has been helping people find and form support groups for over 31 years. The Clearinghouse lists over 6,750 support groups all over the state of New Jersey for just about any type of stressful situation that affects people’s well-being. If you would like information on attending or starting a support group call the New Jersey Self-Help Group Clearinghouse, Monday - Friday, 8:30am-5pm, at 1-800-367-6274 or 973-326-6789 or visit their website at: www.njgroups.org.

Jacob’s
well
Summer/Fall
2012

The Way: A Parish Experience in Adult Education

by Greg Sapnar



Christian adult learning and education for Catechumens is a mixed bag in the Orthodox Church, and perhaps especially in the OCA. For the most part, inquirers or Orthodox adults who wish to deepen their knowledge of the Church, its beliefs and practices must either search for resources themselves or look to their parish priest to select and guide them through a suitable series of readings and discussion. While this process may work, it may also leave some inquirers frustrated or provide an experience which is only a reflection of the unique perspective of the priest. Many parishes, such as my own, have held regular adult education programs, but these will vary greatly from parish to parish depending on the gifts of the individual leaders and the level of interest in the congregation.

A big challenge for any attempt to engage an adult audience is the wide variety of perspectives they bring with them based on their previous church, or non-church experiences.

We are fortunate these days to have many learning resources available through the internet, for purchase in online stores or through our excellent Orthodox Christian radio stations, but even so, these programs must be rooted within the experience of church life in order to be truly meaningful. At the parish level, what has been needed is a structured series of learning programs designed to be delivered in live classes.

What is "The Way?"

The Way, in addition to being the name early Christians used when referring to their faith (Acts 9:2), is a program of Orthodox teaching developed by the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies (IOCS) in Cambridge, England. Under the oversight of Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, the IOCS has developed *The Way* with faculty members to present lectures on a range of Orthodox beliefs and life in the Church.

As quoted from the course materials, "A prime objective of *The Way* is to teach basic Orthodox

Christianity as a journey of life, centered on Christ, in terms that communicate to a secular and largely pagan world. Our target audience is the 18 - 40 age group (though not exclusively). We aim to reach the lapsed Orthodox, and then their friends and contemporaries. We also seek to educate Christians of any age in the fundamentals of the faith and how to relate that faith to the world in which they live."

The basic model of *The Way*, with a fellowship meal included along with the instruction, was modeled on the highly successful Alpha course, offered in non-Orthodox Christian churches in the UK and also across the US. It includes recorded video lectures, handouts for each session and lecture transcripts. These supporting resources support engaging and directed discussions for use after the recorded lectures.

Running "The Way"

A few logistical considerations need to be made when planning to run *The Way*. First, the course states that it should only be run with the permission of your local bishop. Second, the course content may not be altered and should be presented publicly (not taken home for individual or private viewing) in order to build a sense of community.

Each video lecture is approximately 45 minutes long. When you add time for discussion, a fellowship meal, and a short break in between, you could easily be asking people to commit two and a half hours per session. With twelve total sessions, this becomes a substantial commitment. Our parish's normal adult education class takes place before Liturgy on a Sunday and runs for about 40 minutes total, not enough time to run *The Way*.

We decided to run the class every other Saturday, breaking for holidays or Feast Days. Our compromise was to streamline the fellowship meal to a simple sharing of baked goods, coffee and tea. With this format, we established a total time of an hour and forty-five minutes per session. Starting at 3:00 pm, our end time was fifteen minutes prior to the beginning of Great Vespers at 5:00. It was a workable solution and for most of the classes we had a core set of about 8 to 12 participants. If someone missed a class, they were provided with

the lecture transcript to review. Due to the fact that we had limited expenses related to the meal we chose not to charge for the class, hoping to get as many participants as possible.

Another compromise was that instead of the “panel” to guide discussion and field questions, we relied primarily on our parish priest, Fr. John Shimchick. Given the fact that many of our participants were either cradle Orthodox, or converts with a long history, we were able to weather most of the more challenging topics and our newest members were shown just how lively discussions can be when talking about topics in Orthodox faith and practice.

A Solid Program for Faith Formation

Like any educational program, *The Way* had its pros and cons. Some topics had challenges, but those instances were minor when compared to the rich and moving explanations of Christian faith as rooted in Christ’s love for humanity and the church. Topics were presented from the perspective of a daily lived experience of life within the Church. The excellent talk on Christian behaviors had our class in a discussion which would have easily overrun the time allotted.

