

Coworkers With Christ
A Practical Look at God's Plan
for Planting and Nurturing a Healthy, Growing Orthodox Church
A handbook for all based on experience

Preface

My original work was a Master of Divinity Thesis at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary titled Orthodox Church Planting for Evangelism and Church Growth. One purpose of this thesis was to develop a blueprint for planting a church in Jacksonville, FL. As of that date there was no practical, easy to use "how-to" Orthodox material on the subject. There were no seminary classes. The OCA just began the Church Planting Program. Since graduating seminary and planting St Justin Martyr in Jacksonville, FL I have continued to be active in missions. During this time I have shared revisions of my thesis to lay people and clergy in missions I have mentored to use as guidebooks. They have declared them useful and suggested I make it available for more widespread use. In the nearly ten years that has past my thoughts have been seasoned and matured with experience.

In the holy work of church planting I know I have made many mistakes and if I not written my original thesis I could have made mistakes that would have been critical or even fatal to the healthy growth of St. Justin Martyr. Ultimately growing a church is all about God and working with God. He grows the church and we merely cwork with Him. It is all about working hard, using common sense, loving others, people skills, leadership, asceticism, and prayer. There are no "techniques" to it but we can say a few things about its organic process.

"Church growth" is a mystery. "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how." (Mk 4:26-7). As a physician cannot create life or growth, neither can a bishop, priest, or lay person, but like a physician, we can understand how life functions, how to nurture it, and if necessary how to heal it, dependent on and working with Christ, the True Physician.

I want to say thank you to those who have loved me and mentored me from day one in this ten year work: Fr Thomas Hopko who was my original reader and has been a great influencer in my life from afar, Fr John Ealy who painstakingly held my hand daily in the early years, Fr Paul Kucynda who believed me, loved me and pastored me, Fr John Reeves who challenged me often, and Fr. John Breck who's profound wisdom has always helped me adjust the sails and turn the rudder. The biggest thank you is to wife Lee Ann who taught me faith, and then trusted mine.

Finally thank you to those who have sojourned at St Justin Martyr over the years. We have a story to share.

Introduction: What is a Healthy Church?

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)

“Lord, O Lord! Look down from heaven and behold, and visit this vineyard, and perfect that which Thy right hand has planted.” (Bishop’s prayer at the Little Entrance)

Some people have a green thumb and growing a healthy garden is a natural talent. Others can nurture a talent for gardening. Successful gardeners intuitively understand how a symphony of elements working together can produce a bountiful crop. For a plant to grow there must be the right conditions. The soil must have the right make up. Sunlight is needed and the right amount of rain, along with fertilizer and protection from insects and disease. A healthy plant requires the gardener’s time and TLC. All the love and care possible will not prevent the plant from being injured or killed by a natural disaster - floods, winds, etc. – even though plants are naturally resilient. For a plant to be as fruitful as possible, it needs the gardener’s help and God’s cooperation.

The Apostle Paul refers to starting a church as planting (1 Cor. 3:6). Christ is the True Vine (Jn 15:1-17) and that we are the branches. The main point of this Gospel passage is that we are dependent on Christ for everything. Complete union with Christ is needed. As life flows from the vine to the branches, so does Christ - the Way, the Truth, and the Life - flow into our lives by our attachment to Him through the full life of the Church.

The Church is the Body of Christ. The life of Christ flows into us through the life of the Church. Christ is also the True Vine. We as the body of Christ, the True Vine, must be healthy if we are to grow. If the Church is unhealthy, it will be stunted in growth. We become sickly, shrinking, fruitless, or even dying. Just as healthy plants grow, healthy churches grow. Just as a healthy plant is dependent upon God for the sun, and the rain and upon the gardener for his expertise, and TLC, to grow, so the local church dependent upon God who desires the church to grow, together with the bishops, priests, deacons and lay workers, who are the gardeners. Our Lord promises the fields are white for harvest (John 4:35)

In another biblical metaphor of growth (1 Cor. 12:4-28), the Apostle Paul compares the body of Christ to the human body. Christ is the head, we are the body. The whole community is the body. There is interdependence among the members of the body. We are all necessary parts of the body. God providentially puts specific people together to be community and to work out their salvation. When one person is sick, all are affected. For a church to stay healthy it must have a deep and authentic commitment to the fullness of the Orthodox spiritual life: prayer, worship, ascetical discipline, servanthood, almsgiving and stewardship. Also needed is effective shepherding, preaching, teaching and a dynamic lay ministry. The church needs a positive attitude and to be friendly to visitors. The community should be biblically literate and must always be centered in Christ.

For a church to be healthy, the priest must cultivate prayerfully, as directed by the Holy Spirit. He must weed, prune, and sometimes use insecticide. Like any gardener he must work on his knees, praying to God for direction and as the farmer is dependent on God for sunlight, rain and seasonable weather, so are the priest and bishop dependant on God for forming people and creating a healthy environment. God

grows the church and God wants the church to grow. It is our task to not get in God's way, but to stand willingly alongside Him, working hard and pouring our lives into the task, that He has set before us.

Study Questions

1. Study Mark 4:26-32. How is the growth of the church a mystery? Can God grow a church from a small seed of people?
2. How would you define a healthy church?
3. List the characteristics of a healthy church.
4. What are signs of an unhealthy church?
5. Is growing a church a matter of mixing the right ingredients as does a chef cooking or is there something more? If so, what is this something more?

