

KOINONIA: A Publication of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

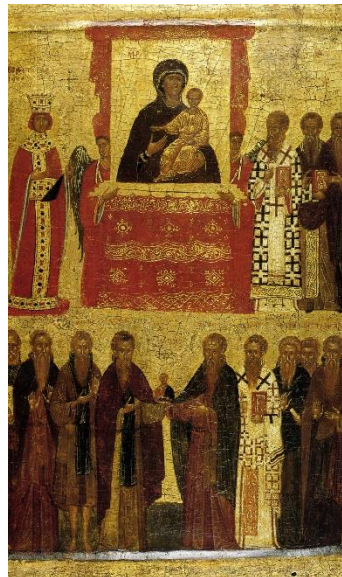
Leaders of Character by Fr. Eric G. Tosi	1
Re-Authenticate the Witness by Fr. Edward Rommen	2
Examine and Rediscover Our Values by Pdn. Peter Danilchick	2
From the Fathers – St. Gregory the Great	3
Diocese Holds First Annual Evangelism School	4

LEADERS OF CHARACTER by Archpriest Eric G. Tosi

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on His law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.”

– Psalm 1
(First Kathisma)

During nearly all of the Vespers services celebrated throughout the year (especially on Saturday evenings and the eves of many feasts), the Church sings Psalm 1, from the First Kathisma, after the Great Litany. This is a clear message to the faithful, and especially



they are going to do and then does it. There is no equivocation, only steady, honest, loving service. Leaders of character lead with Christian principles foremost in their actions and do not shy away from these core principles when confronted with conflict and danger. They humbly sacrifice themselves for the souls entrusted to them but also speak hard truths when necessary.

the priest, on how we have to be *leaders of character*. Being a leader of character enables us to competently and correctly witness to the truth. It is perhaps one of the most important elements in evangelism. Those seeking the Church must find here leaders of character who not only preach the truth but live the truth. Otherwise those seekers will simply walk away, because they will spot hypocrisy very quickly. Character breeds trust.

A leader of character is someone who says what

Evangelism requires leaders of character to bring the Gospel to the world – offering a living witness to the truth of the Orthodox Church, while contrasting this truth to the fallenness of the world. Whether you are a clergyman or a layperson, your character will stand as a bright light in the world, illustrating what it really means to be a disciple of Christ.

“Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)

Re-Authenticate the Witness

“If this trusting state of mind is achieved, trusting behavior will follow; spending time together, sharing resources, freely exchanging ideas.”

[It] should be obvious that the authentication needed for Christian witness goes way beyond the simple verification of identity. It is not only a question of being who I say I am, but being what I say I am in Christ. What we are talking about is establishing a web of interpersonal trust that binds two (or more) people together, a context of intimacy in which one person believes in the integrity, goodness, and competence of another person. Accordingly, a non-believer will come to trust the believer’s ability to adequately relate and discuss the details of his

faith (competence). She will come to trust the believer’s intentions, that is, to recognize the absence of coercion, the use of power, or any kind of ulterior motive (goodness). And this relationship of trust will play itself out on the entire breadth of each participant’s person (integrity). If this trusting state of mind is achieved, trusting behavior will follow; spending time together, sharing resources, freely exchanging ideas. It is in this kind of context that the invitation to follow Christ develops traction, makes sense.

But as mentioned above, this web of trust can only be established over the course of time, with a few people, and only if we free ourselves from the narrow confines of programmatic efforts [and] depersonalizing technologies, and engage others in the wholeness of their persons.

*Excerpts from Fr. Edward Rommen’s **Get Real: On Evangelism in the Late Modern World**, (Pasadena, CA: William Carey, 2010), pp. 201-211.*

Examine and Rediscover Our Values

“We all take our status as Christians for granted sometimes.”

The second goal of Christian strategic leadership is akin to the examination of conscience that every Orthodox Christian is supposed to undertake prior to going to the priest for confession. It is not an automatic exercise, but rather a true soul-searching that plumbs the depths of our entire relationship with God. It asks the questions: “What are my values as a Christian, and more specifically as a leader in Christ’s Church?” It is too simple to answer. “Why, it is self-evident that my values are the same as Christ and the Church. I am a believer. What more do I have to say?”

We all take our status as Christians for granted sometimes. We assume that we love God and follow Christ. We assume that our values are the same as His. But when we look deep inside and honestly examine the values that govern our daily lives, activities, and relationships with others, we may come to a different conclusion...It becomes all too easy for us to let each day slip into the next without self-examination. And once we are out of tune with God, it becomes very easy to be out of tune with others, especially the ones whom we love and who love us.

We know we need to set priorities. Yet far too often, the urgency of the moment takes precedence over the truly important things in our lives...The values that we imprint in our minds and hearts govern our behavior, especially in ... conflict situations.