The topics outlined below show the breadth of the series:

1. The Search for Faith
2. God, The Holy Trinity: The Lover of Mankind
3. Being Human: Fully Alive
4. Why Did Jesus Come to Us?
5. Salvation in Christ
6. The Holy Spirit
7. What on Earth is the Church? Isn’t God Enough?
8. The Divine Liturgy: A Pearl of Great Price
9. The Holy Mysteries
10. Bible, Prayer and Fasting
11. Christian Behavior
12. Heaven on Earth

The videos are simple recorded lectures and contain few other visuals except for an occasional PowerPoint slide, but the class soon became accustomed to the format. Another important consideration for American viewers is that the only version available at the time of this writing was in European PAL format and will most likely not play on a standard DVD player in the US. We played

the DVDs on a laptop and projected the image on a screen.

Overall the group thought the presentations were extremely valuable. Combined with the notes on the handouts and the ability to reference the lecture transcripts, our discussions were a meaningful and practical experience of learning the faith within a community. We were never at a loss for conversation and could have used more time on the core topics of faith. Some concepts were too deep for one session and could have easily held our interest longer as we discussed how to apply them to our own lives.

Our first parish experience with *The Way* has shown it to be a much needed and valuable program for Orthodox Christian adult education and outreach. In this run, we had only our parishioners, but the goal is to have new inquirers in future offerings. Hopefully, within the Orthodox Church, especially the OCA, this will be the beginning of a trend toward creating more consistent and finished programs starting from preschool on through adulthood. It is important not only to strengthen the core foundations of belief, but also to help clarify the differences between what is a core Orthodox Christian belief, and traditional practices that may or may not be observed by all Orthodox Christians. This last point should be especially important for the OCA with its parishes of mixed ethnicities and continual influx of converts.

One of our dedicated participants and a cradle Orthodox Christian said it best when asked to provide feedback on the sessions: “Thinking of that Old Testament verse: ‘My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge’ (Hosea 4:6), these sessions were a great wake-up call.”

Find out more about *The Way* and the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies at:

www.iocs.cam.ac.uk/theway

It is available from Amazon.com: *The Way DVD/CD Set Introduction to Orthodox Christianity [DVD-ROM]*

Greg Sapnar and his family are members of the Orthodox Church of the Holy Cross in Medford, NJ. Greg has a Master’s degree in Educational Media and works in corporate training.

Jacob’s
well
Summer/Fall
2012

St. Vladimir's Seminary, Liturgical Music, and Our Church

by Dr. Nicholas Reeves

This past academic year (2011–2012) I was appointed the Assistant Professor of Liturgical Music at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary. My predecessors—who were all highly skilled in Orthodox liturgical music while teaching at the Seminary—left behind a legacy that both encouraged and challenged me as I began my new work. St. Vladimir's recordings and publications of our Church's

rich collection of sacred hymns, responses, and psalms have been essential components not only of the libraries of our local church communities, but of the consciousness of a broader audience seeking a clearer understanding of the meaning of this repertoire. Truly I inherited a significant responsibility replete with high expectations.

The musical environment at St. Vladimir's is one of transition. New arrangements are being sung in Three Hierarchs' Chapel, new avenues of presenting music are being tried (namely in the form of concerts), and new professors are instructing the courses, which all may be the result of the most important aspect of the school—the new students and their needs theologically, pastorally, and certainly musically.

Part of the transition mentioned earlier is a request from the Dean and Chancellor to chart the course of the music program over the next two years (2012–2014); this is my academic charge and sacred task. It is academic in the sense that the proper technical skills and information must be collected so that they may be taught and relayed to the students. And it is sacred clearly in its content, sacerdotal expectations, and spiritual impact. The following criteria inform the methods and implementation of music instruction at St. Vladimir's: 1) the musical needs of a parish; 2) the essential skills required to fulfill a sacred music ministry; 3) the theological, historical, and contemporary



The SVS Chorale presented, "ORIENT: Sacred Song and Image" at St. Malachy's Chapel (The Actor's Chapel) in NYC on May 7, 2012. On the right, Fr. Richard D. Baker, pastor. Photo by Vadim Arslanov.

significance of Orthodox liturgical music; 4) the spiritual ramifications of music, both sacred and secular.

An honest assessment of the musical needs of a parish is essential. To this day many of the hymns used in the English worshipping churches in North America are based on the models of Imperial Russia—a highly sophisticated and stratified context that gave

birth to one of the greatest choral traditions in the world. Yet the forces and patronage of professional and skilled amateur singers, the political and intellectual milieu, and the institutions of advanced music education (most germane to this article) as they existed then, in a different time and country, do not exist here, at least as a cohesive entity in the Orthodox Church. As a response to this reality in the American parish, much was done through SVS publications to make the textures and counterpoint of a previous musical epoch more conducive to our own; this will certainly still continue. Yet while these arrangements meet the needs of many parishes, they necessitated another need—technique.