Chapter 1 **Commissioned!**

“You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”
(Acts 1:8)

God sends the Holy Spirit to the Church to give us power to bear witness to Jesus Christ. Evangelism is sharing this Good News. It is the overflowing of God's presence in our lives. We cannot contain it. It is the Power from on High.

It is excitement! It is fire! It is life! It is joy! It is truth!

There is no greater purpose and joy in life than to share Christ and His love, peace and joy and to bow down and worship Him, His Father and the Holy Spirit. What a great privilege we have been given! As Orthodox Christians, we have the fullness of truth. We have been given a way of life, the gift of ascetical struggle, the Liturgy, the Holy Eucharist, and two thousand years of Truth and Holy Tradition to deliver to the rest of Christ's creation. The desire to reach out to our neighbor arises from our innermost being and living experience with Christ, like a fountain that overflows (Jn 4:14).

The fire of the Holy Spirit makes us the light of the world. Is our light under a bushel? Do people look at us and see Christ? Is our lamp lit? Are we committed to Christ, or are we of this world? Is Christ a Sunday only reality? Do we take Christ to work? Is His icon in our office or workplace? Do we open our mouths and share the Good News? Do we at least desire to do so? Is Christ enthroned in our hearts? Do we practice ascetical discipline? Do I pray a few times a day? Do I keep the fasts? Do I give alms?

Take Your Temperature

With the exception of Alaska, most Orthodox Churches in America were begun by groups of ethnic Orthodox new to this country. They gathered together, desired a church, and eventually they were sent a priest. Not that there is anything wrong with this. Praise God a church was born! Unfortunately, the method was not biblical or traditional and a non-biblical/non-traditional mindset about evangelism was laid on the foundation of this church. Evangelism was not and did not become a *core value* of the community. A core value was survival, preserving their faith and ethnic traditions. I have heard from intermittent attendees that they come to church to get their “ethnic fix.” One matushka shared “Our Father” in Slavonic (“Oche Nash”) as a little girl. Only in high school did she learn that “Oche Nash” and “Our Father” were the same prayer. Often times the priest may have been *hired* (like an independent Protestant minister is) and is not really the leader of the community. He is only its employee, and this effectively renders him unable to lead the people to a higher level. This is also at complete odds with the ancient Orthodox model of leadership/hierarchy and will lead to a dysfunctional church.

Mission Challenged

In some places church membership is in decline or at best has plateaued. It has been documented that vocations are in decline in American amongst “born” Orthodox. They say the vision is lost. There is dead wood and dry bones. There are church communities that fit the definition of a club better than that of church. Far too many cradle Orthodox are biblically illiterate. Some priests are unequipped for their ministry. They do maintenance well, but are *mission challenged*. And let us be honest, who

wants to go to a dead church? Who wants to go to a club to worship God? Does it really matter if such a church claims to be the true church? Who is going to believe them? Where is the fruit?

America wants Orthodoxy. America needs Orthodoxy. According to research America is a “highly spiritual nation.” America is primed for true Christianity. Examples abound in the American church of thousands of people, including clergy, converting to the ancient faith. For the most part, healthy churches attract converts. We have been entrusted with delivering Orthodoxy to God’s people. We will be held accountable. Just as in the parable of the householder and the rebellious tenants who killed his son, it seems that today God is taking the church from those who would not produce fruit and giving it to those who will produce fruit (Mt 21:43)

The Need For Church Planting

The fruitless fig tree (Lk 13:6-9) is to be either uprooted or fertilized. Fertilizing a fruitless tree into fruitfulness is difficult at best. God wants fruitful churches. As it is easier to have babies than to raise the dead, it is easier to plant new churches than revive existing churches. This is not to say that we should not try to administer first aid to a dying church, but the church with its self-imposed limited resources (resulting from poor stewardship and often negative attitudes) must choose its battles carefully. If it is our mission to spread the Gospel, the Good News, if this is a primary function of the Church in this world, then we must get busy; busy fertilizing, or uprooting, and planting. Let us work to provide our Lord a harvest at His second and glorious coming.

Church planting is *the* means described in the New Testament for starting churches and evangelism. Church planting is biblical. In 1Corinthians Paul gives us key insights into how he planted churches, and he stresses the core values of church planting. Paul shows us that the priest’s task is to nurture the community, but it is God who makes the church grow. (1Cor. 3:6.)

St. Paul shows us (1Cor.3:6-18) that a church is planted in synergia (cooperation) with God (*for we are God’s fellow workers vs.9*), and we can only succeed where *Christ is the foundation (vs. 11)*. This requires expert leadership (*architect (Gr) master builder vs. 10*), the right attitude—a spirit of excellence (*let each man take care how, vs. 10*), with humility (vs. 18), and initial proper planning and core values (*taking care of how he builds, cf. vs. 10 and 1Cor. 9:26*). If it is not done this way, it will be revealed as fruitless and burn up (vs. 13). Pastoral skill is required (vs. 2).

In 1 Cor. 9:16ff we see there is an anointing for this work. *For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel! 1Cor 9:16*. The leaders of the church are *entrusted with a commission (vs. 17)*, i.e., given the stewardship-responsibility to share the Good News, to evangelize, so that some may be saved and we may *share in its blessings (vs.23)*. This is done with a spirit of servanthood (vs. 19). It requires an ascetical struggle (vss. 24-27). Great missionary such as Sts. Innocent and Herman of Alaska and St. John of San Francisco applied this in America, with extraordinary success.