*Excerpt from Protodeacon Peter Danilchick’s **Thy Will Be Done: Strategic Leadership, Planning and Management for Christians**, (Crestwood: SVS Press, 2016), pp. 76-77.*

From the Fathers: Letter to Theoctista by St. Gregory the Great

I reveal that I have learned from certain messengers that due to the inconstancy of the people an uproar of slander has arisen against you. About this matter I hear that your excellency has been greatly distressed. If this is so, I wonder very much why the words of men on earth distress you, who have fixed your heart on heaven. For the blessed Job, when his friends who had come to console burst out in rebuke, says: *“For behold my witness is in heaven and he that knows my conscience is on high”* (Job 16:20). For whoever holds the witness of his life in heaven should not fear the judgments of men on earth. Also Paul, leader of the good, says: *“For our glory is this, the testimony of our conscience”* (2 Cor. 1:12). Again he says: *“Let each one prove his own work, and thus he will have glory in himself and not in another”* (Gal 6:4). For if we are gladdened by praise (and) broken by censure, we have placed our glory not in ourselves but in the mouth of others. And foolish virgins have not taken oil for their vessels, but the wise have taken oil in vessels with their lamps. To be sure the lamps are our good deeds. About these it is written: *“Let your light*

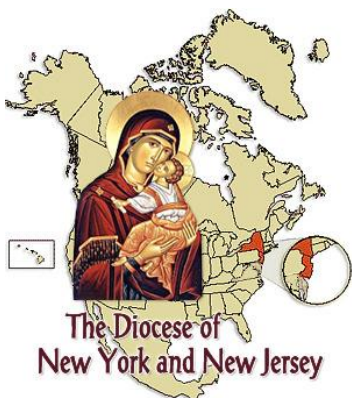


shine before men so that they see your good deeds and glorify your Father Who is in heaven” (Matt 5:16). But then we take oil in vessels with our lamps when from good deeds we seek the splendor of glory not in the praises of neighbors but we protect it in the testimony of conscience. Further, for everything that is said about us on the outside we must run back to the secrets of the mind. Even though all may censure, he is still free whom conscience does not accuse, because even if all praise, he cannot be free if conscience accuses him. About John the truth says: *“What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed shaken by the wind?”* (Luke 7:24)

Specifically he says this for negation, not for confirmation when he adds *“But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft garments? Behold, those who are dressed in soft garments are in the houses of kings”* (Matt. 11:7-8). Although according to the truth of the gospel John was covered in rough clothing, nonetheless according to the meaning those who are dressed in soft garments delight in adulations and praises. Yet we deny that John was a reed agitated by the wind since no breeze of a human mouth bent the strength of his mind. For if we are raised up by praises, (and) we are humiliated by censures, we are a reed agitated by the wind. But let this be absent, let it be absent from the heart of your excellency. I know that you read zealously the teacher of gentiles/pagans who says: *“If I were still pleasing men, I would not be the servant of Christ”* (Gal. 1:10).

Excerpt from St. Gregory the Great, Book XI, Letter 45. Translation found at Church Fathers: Registrum Epistolarum, Book XI, Letter 45 (Gregory the Great), (newadvent.org).

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Good News: Diocese Holds First Annual Evangelism School at St. Gregory Church

The Diocese of New York and New Jersey held its first annual Evangelism School from Monday, August 8 to Wednesday, August 10, 2022, at Saint Gregory the Theologian Orthodox Church in Wappingers Falls, NY. The School is an initiative of the Diocesan Commission on Missions and Evangelism, fully funded by the Diocesan Council, as a way to foster a renewed thinking and excitement on sharing the Holy Orthodox Faith in the parishes across the Diocese.

The School was open to ten students. The ten participants were comprised of both clergy and laypersons, representing all three Deaneries of the Diocese. "The School was specifically kept small, so as to foster greater interaction and discussion among the participants while ensuring that the information could be effectively discussed," says Archpriest Eric G. Tosi, chairman of the Commission and organizer of the School. "We based the model on previous missions schools that had been done on a Church-wide level annually for a number of years. This Diocesan School was specifically designed to be an intense three days."

Topics that were discussed included the theology and application of evangelism; leadership and management principles; communications; catechism; and education in the parish. The School's invited speakers



were Archpriest Eric G. Tosi, Archpriest David Garretson and Archpriest Timothy Hojnicky. His Eminence, Archbishop Michael, was present for the School and offered invaluable insight from his own experiences, as well as giving archpastoral guidance on the topics discussed. The School also integrated roundtable conversations on various themes, as well as open discussions in which the participants shared their experience and were able to explore topics of concern.

"I left the three-day School feeling refreshed and reinvigorated! I came away with a whole bunch of ideas to bring back to my parish," reflected Priest Theodore Gregory, rector of Holy Trinity Church in Rahway, NJ. Archbishop Michael shared with the participants at the conclusion how this School "enables parishes and missions to examine what they are doing in their parish life and how that is reflected in the surrounding community in order to draw people into a deeper relationship

with Christ." His Eminence challenged the participants to take the information and experience back to their parishes and missions and share it with the parish leadership and community, reminding us that "this will only be effective if the information is shared and then implemented on a local level."

The School was held in conjunction with the Feast of St. Herman of Alaska, the first missionary and Saint in North America. Festal services were celebrated, presided over by His Eminence, Archbishop Michael.

The School will be an annual event, fully funded and sponsored by the Diocese of New York and New Jersey. Different participants will be recruited each year, continuing to draw from the length and breadth of the Diocese.

Through the prayers of our holy Father Herman of Alaska and the Saints of North America, may this missionary effort be blessed by Almighty God!

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<https://www.nynjoca.org>