In order to fulfill a sacred music ministry in a parish, and for that matter a monastery or seminary, one must possess the technical skills required to execute them. A solid foundation in vocal production, music theory, and conducting is indispensable. While the classroom context may not provide the same education as experience, yet experience must be gained not just in one's own parish, but also by participating in model choral ensembles. Models of choral excellence provide so many benefits for the emerging singer, composer, or conductor. They allow the student to participate in a more idealized context, which shows, among other things, the ability of a given ensemble to grow musically when under expert leadership. Though not every ensemble will produce the same sound as the model, even in excellent groups, mountains

still must be moved to achieve a desired goal. This tenacity must be brought to the parishes, not for the sake of performing well, but in order to realize our duty to offer our first fruits to God. When a conductor gives up on the singers out of frustration or apathy, usually the choir will respond in kind. Thus the choral rehearsals and concerts at St. Vladimir's are to be models of choral excellence. The classroom education is to prepare the future clergy and singers in voice, music theory, conducting, and the basic genres of all Eight Tones. The chapel services—the heart of the school's life—are to be exemplary in every liturgical aspect, especially singing.

No matter how good the technique, though, execution without meaning is empty. The students at St. Vladimir's are privileged to attend lectures by expert professors in the field of Liturgy and its historical development. This has been an attractive feature of the Seminary for years and is respected by many other theological academies both in the Orthodox and non-Orthodox realms. In our instruction, we teach not only how but why. We also examine how something was done in the past or could be done in the future, weighing this against the experience of the Church in the present, socially, culturally, and spiritually. The music classes in particular address similar topics such as the major spheres of contemporary liturgical practice in the Orthodox Church worldwide and their application in the American parish, as well their musical arrangements, the forces required, and geographical contexts. Likewise, current usage in the Northern Hemisphere is analyzed for its accomplishments, room for improvement, and potential for the future.

For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? (Mark 8:36)

Fr. Cowan continued from page 21

and choir director. He received his Bachelor of Science in Music Technology at the University of Southern California in 1991 and his Master of Divinity from St. Tikhon's Seminary in 2007. Matushka also earned her Bachelor's at USC. She is an elementary school teacher, a former member of the OCA Department of Christian Education, and a vocal instructor; since 2005 she has trained seminarians in liturgical chanting and singing.

Both Father and Matushka have worked with Bishop Michael since Fr. David's days as a

Practical experience, technical proficiency, and the rigors of academic life are worthwhile only if they lead us closer to our Lord Jesus Christ. The tools a Church musician gains over time are inseparable from sacramental life. Proper preparation for the services not only includes the organizing of musical scores and sorting out of rubrics, but also the self-emptying of the musician by prayer, fasting, repentance, and forgiveness. The spirit exuded by the choir director or chanter can have a strong effect on the choir or congregation. Hence in class, reflections on the emotional experience in services and the spiritual struggle found in them are commonly attached to lectures on liturgical structure, historical style, and repertoire.

There is much to accomplish at St. Vladimir's. The result may be an accredited degree in music or a certificate in liturgical art; what will help facilitate either is your support. Consider sponsoring a seminarian or local choir director studying part-time at St. Vladimir's to learn Orthodox music more thoroughly; arrange for your parish to have the Seminary music faculty lead a workshop in your community; come and hear the concerts and other public events involving sacred music, whether on or off campus; see what musical resources are available from the SVS Press. However you choose to support the music program at the Seminary, I ask most of all for your prayers as I unworthily take on a challenge to provide appropriate education for the members of Christ's Holy Church.

Dr. Reeves, DMA, is the Assistant Professor of Liturgical Music, St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary and Choir Director, Holy Trinity Church, East Meadow, NY.

seminarian; he as assistant editor of the *Tikhonaire*, assistant in the process of preparing the Seminary for its full academic accreditation, adjunct faculty member in Homiletics, and substitute instructor in His Grace's Seminary courses; and she as coordinator of the student-wives formation program and the Seminary church school.

Fr. David and his family have been overwhelmed with the warmth and hospitality of their new parish family in Yonkers, and they are overjoyed to be part of the thriving Diocesan family!