Evangelical-nondenominational America, mixing biblical truths with secularism, has given genuine evangelism a bad name. “*Just walk the aisle,*” *Once saved always saved-* theology, and “*Send your money to the address at the bottom of the screen and lay your hands on top of the TV,*” is indicative of a selfish, uncommitted, fast-food, instant-gratification, drive-thru, media-driven approach to theology and sharing the Good News. The mega-churches of today whose leaders have good intentions, are

ultimately about numbers, a charismatic leader and a good show. There are mega churches bigger than some of our dioceses!

If we Orthodox have been entrusted with Truth, why are we so complacent? The New Testament (cf. Acts!) reminds us that the most effective method of evangelism is planting new Churches. Outside of the historical church, denominations that plant churches are growing. To help change the trend of decline in Orthodoxy we must plant new churches with an evangelical vision.

We must understand God's plan for planting and growing a church. Planting new churches requires the pouring of one's whole soul into the endeavor. It requires dedication, sweat, faith, determination, many hours of hard work and loneliness, and the real experience of working alongside Christ. It can at times be slow, difficult and frustrating. Nevertheless, it is at these times that we can draw closer to Christ, remembering that it is His Church, and that we are only His servants. Church planting requires 110% of our best effort. I challenge you to undertake this exciting journey.

Study Questions

1. Is church planting biblical? Show examples from the New Testament.
2. Is there a need for church planting? Does God want us to plant churches?
3. Who are the fellow workers?
4. Are you a fellow worker?

Chapter 2

Prayer: The Church's Immune System

"If you are not successful in prayer, you will not be successful in anything, for prayer is the root of everything." St. Theophan the Recluse

St. Justin's was planted in July, 1994. Within the first three weeks a visiting catechumen asked if we could talk. On Monday we had lunch. Without going into much detail, he said that he had talked about Christ and Orthodoxy with a friend of his who was having many problems. He asked me to pray for her, and I told him I would. In our very new community we also had a prayer ministry to which I added her name. On a daily basis, members of the prayer team prayed for the people listed. That November the phone rang. It was the lady the catechumen had asked me to pray for some three months earlier. She said she heard we were "the true religion." I invited her to church the next Sunday. She called Sunday evening and said, "I need Baptism." I told her we should talk. We had lunch, and I explained the catechumenate to her. None of her friends were Christian. Still, she progressed rapidly. On the eve of her baptism she told me I could not baptize her; she was not worthy. I replied that *now* she was! She was baptized, and has since gone on to marry a pious man, to begin a family, and to become a pillar in her church community. She fervently prayed for her parents and seven years from the times of her baptism her previously unchurched parents were received into the faith and are actively leading the Orthodox life. There is a presence of God when she walks into the room.

We saw God change this woman's life and later the parents. He did it using the prayer ministry of (our parish), praying for someone we didn't even know.

Prayer is powerful. There are many others whom we put on this prayer list who had no commitment to the church, and now have been received into the Church. At St. Justin Martyr all we did was pray for them. The Holy Spirit did the rest. Today these people are striving to walk the narrow path. One is pursuing vocations.

A few years ago I did a church-planting workshop at the founding meeting of a new mission. I spoke for a couple of hours on prayer. At the conclusion of the meeting, the local lay leader came to me and said, "I wish I could be so enthusiastic about my faith and share it like you." The essence of my response was: "It is nothing special. If you really pray, you become filled with God and you can't contain it. It overflows. God gives you the words and the zeal." I told her "Pray and beg God to come into your life, and He will do the same thing for you." Nearly a year later this person was invited to speak in front of a Protestant Sunday School about Orthodoxy. The following Monday morning I received an e-mail from her, full of excitement and thanksgiving. She loved every minute of that talk. The class response was very positive. Her life was overflowing with the presence of God and she could not contain it. She couldn't wait to talk more about her faith. By virtue of her sincere prayer life God took her from one extreme to the other. She has led others to Orthodoxy. God made her an evangelist!

The local church will grow to the level of its prayer life. The most important brick on the foundation of any church is prayer. The life of God flows into us through prayer. The life of God flows into the local church through prayer. Not to pray is to constrain God, to quench the Holy Spirit.

I cannot imagine a praying church not growing. A praying church will acquire the mind of God, and just as "deep calls unto deep", other people hungry for God will be attracted to it. Prayer is the most important thing we can do in planting a church. Nothing

can replace it. St. Theophan the Recluse says: *“If you are not successful in prayer, you will not be successful in anything, for prayer is the root of everything.”*

Prayer Is Essential In Church Planting

“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are equal, and each shall receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.” (1 Cor. 3:6-9)

We are God's fellow workers.

Prayerfully, with hoe in hand, we are preparing the ground, and Jesus is hoeing the ground with us. Our Lord is there, perceived especially in our prayer lives, showing us where to hoe, how to hoe, how to fertilize, and what type of plant will grow in this soil. It is this very reality of Christ with us, a reality realized only in prayer- that gives strength, peace and motivation to the church planter. The work is being done with God's energy and guidance.

The key to planting and making a church grow is the desire to share Christ with others. This desire is born from prayer. The church plant-team leaders must be people of prayer, and nothing less. Church planting is hard work, guided by God. In this endeavor prayer is the source of strength and wisdom.

Intellectually, we can know that God wants us to spread his Gospel. We can learn the nondenominational-evangelical American Christian “church growth” techniques that are available to us, but growth techniques are only formulas. In reality, the church is not healthy without the solid foundation of prayer, which means becoming of one mind with God in this holy work.

From the initial thought of planting a church in a specific community, then throughout the entire process, all of our efforts must be grounded in prayer. First, we must ask, “Is this Your will, Lord? What do we do, Lord, to lead more people to You? Lord, please bless our endeavor and have mercy on us.”¹ There must be a group of people devoted to interceding for this endeavor. Everyone in the initial core group must be praying for God's blessings and wisdom.

Having an organized small group prayer ministry is crucial. This consists of a group of people who already have a good personal prayer rule. They agree to pray daily for the church plant as a whole and for any specific needs in the community. This organized prayer ministry also keeps diptychs (prayer lists), listing the names of all inquirers, catechumens, members, friends, and supporters of the church community.

In addition, a community-wide prayer rule based on the Orthodox daily prayers can be established which includes prayers specifically for the community and for the priest. For example:

That we be a community that loves and falls down before you, O Lord

That we be filled with the fire of the Holy Spirit

That we be the salt of the earth and the light of the world

For a hedge of protection from the evil one

To see Your vision for the community

That You O Lord would add to this vineyard according to Your will

For all catechumens and inquirers, known and unknown especially:_____

¹Of course, these prayers are offered in connection with or in addition to our regularly established rule of prayer.

For the raising up of leaders
For a spirit of humility and commitment
That we would be honest with our tithe
That we would hear God's word concerning a worship facility
For the priest(s) and shepherd(s) of the community(Name[s]), who must answer before the throne of God for the community:
That he/they might have a spirit of humility, stability, peace and joy
That he/they might have the Gifts of discernment and wisdom
For a hedge of protection for family and self, both spiritual and physical
That he/they might hear and preach Your Word for the community
That his/their preaching be clothed with the Holy Spirit
That He/they may be filled with the Holy Spirit and the light of Christ
That he/they may nurture and increase the spiritual gift of leadership given to him/them at ordination
That his family needs be met.²

The saying may be trite, but it is based on experience: A church that prays together, stays together. The priest, especially, must always be undergirded by prayer, because if the shepherd is struck (whether by the demons or through his own fallenness), the flock will be scattered. Satan has painted a target on the back of every priest. He wants everyone to notice the spec in his eye and every stumble he makes. He and his family need love, mercy and prayer.

Prayer for any outreach event is essential. We must ask that our Lord bless the event, and lead those parishioners whom He has called to participate in it. We must pray that the church minister freely and without hindrance, asking for illumination by the grace of the Holy Spirit, present in the Church since Pentecost. The Molieben (prayer service) Before Beginning any Good Work is particularly appropriate, as is the hymn in tone 6 from Palm Sunday:

The grace of the Holy Spirit
 has assembled us today;
 taking up Thy cross, we sing
 Hosanna in the highest,
 blessed is He that comes in the Name of the Lord!.

Liturgy And Prayer

The church must also pray liturgically about this planting endeavor. First, the patron saint of the newly-planted mission has a special relationship to that mission. The priest can serve a weekly molieben to the patron of the mission, in public whenever possible, asking the saint's intercession for the mission. At these moliebens (or akathists), the names of all inquirers can be commemorated along with those of catechumens and others commemorated during the Liturgy.

At the Divine Liturgy during the Proskomedia, all catechumens and all Orthodox who are members of the church community and/or committed to the newly-planted mission should be commemorated. During the Litany of Fervent Supplication, special petitions can be offered for the mission. For example:

² Drawn from Common Prayer Discipline, St. Justin the Martyr, St. Justin the Martyr, Jacksonville, FL

We pray for spiritual growth and understanding in this vineyard that You have planted with Your right hand and that You add to the numbers in this vineyard according to Your will.

We praise You Lord and give thanks to You, and we pray for those that support this mission with their prayers and gifts, especially _____

Through the intercessions of the missionary saints of North America, Lord bless and add to the numbers of this vineyard that You have planted.³

Many Orthodox communities cut the services, as if the Liturgy were too long, as though it were something to be endured, rather than entered into. The Liturgy we celebrate is a foretaste of heaven, not an obligatory Sunday morning event. One portion frequently cut is the Litany for the Catechumens. How unevangelical! The liturgical cycle of the church in part has developed around the reception of catechumens. This evangelical vision is lost when this litany is eliminated! Some reason illogically that if we have no catechumens, why do the litany? St. John Chrysostom refuted this pseudo-argument in the fourth century. A parish church may lack catechumens, but this does not mean that the Church everywhere lacks them. The catechumens everywhere need all the prayers they can get. Let's not deny them that charity at least. To lose this perspective and drop the Litany for the Catechumens is liturgically to lose sight of evangelism.

This section has concentrated on intercessory prayer for the establishment and success of missions, and the welfare of catechumens and inquirers. As important as such prayer is, it needs to be said that the "mercy, life, health, peace, and forgiveness of sins" that we entreat for others are the very things we ourselves need and desire. Of all the techniques for church growth, for sheer simplicity none can match that of St. Seraphim of Sarov, who said: "*Acquire the Spirit of peace, and a thousand souls around you will be saved.*" It would be blasphemous to think of this as a means to an end: St. Seraphim elsewhere describes the acquisition of the Holy Spirit as the purpose of the Christian life.