Jacob's
well
Summer/Fall
2012

Orthodox Faith In Action

by Reader Dr. Mark A. C. Hoeplinger

There are certainly unlimited ways in which one can serve the Lord. My wife, Dr. Christine, and I have been privileged to participate in many oversea medical/dental/humanitarian missions through the years. On our most recent mission to Guatemala, accompanied by Matushka Anastasia Karlgut, RN, we also visited the Orthodox orphanage, Hogar Rafael Ayau San Raphael, in Guatemala City. There we were told by Mother Ivonne, that their chapel is the only Orthodox Church in that entire country!



My first oversea mission was to Uganda, East Africa.

There we rendered medical services at numerous Orthodox churches throughout the country. I examined and treated this child, Rachel, and her mother on my first morning there. The child was quite near death with a fever of 106, pneumonia, malaria, intestinal parasites, dehydration, and had not made urine in 14 hours. As the story unfolded, I learned that her mother, Papadija, was the wife of the priest of that church, Father Samuel Luwego. We took Papadija and the child back to the capital city with us in our minivan and admitted her to the Orthodox Hospital. Four days later she was discharged, with full recovery, and has enjoyed excellent health ever since. I continue to stay in contact with Father Samuel to this very day. I shall never forget his family and by the Grace of God will return in 2013 for my second oversea medical mission there. Would you like to join us?

This is an 11-year-old Guatemalan boy named Ulysses. He came to us with his father who explained that Ulysses is deaf and mute! Not one word! He explained that as an infant Ulysses fell from the crib and was found unconscious on the floor. Three days later he woke up and became healthy, but has never had hearing or speech. He has an obvious scar on his right temple from when he fell. I am sure he lacerated his artery and had a subdural hematoma. He survived all this, without doctors, without CT scans or hospitals and I feel for this he is entitled to have hearing.



This is a part of our most recent oversea medical missionary team as we visit patients at the Orthodox orphanage in Guatemala City.

From the left:

Christine Hoeplinger DDS, Matushka Anastasia Karlgut, RN, Mother Ivonne of the orphanage, the author, and his University at Buffalo medical student, Robert Taylor.

The hearing test result showed a 70% hearing loss, but he could be helped. Note the expression of supreme joy, ecstasy even, as we switched on the hearing aid and he heard for the first time in his life! Then the audiologist Jodi began to teach him rudimentary vowel sounds. Within 30 minutes he said the first word of his life: "Hola!" He ran through the entire medical camp exclaiming to all the American missionary doctors "Hola!" At the end of my day, as we were packing up all of the equipment and leaving, he was in the parking lot playing soccer with all of the other Guatemalan boys, proudly wearing his hearing aid. He ran up to me, clutched my arms and again explained "Hola!" I will never forget him.

By the Grace of God, we intend to continue this type of expression of our Faith, in service to God, every year. We hope this small article perhaps will stimulate reflection of how each of us can further serve the Lord. If you have any health care background and would like to embark on such a journey, we would love to hear from you.

Dr. Hoeplinger is Clinical Assistant Professor of Otolaryngology (Ear, Nose & Throat) at SUNY-Buffalo, and his wife, Dr. Christine, is a dentist. They are members of St George Orthodox Church, Buffalo, NY. He can be reached at: wnyent@aol.com

Saint Tikhon's Seminarian Travels to Albania

by Dn. Matthew Brown

"I again considered returning to missionary activity. The question formed in my mind: 'What about the dangers you will face?' Then came the response: 'Is God enough for you? If God is not enough, then in what God do you believe? If God is enough for you, go!'"

– Archbishop Anastasios (Yannoulatos) of Albania

For the third consecutive year seminarians in America have traveled to Albania as part of a class on missions. Twelve seminarians participated in the class representing four seminaries: Holy Cross, St. Vladimir's, St. Tikhon's, and St. Herman's in Alaska. I represented St. Tikhon's and found the trip to be a wonderful experience. It is rare that seminarians from four different seminaries are able to study and travel together. Not only did the class teach me about missions, but it also taught me a lot about the other seminaries and parts of the Orthodox Church in this country of which I have had little exposure to until now.

The class was sponsored by Holy Cross Seminary in Boston and OCMC (Orthodox Christian Missions Center). A generous individual donation deferred the cost of the experience, making it affordable for seminarians; only a few hundred dollars rather than a few thousand. Father Luke Veronis, a parish priest and professor at Holy Cross, taught the class and led the team to Albania. He worked for over ten years in Albania, during the early years of the missionary effort in that country.