Still, it stands to reason. Holiness attracts. If we become men and women of prayer, if we try to overcome our passions, God will bring us in contact with others who desire holiness and truth. St. Dorotheos of Gaza wrote that our relationships with each other can be plotted like the spokes of a wheel. The various spokes of a wheel converge at the hub in the center. The closer a point on a spoke is to the center, the closer it is to the neighboring spokes as well. Likewise, as we come closer to God (the center, around which everything else turns), we also come closer to each other.

Key to an effective prayer life is fasting. It may sound mystical but fasting truly helps us hear God and be obedient to God. Fasting encourages us on the ascetical path. Fasting improves prayer. If you are not fasting with your spiritual father's guidance you are not praying as well as you ought and you are reducing the success of any holy endeavor you may engage.

³ Additional litanies used during Litany of Fervent Supplication, St. Justin the Martyr, Jacksonville, FL

Study Questions

1. How is prayer essential in church planting?
2. What should we pray for in planting a church?
3. Do you have a prayer rule? Do you keep it? Do you fast?
4. Do you pray for your priest, bishop?
Do you pray for inquirers? Catechumens?
5. How many times a week (on average) do you attend church services?
6. Discuss "*Acquire the Spirit of peace, and a thousand souls around you will be saved.*" What is St. Seraphim saying to us?
7. Have you ever met a really holy person? What was their affect on you?

Chapter 3

An Attitude Away From Success

A certain parish priest in a rural parish in the “old country” used to trudge through the mud in the early spring at planting season. At each farmer’s field, he would serve a *molieben* (prayer service), asking for God’s blessing on the farm that year. Only at the field of one parishioner would he refuse, folding up his stole and putting away the holy water. “But why?” asked the owner of the field, a man not known for his callousness. “No *molieben* can help this field,” Father replied, “what this field needs is some manure!”

Father knew the value of “sweat equity,” even if the expression hadn’t been coined yet. In the previous chapter, we saw that prayer lays a foundation for our efforts in church planting and evangelization. Prayer must be accompanied by hard work if it is to bear fruit, however. As the saying goes “Work as if everything depends on you, pray as if everything depends on God.” The hard work of planting a church must be shared by many people, most of whom will be working as volunteers. Often the success or failure of a new church planting depends upon the basic attitude of the founders. They must be encouraged and supported through difficulties. They need to be welcomed and feel that they belong, that they count. Sometimes one person’s negative attitude is enough to kill the infant church and can even harm a larger, mature church.

Once I was asked to attend a council meeting at an established mission to help lead a workshop. My first contacts with the parish had gotten me excited. They had a small but committed core of people. The area had good demographics. I wondered: why was this mission having trouble getting off the ground?

It didn’t take too long to find out. When the people arrived, the priest greeted no one. No hugs, no kisses, no handshakes, no hellos - not even any eye contact. At the appointed time he announced the beginning of the meeting with a bark. The problem with this mission was not the demographics, the people, commitment, etc. It was the priest and his attitude. I have seen dogs with better people skills. The church was a priest’s attitude away from success.

More than anything else, our attitude about any task in life will determine whether we succeed or not. Success or failure in business is directly related to the attitude of the business leader. When the leader has a positive attitude, so will the employee. In the Church, if the pastor communicates warmth and confidence, his flock will pick up on it. It’s been said: “*Life is 10% what happens to me and 90% what I do with it.*”⁴ We are responsible for our attitudes. When things do not go well and stormy seas are before us we must remember that we might not be able to direct the wind, but we can adjust the sails. Having a positive attitude about ministry and the great works of God is *crucial*. When the shepherd has a positive attitude, so will the sheep. If the priest lacks enthusiasm, so will the church. Attitudes are like the flu. Both are contagious. Ask yourself “Who wants to be around negative people?” (Answer: Other negative people!) The attitude of the priest determines the attitude of the people.

Of course, hard times do come. Every new church planting has its share of trials and temptations. Here especially, the positive, hopeful attitude of the priest (and of other key members of the church) can mean the difference between the life and death of the new community.

⁴Attributed to Charles Swindoll

A cold, despondent attitude can kill any parish. There are other attitudes that are just as dangerous, however. After paddling upstream for a few months or years, some church planters become so tired that they give up everything but going through the motions. The priest might stop preparing his sermons or teaching classes. Following his example, lay workers stop having choir rehearsals. The bookstore corner becomes messy and poorly stocked. Everything in the church tells a visitor (if there are any), that no one here thinks anything important happens here.

In 1 Corinthians 3:6-23 we see a totally different approach. There we see that Paul planted the church with an attitude of excellence. He says he built *like a skilled master builder*, i.e. with expertise and an eye for quality and permanence. He told us that we in our turn should do our work with *gold, silver and precious stones*, i.e. quality materials that will stand the test of time- not wood, hay or straw that will be burned up on the last day. All our work in the Church should be our best effort. It must be the best we can do, not second best or done with an "I'll take whatever I can get" attitude. We must give God our best, and we must be ready to continue doing so for the long haul. If a negative attitude can prevent an otherwise healthy church planting from taking off, a positive attitude on the part of the leaders will maximize resources and even cover over certain defects or lacks. Again, St. Paul teaches by example. He says that he freely *made himself a servant (1 Cor. 9:19)* to the Corinthians, in order that he *might win more*. It seems paradoxical, but servants make the best leaders. Employees who serve the company best rise to the top of the organization. Even the Apostle Peter did not understand this when our Lord washed his feet. Servanthood is:

- an attitude of selflessness, keeping a focus on the other person and their needs,
- not afraid to get its hands dirty,
- transparent, sincere, and humble,.
- more concerned with doing than with getting the credit for doing.

If the priest is to be recognizable as an icon of Christ, he must have an attitude of servanthood. Our Lord said: "*I have come to serve, not to be served,*" and washed the apostles' feet at the Last Supper. In the same way, the priest who would faithfully serve the Eucharist must also be willing to wash his people's feet. Servanthood comes with a price tag: time, resources and humility.

If the priest's attitude is vital for success, the outlook of the community is also important. The way the members of the fledgling community understand their mission is key to whether the church will be evangelical or merely dead wood. What does a healthy church attitude look like? A healthy church:

- is excited about the Gospel and the Orthodox way of life,
- has a passion for excellence,
- holds prayer as a priority,
- tithes,
- has outreach programs,
- has strong, encouraging leadership

All of this implies the cultivation of a team spirit. Ideally, there will be strong emphases both on pastoral care and lay ministry. For this to happen, the people need to know that their contribution is a welcome and is even anticipated. The priest in such a parish is *in touch* with the people. *For* them, he serves as priest; *with* them, he is a

disciple.⁵

What is the attitude of the members towards the church's future? What is this mission being established to do, to be? According to *Webster's Dictionary*, a group of people gathered together for a social, literary, political, or any other purpose is called a club. It is an organization that offers its subscribers certain benefits, in return for regular purchases or payments. Characteristics include members having the same social interests, a limited membership, and dues. Unfortunately, such an outlook is common in churches today. Many new missions are begun with a mixture of new converts and "cradle" Orthodox, the latter of which are often transplants from established parishes in other places. It is inevitable that "the way things got done" in people's previous churches get borrowed to become a sort of "template" for establishing the new one. Many of our people will come from churches that have been preoccupied historically with merely staying in existence or maintaining the status quo. These are called maintenance-minded churches. To maintain means to keep the same, in due condition, preserve, or retain in a specified state.⁶ A maintenance-minded church is more interested in repairing roof leaks, plumbing, painting, and mowing the lawn than in spreading the Gospel. Characteristics of a maintenance minded church include:

- No evangelism or outreach programs,
- it keeps busy taking care of self/institution (self-centered),
- Lay leadership is concerned about repairs and not prayers
- Not excited about the Gospel or the Orthodox way of life and their role in it
- Dues system, lack of tithing, poor stewardship
- Outreach is the sole responsibility of the priest ("That is why we pay him!")
- Founded and based on social/ethnic interests,
- Priorities are based on social/ethnic interests.

Historically, maintenance-minded "club" churches are products of innocently ignorant, weak on the evangelical side shepherding. In worst-case scenarios, they can only be seen as being "dead" or "dry bones" because they lack understanding and purpose. They will find it difficult to provide fruit for our Lord's harvest. A radical change in attitude is needed, and it is possible, particularly in new churches where such attitudes have not been reinforced for generations. In older parishes, strong shepherding can, over time, create this positive change. As we look around, it becomes obvious that not all churches thrive - or even survive. We are in a race that not everyone can win. Only if we concentrate on winning the race - on excellence - do we have any hope of doing so. If we just concentrate on maintaining or getting by, we will lose. (*1 Cor. 9:24*)

The key to success in any church plant is to produce a positive mission-minded church culture and to have an encouraging, positive shepherd. This is not artificially created. It arises from loving God and wanting to share that love with others. Maintaining the right attitude is easier than trying to regain it once it has withered away. Success in church planting requires a positive attitude.

⁵A paraphrase of St. Ambrose of Milan.

⁶Webster's Dictionary

Study Questions

1. How are attitudes like the flu?
2. Define excellence. Define mediocrity.
3. What is servanthood?
4. What kind of attitude do you have? What would others say?
5. Is the glass half full or half empty?
6. Compare and contrast a maintenance mindset with an outreach mindset.
7. What specific things might a visitor look for in a church for evidence that it is outreach-oriented? That it is maintenance-minded?

Chapter 4

How To Let God Grow The Church And How To Stay Out Of His Way

"I tell you lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest"
(Jn 4:35)

"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few, pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. I send you out as lambs in the midst of the wolves"
(Luke 10:2-3)

"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." (Jn 6:44)

If the Gospel is worth anything, it is worth everything. When I began to commit my life to Christ, I wanted to share Christ in a big way, but I felt unequipped - and I was. I lacked spiritual maturity and knowledge. So I asked my priest to teach me evangelism. He said he didn't know how to. When I asked for Orthodox books to read, he could offer none. When I inquired about seminary courses on the subject, there were none. Still, the fire burned inside of me. In seminary, I began to research nondenominational-evangelical Christian materials, and what I discovered was that what was really genuine in their evangelism was totally Orthodox. St. Innocent, Sts Cyril and Methodius, St. Herman of Alaska were all bona fide evangelists. Their approach didn't come out of reading a book. It came out of living their lives in communion with God. A personal, deep relationship with God is the source of an evangelical life.