The week-long class at Holy Cross involved reading the works of Archbishop Anastasios and other missionaries to Albania. During the trip we met with bishops, visited ancient churches and newly constructed ones, attended services, hiked through the mountains, spent the night at an abandoned monastery, talked, prayed, and danced with youth groups, visited a church-run college, high school, elementary school, and orphanage. We saw the many ministries the Albanian Church runs such as relief work, summer camps, iconography studios, and women's ministries. The Church is busy.

But maybe you are wondering, "Where in the world is Albania?" That wouldn't be the first time I have heard that question. It is one of the smaller and lesser-known European countries, situated in the Balkans. As one of the last to emerge from communism, Albania was also where the Church suffered its harshest persecution. Unlike other

communist countries where parishes remained open, though restricted and severely treated, here all religious life was forbidden. From 1967 to 1991 Albania was an absolutely atheistic land. Of the over 400 clergy active prior to communism, only 11 survived – all elderly. Over 1600 church buildings were either destroyed or used as military barracks, hotels, or dance clubs.

When communism fell a unique opportunity arose for the Orthodox Church to re-evangelize Albania. Yes, I said re-evangelize, for Christianity has been in Albania since the first century! Tradition tells us that the Apostle Paul visited the ancient city of Durres and ordained its first bishop who later became Albania's first martyr, Saint Asti. As I was touring the country with the rest of my class I noticed the remarkable juxtaposition

between things in Albania. It has an ancient Christian heritage, but is also a fledgling Church. It has many holy and deeply pious people working in the Church, but the vast majority is unchurched, having grown up in a world completely void of religion. We visited many ancient churches and monasteries with iconography hundreds of years old. But most of the churches were new, recently constructed now that the Church is free and growing. There is a large portion of the population which identifies itself as traditional Orthodox (30%), but the majority of people consider themselves Muslim (60%). However, few Albanians are actively religious Orthodox or Muslim.

The missionary effort in Albania is one of Orthodoxy's greatest success stories. It is a reminder to all of us of the necessity of missions and their possibilities. Over the past 20 years the mission in

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Summer/Fall
2012



*Seminarians
with Archbishop
Anastasios*

COMING HOME: Returning Combat Veterans

by Fr. Daniel Degyansky

Introduction

The conflicts in the Middle East have been a part of our lives for over ten years. Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) began on 19 March 2003 and U.S. troops began withdrawing in earnest on 15 December 2011. In that time U.S. forces suffered 4,282 combat related deaths, and 30,182 wounded. Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) was initiated in Afghanistan on 07 October 2001 and continues to the present. Combat related deaths in OEF are at 1,896 and the ranks of the wounded have climbed to 15,322. (1) Those who fought in both conflicts (many served two or more tours of duty) are highly trained men and women. These are members of one of the elite fighting forces of the world; individuals who were entrusted with huge responsibilities while deployed, under extremely stressful conditions. These men and women are our family members, neighbors, parishioners, co-workers and friends. Many of those who have served and are now returning from their tours are changed people who are facing the challenges of returning home and re-integration.

Challenges

Neither the returning warrior nor the family members at home are the same as before deployment. Returning home is a disorienting experience for the combat veteran, a process in which he or she may feel separated from their social or faith community and, once again as civilians, they may feel a lack of structure, order and predictability. The enormity of the war experience shatters the individual's basic sense of safety and understanding of the meaning of life. Many combat veterans were exposed to trauma on the battlefield. Trauma can be defined as any injury, whether emotionally or physically inflicted. When a warrior is exposed to combat situations that are painful, distressful or shocking, he or she may feel lasting mental and physical effects. Thus the challenge for coming home is in "Resetting" back to civilian mode, which means struggling to "Turn Off" combat skills.

Spiritual Crisis

Research shows that a veteran's experiences in combat (killing, losing a comrade, etc.) weakens their religious faith and is mediated by feelings of guilt. (2) Weakened faith and profound feelings of guilt

both contribute independently to the more extensive current use of mental health services provided within the healthcare community. The returning warrior may feel confusion about his or her image of God. For many, the image of God they nurtured from childhood somehow "died" on the field of battle, along with many of their comrades-in-arms. Others may have an altered sense of the meaning of life, and their place in civilian life. Grief and loss issues are profound: the loss of a buddy, the loss of non-combatant civilian lives in the course of war, and the loss of innocence that the individual suffered as a result of his or her war experience. Questions of Theodicy are raised: Why would an all-merciful and just God [the God we were taught to love as children] permit the atrocities associated with war to happen? Some combat veterans were witness to, participated in, or were aware of but did not object to, malicious acts of cruelty which resulted in deep-seated Moral Injury. Those who were exposed to such conditions exhibit feelings of ineffectiveness, shame, despair and hopelessness. Under such circumstances the warrior may experience confusion about core ethical beliefs and often feel a loss of previously sustained beliefs. The most severe cases are those who believe that their psyche is permanently damaged on account of what they experienced in war.