It seems the concept of evangelism is hard for some Orthodox to understand and accept. A convert from Evangelical Protestantism with a seminary degree once told me that he could not define Orthodox evangelism. It is something that goes beyond the academic. Many Orthodox misunderstand what evangelism is. For many it is too closely woven in with their perception of televangelism or Christian radio programming. This "media-oriented evangelism" invokes the name of Jesus over a mixture of secular and Biblical principles, often apparently with the central goal of adding to the "ministry's" bottom line: "Lay your hand on the TV and mail your money to the address on the screen." Such an approach has given both the Church and evangelism a bad name.

Non-denominational-Evangelical numbers style evangelism is often purely subjective: sing a few feel-good hymns; hear a moving sermon; get a feel-good goose-bump feeling; emotionally walk the aisle; accept the "*once saved always saved*" non-theological approach to eternal life and that's it! Adding to their subjective approach to evangelistic content is a quantitative measure of success: these churches might be a mile wide in people even while they're an inch deep in the substance of faith. They are built on the personality of the preacher. Someone once told me that a mega church they were building near him looked "more like a people warehouse than a church!" Granted, a certain faith is sometimes encountered in such places, but this is not the faith of the Three Holy Youths that turned fire into dew (Daniel 3:17). The Church is called to do more than gather numbers.

If non-denominational-evangelical, numbers style evangelicalism has stressed a broad but shallow approach, the narrow way of Orthodoxy, on the other hand, is one inch wide (at least in America!) but infinitely deep. In America our numbers are smaller than those of other groups, but Orthodoxy is the fullness of Christian faith. These numbers reflect the fact that, up until now, evangelism has not been practiced in a consistent and vital way by Orthodox in America. An organic, genuinely Orthodox evangelism would

cause the Church to become “wider” (i.e., attract more people). There is no need, though, to sacrifice depth (truth, doctrinal quality) for width. In fact, depth attracts and develops width.

In statistics compiled by Evangelicals themselves, it has been shown that most of those who “walk the aisle” backslide⁷ after the effervescence of their conversion wears off. Confused, untaught, and immediately subject to the attacks of spiritual warfare, these new Christians are left to flounder in the shallows of weak faith. Evangelism for us is radically different: we have a period of inquiry; a catechists/catechumenate; and after the reception of the catechumen, the concern with continual repentance and conversion to Christ on a daily basis - what might be called a constant *self*-evangelism.

Subconsciously, some Orthodox seem suspicious of “doing” evangelism, though this is rarely expressed. It appears to them to be a Western Christian concern. Certainly, part of this attitude that evangelism is “just not Orthodox” comes from Orthodoxy’s historical experience. Too often, the only experience Orthodox Christians have of “evangelism” has been on the receiving end - whether from Muslims, communists, or Roman Catholic Uniats. Persecution has built a siege mentality in us. As a result, some well-meaning Orthodox today see evangelism only as a (Protestant) weapon that is used *against* the Church. Seeking to *protect* the Church, and sure that all evangelism is sectarian in theology and practice, they reject any attempts at a genuine Orthodox evangelism. Often, when lay people are on fire for Christ, these Orthodox who seek to “protect the Church” spend their time dousing them with water, instead of adding fuel and directing the burn. They are quick to say that the Orthodox Church is the true Church and why this is so, but they do not effectively preach the Good News. In this world of bad news, people need to hear the Good News.

Evangelism literally means sharing the Good News. When we truly receive the Good News in our lives, we will not and cannot keep it to ourselves. God cannot be contained. He will overflow like a spring of water welling up to eternal life (*Jn 4:14*). This is an aspect of the Orthodox understanding of evangelism. Our Lord, the foremost evangelist and our model said, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the Good News to the poor.” (*Lk 4:18ff cf. Is 61:1ff.*) Jesus also said, “As the Father has sent Me, even so I send you . . . Receive the Holy Spirit.” (*Jn 20:21-22*). He gave us Power from on high to do this work. (*Acts 1:8*) The thirst to evangelize is part of us, part of our inner being. Our Lord commands it as a primary task of the body of Christ as a whole, and as the task of each member of the body.

While not all Orthodox are called to be evangelists (remembering St. Paul: “*Are all teachers? Are all evangelists?..*”), all will naturally do the work of evangelism as a result of their Christian life. Drawing nearer to Christ, a person becomes a more evangelical Orthodox Christian, as St. Seraphim of Sarov says: “Acquire the Spirit of peace and a thousand souls around you will be saved.” The closer we draw to God, the more we will be filled with the Holy Spirit, and the more we will know about evangelism, taught by the Spirit.

St. Paul likewise tells us that evangelism is a gift of the Holy Spirit (*Eph 4:11*). It arises out of one’s spiritual journey.

As we acquire the Holy Spirit, we begin to get a share of Our Lord’s compassion for the lost. In Luke 15, Jesus tells us three back-to-back parables: about a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son (the Prodigal Son). Extraordinary things are done to win back the lost

⁷ Barna, George, [Evangelism that Works](#)

in these parables: a shepherd leaves a large flock to find a stray sheep; a woman tears the house upside down to find the lost coin; and a father reinstates his dissolute, wandering son to his former position of honor and intimacy at the homestead. Our efforts in evangelism must arise out of this same kind of love, which will grow in us as we draw nearer to Him. If Orthodoxy is a way of life that seeks to live always and fully in communion with God, then evangelism, sharing the Good News, must be an integral part of this way of life for it to be complete. Though evangelism cannot be taught like driving a car, we can outline some basic principles.