Directions

Veterans feel more comfortable approaching their Chaplain or Community Clergy than they do a healthcare professional. This is because, within the military culture, a conversation with a Chaplain is kept confidential, while a session between a veteran seeking help and a Staff Psychologist or other mental health professional becomes a matter of official record. Service personnel fear that such documentation could act as an obstacle to promotion within the ranks. Clergy are often seen as less threatening with no stigma attached. The Faith Community is there for the returning warrior to provide a safe haven: a calm, safe and non-judgmental presence, free of anxiety. Clergy are present for the veterans, and their families: both during the period of deployment and through the storms of re-integration. Clergy are there to listen: without interruption or comment, conveying warmth and acceptance of the veteran – their journey and their struggles. The listener avoids

St. Tikhon's continued from page 31

Albania has been led by the charismatic figure of Archbishop Anastasios. More than any other figure in this past century, the Archbishop has been the leading voice for the renewal of a missionary spirit in the Orthodox Church. We can see this apostolic zeal among saints of our own land such as St. Innocent of Alaska and St. Alexis Toth. Each generation has the responsibility of carrying on this missionary spirit or renewing it if it has cooled. Archbishop Anastasios argues that if we fail to do mission then we fail to be an apostolic Church. Apostolicity is not just backward looking. It is not only about our ancient roots. It is also forward looking. It is about being witnesses to the love of Jesus Christ today.

Much still needs to be done in Albania. The success experienced so far is a good beginning, but the next step is creating a mature and self-sustaining Church in Albania. Nathan Hoppe, a long-term OCMC missionary in Albania, says that the greatest need in the mission field is for personnel, long term missionaries, especially mission priests. He says he would love to have a mission priest come to Albania and become a parish priest. The laity and

the clergy need to see a healthy and vibrant parish life modeled.

Traveling to Albania and studying the missionary effort there has greatly enhanced my seminary education and priestly formation. I wish every seminarian could take this class or go on an OCMC mission's trip. Experiencing Orthodoxy in another cultural context can help one see the importance of missions, both domestic and foreign, for the local parish. In the words of Christ, we must all "Go Forth" (Matt. 28:19).



Raised in Michigan, Dn. Matthew Brown and his wife, Matushka Elizabeth, have two children. He is entering his final year at St. Tikhon's Seminary and has worked this summer as an intern for Bishop Michael.

Jacob's well

Summer/Fall
2012

*Ancient icons
from an
abandoned
monastery
in Albania*

Coming Home continued from page 32

asking questions [DO NOT ask if the veteran has killed in combat, and if so, how many!] and does not freely offer advice or platitudes. Clergy and the Faith Community may assist the returning veteran in being grounded: providing a "roadmap" for re-integration through the Parish Community into the community at large. The Faith Community can provide avenues of dialogue for spiritual and religious growth and engagement. The Faith Community has to be accepting: acceptance means understanding the dark side of human nature without trying to fix the unfixable. Rather, acceptance offers a deep reflection on "what is goodness" and how to assist others in finding goodness within themselves. Lastly the Faith Community must be available to assist the returning veteran in referrals to resources within the general community. This allows for an honest and realistic reflection on the recovery process in which spiritual, religious and community resources can be made available for the returning veterans and their families.

Conclusion

This article touched upon the very "tip of the iceberg" in regard to re-integration of the combat

veteran into civilian society and the role of the Faith Community in this process. As Orthodox Christians we are blessed with a rich tradition of the Sacraments, our sacred narratives, hymnology, and theological constructs to address the needs of the returning warrior. Our sacred tradition provides the foundation for a support team [the Faithful] to provide practical, emotional and spiritual support to returning veterans and their families.

References:

- (1) U.S. Department of Defense: figures reported, as of 06 July 2012.
- (2) Fontana, A. & Rosenbeck, R. (2004) Trauma, change in strength of religious faith, and mental health service among veterans treated for PTSD. *J Nerv Ment Dis.* 192(9) , 579-584.

Fr. Daniel Degyansky is the Rector of St. John Chrysostom Eastern Orthodox Church in Woodside. He is also a Board Certified Clinical Staff Chaplain and serves at the Veterans Affairs Medical Centers in the Bronx and Northport, Long Island.

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Summer/Fall
2012

The Extraordinary Work of the Nuns and Monks of the Georgian Orthodox Church

Supported by American Friends of Georgia

by Marusya Chavchavadze

American Friends of Georgia, Inc. (AFG) is a non-profit, non-political, U.S. based public charity with 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status. AFG was formed in 1994 to help the people of Georgia during a difficult post-Soviet transitional period.



*Mother Mariam
with former
street children
in Bediani.*

For over 17 years, AFG has been raising funds for our Georgian partners who create successful innovative programs caring for the most vulnerable populations in Georgia—primarily children and elderly who are displaced, abandoned, disabled or suffering from leukemia, cancer or tuberculosis. Programs include: rehabilitation, education, palliative care, cancer prevention, nursing, medical care, refugee assistance, sanctuary, art therapy, environmental education, culture and art.

Several of AFG's partners in Georgia are Georgian Orthodox nuns and monks. Under the guidance of the Georgian Patriarch, Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia, His Holiness and Beatitude Ilia II, the nuns and monks create much-needed programs to assist the most vulnerable in Georgia.



*Mother Mariam
in the Transfigu-
ration Convent
with AFG's
Executive
Directors
Lena Kiladze
and Marusya
Chavchavadze.*

Years ago when I met the Patriarch, Ilia II, he told me he continually tried to start these essential ministries in the hopes that the government would follow. I would like to tell you something about the extraordinary work of the nuns and monks and their need for our assistance. In this article I will focus on the ministry of Abbess Mariam and Mother Nino.

Abbess Mariam— “the Mother Teresa of Georgia”

In 1991, when Georgia declared independence from the Soviet Union, there were very few nuns or monks remaining in Georgia. It was startling for me to see upon my arrival in 1996 that Mother Mariam was only 29 years old and already an Abbess with only 6 nuns and novices. Today there are 3 convents. The young abbesses and bishops responded with great energy and creativity to the

extreme conditions, finding innovative ways to care for the needy by setting up programs never before seen in Georgia.

When I met Mother Mariam she told me the Georgian Patriarch asked her in 1995 to make the Transfiguration Convent in Tbilisi a place where the most desperate Georgians could seek help. This was most unusual for an Orthodox convent and at first she was very frightened to attempt this ministry. Deeply spiritual, radiating compassion and joy while also being very practical, Mother Mariam has a unique ability to find simple solutions for complex problems. Her work has led to the most successful humanitarian projects in Georgia including care for street children, homeless mothers, refugee children and sick elderly. I understand why she is often called “the Mother Teresa of Georgia.” Her work is supported by the efforts of Mother Nino (also a physician) who coordinates the only Hospice Nursing School and Home Care Program.



*Mother Nino with Patient
at Transfiguration Mercy
Center Hospice.*

Please consider giving to AFG to help continue the important work of the Georgian Orthodox Church through these dedicated nuns and monks. Donations are tax deductible. Online donations by credit card are accepted at our website: www.afgeorgia.org by pressing the DONATE NOW button; or you can send a check to American Friends of Georgia, Inc. P.O. Box 1200, Truro, MA 02666. You may choose any of the projects described in this article or allow me to direct your gifts according to our immediate needs.

Marusya Chavchavadze
Executive Director
American Friends of Georgia (AFG)
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Savvy continued from page 36

But perhaps in our darkness, the unanswerable provides a star. Maybe it's ontology over theology; relationship over rubric, pragmatic logic giving way to love that can't be proven and just makes no worldly sense.

A boy in the dark under his sheets in the summer listening to the ball game on his transistor radio that gets only 3 AM stations believes he has access to every transmission in the universe with no notion of his limited bandwidth and what might be out there beyond his capacity to receive.

To communicate with him, that which is beyond must will to condescend to come within his range...

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us..."

The little girl did become Orthodox at 18, studied in England, and went on to graduate from Orthodox seminary. She married a young man who became Orthodox too. She now serves the poor with probably more unanswered questions than ever... Far as I know she does eat an occasional doughnut at coffee hour with her dad, who 9 years after her, also embraced the Faith he likes to say he still doesn't savvy.

Savvy?

Tough Town - Camden, NJ

Covenant House Camden is a fully functioning storefront drop-in center seeing 15 to 20 kids a week – and then some.

First thing every morning our Service Manager, Mandi, is outside with a broom, a shovel, trash-bags, and a bucket filled with bleach-water. Along with Juan, our restaurant neighbor from Vera Cruz, Mandi and the team snap on the rubber gloves and do the daily clean-up of our block.

Functional inch by inch zip-lock drug-bags, used condoms, blunt-wrappers hollowed out of their tobacco content, so weed can be stuffed in its place (a blunt is a cheap flavored cigar), chicken-bones, Styrofoam containers, broken Corona bottles, all bagged and put on the curb.

We ask Juan, "Cuando es el día de la basura..." When is trash-day? Juan says, "Cada día." In Camden, "every day."

The kids across the street start early.... The suppliers crank them up and they crank it out. It's hard to compete offering a minimum-wage job to a kid taking home seven-hundred a week, on a bad week. His boss patrolling in a shiny SUV with spinning wheels, watching. Maybe he likes us...

But everyday Mandi and the team succeed incrementally in reducing Poo, Zee, and Junior's time on the corner. Every day the kids spend a little more time with us, having a bottle of water, eat-

ing some rice crispy treats, making a sandwich, helping us make sandwiches, stocking the cooler for the Street-Outreach Team to distribute in the gritty downtown, telling us their real names, trusting us, trusting the growing relationship, telling us their dreams... One eye out the window for the boss...

And then there are the boys and girls on the grimy downtown corners and out in the weeds by the highway truck-stop... Kids from all the surrounding New Jersey towns, Collingswood, Voorhees, Audubon, Medford, Moorestown, Cherry Hill, Lawnside, and Haddonfield... So far Outreach has been able to help half a dozen get away from the traffickers... Away from the nightmare they've been duped into believing...

Thanks to donors who care about others, we're able to offer simple things, soup, soap, and hope... A legit job, a GED course, a mattress, a ticket out of harm's way, a bed in our Atlantic City or Philly shelter, a chance to get off the corner, out of the life, to go home, to see another way of life, to see a visible sign of God's Presence in Camden...

We start every morning meeting with the same prayer: "God have mercy... Help us. We need a shelter here in Camden for your kids..."

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Summer/Fall
2012



If you'd like to help with the work God is accomplishing among us in Camden, please email Father Stephen Siniari at frsiniari@gmail.com. We ask your prayers.

One Beggar Telling Another Beggar Where to Find Bread

Savvy

by Fr. Stephen Siniari

“When I’m 18 I’m becoming Orthodox.”

She was 11 when her father first brought her to liturgy. She stood up front and didn’t blink.

Why they came? I don’t know. They weren’t Orthodox.

He said he’d taken her everywhere to try to get an answer to her questions.

I’d consumed the Gifts and was unvesting.

“If I love God and I go to Heaven, it will be perfect joy there, to be with Him, right?”

“Right.”

“If my mother and father don’t go to Heaven, will that perfect joy be diminished?”

She said it more eloquently, but that’s the best I can remember, little blonde angelic face in her Sunday dress and good shoes.

And before I could do my WC Fields, “Get away from me kid, ya’ bother me...” She asked another...

“God knows everything, right?”

“Right...”

Father Vladimir Borichevsky always said look out for the simple ones...

“And God knows in advance, right?”

“Right.”

“Then why does He make people He knows won’t love Him...”

This little girl was serious.

“...And so condemn themselves to eternal suffering?”

No cookie-cutter answer. No pithy quote.

“Why doesn’t He just make people He knows will love Him and go to Heaven with Him, if He loves us?”

“You want a doughnut, sweetie? C’mom, Dad, let’s go to coffee hour.”

Dad shook his head, took her by the hand and said, “I still don’t savvy.”

Sometimes I wonder if God sat me down and explained it in baby language - If even then I’d understand:

How can I hear that which is beyond my auditory experience?

Taste life my gustatory palate has forgotten?

Envision things too lofty for my visual scope?

Be lifted up by a fragrance exceeding my olfactory sensibility?

Touch something too fine for my tactile sensitivity?

Conceive of relations immeasurable by my poor earthen moral compass?

And I know another thing that makes me know I don’t truly know - The thing I hold it by; the words, the concepts, the discursive objectified knowledge, the arrogance of my personal Pythagorean theorems - There’s my weakest point - Like the place Achilles mother held him by when she immersed him in the dark waters - Like a clever monkey who learns to sign, to recite a riddle to get ambrosia, inebriated by the cup, but never really knowing the truth of what ambrosia means... oblivious to my failure to relate to “the Offered and the Offerer... “ to what Dylan Thomas calls “the close and holy darkness...”

Truly, “...We see now as in a mirror darkly...”

Continued on page 35

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