Being Genuine: Taking First Steps

First, we need to become genuine, transparent, and non-manipulative. To evangelize others, we need to have credible relationships with non-Orthodox and non-Christians. This alone can cause us to move outside of our social comfort zone. Yet only after we have a solid, positive relationship with someone can we raise topics of faith and out of only the motivation of love share the eternal truths of the Gospel. Timing is key, and God gives the moment. The opportunity to witness is almost a natural/organic to the relationship. As long as we never compromise the truth - and often even if we have - God will provide an opportunity to present the Gospel.

Keeping Our Focus

When the moment comes, discernment is needed. In today's de-Christianized society, some potential converts may not know who Christ is at all. Others may be practicing, believing Christians. In either case, we should take care that our witness is Christ-centered, concentrating on the person of Christ and His work. Should we preach the Church? Yes, but only in context. Some people, familiar with (and frustrated with) rootless forms of Christianity, may need and want to hear about *The Church*, that one which has preached Christ from the very beginning. For others, the word conjures up images of cold, lifeless institutions. "The Church is an organism, not an institution," says Fr. Justin Popovich. When we speak to inquirers about the Church, we should always describe it as *Christ's Church*, as *His* body, *His* bride. The Church exists to bear witness, not to itself, but to Christ. We need to remember this when doing the work of evangelism. People need a Savior, not what this culture perceives as an institution.

Paying The Dues To Preach The Good News

Bearing witness requires us to pay our ascetical dues. Only people of prayer who are radically committed to Christ as the source of their life, their reason for living, will persevere in evangelism successfully. We simply cannot give away what we don't have. We want to be persons who pursue ascetic disciplines, not noticing the speck in our brother's eye, but the log in ours (*Matt. 7:3*). We must be persons of integrity, willing to pay the price for it in time and energy.

And we will pay a price. At times, we will find ourselves doing things we do not want to do, and going places we do not want to go. People will falsely accuse us. (Blessed are you!) We need to remember that Jesus himself was called a glutton and drunkard. We have to step out in faith and depend completely on God. Little by little, the paradoxes of the Beatitudes become a lived experience, and our faith grows. As our faith and spiritual life develop, they will become infectious to others. We will become more people-oriented. We will have opportunities to share our joy.

Sharing *With*, Not Talking *Down*

It's often been said: heart speaks to heart. The purpose of evangelism is not so much to educate as to illumine - to turn a light on. The idea is not to present a class on Jesus or about the life in Him. It is to lead people to Jesus and His Church. This is the true goal. Nor is it our job to confront the sin in their life (*Jn 4:16-18*). The Holy Spirit does this, for He alone is Judge. We are to lead people into the Kingdom of Heaven, not convict them of a crime. Proselytizing is unacceptable and is not evangelism. Genuine evangelism is never confrontational. It is a sin to impose anything on anyone or to pressure anyone, perhaps including knocking on doors uninvited.

Communicating The Gospel

"In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female,..." says St. Paul. It is to be expected that, as we mature in our faith and gain experience in evangelism, we will be able to speak and interact comfortably with a wider variety of people. The fact remains, though, particularly in the early stages: most of us can only evangelize people we have a certain amount in common with. Birds of a feather *do* flock together. We must be honest with ourselves. What socioeconomic group do we best function in and what ethnic group are we a part of? This does not mean we cannot cross these barriers. But the ability to do so is a gift. Members of separate homogeneous groups do not easily cross linguistic, cultural, racial or class boundaries. In fact, these boundaries are often barriers to deep relationships such as church membership and marriage. (As an example, consider the small number of interracial marriages in our country.) Of course, primary in all this is the one person to whom the Holy Spirit is leading us. The missionary saints understood this. They adopted the culture of the people to whom they were sent; they listened to the Natives and became a part of their culture, always affirming the positive. Some of these "foreign" missionaries became so beloved by their converted spiritual children that they have become symbols of their adopted land and culture: some examples are St. Patrick of Ireland, St. Nina of Georgia, and our own St. Herman of Alaska.

Preparing The Church For Evangelizing

It is easy to think that preparing the local church for evangelism is a matter of setting up a parish program. Setting up a program is not a bad idea - but its not so simple. One of the central thrusts of this work is that evangelism is a natural fruit of healthy parish life: a healthy church evangelizes. Evangelism, then, is a way of life - not just a church program. The activities of the church must be modeled with evangelism in mind: very often they (unwittingly) undo the work of evangelism. Much as the individual needs to take a personal inventory, deepen his spiritual life, and develop new skills in order to be a successful evangelist, so the local church needs to look over its activities in light of evangelism.

This includes, among others:

business cards - Is the design clear, attractive? Is there a map to the church on the back? A schedule of services?

church appearance - Does the church and its property look neat and clean? Is there a sign? What indications are there outside that life is going on inside?

church school - Is there one? Is it advertised? (a relevant, interesting and quality church school curriculum is something many "church-shopping" parents are looking for.)

liturgical matters - Is the liturgical schedule advertised? Are there user-friendly books for visitors to follow the service? Does anyone greet the visitors and get their addresses?

pamphlet racks, book/icon stores - Are there any? Are they neat, attractive in appearance - or hard to find, dirty and dusty, with dog-eared pamphlets and shopworn books? Are they well stocked with a selection of inexpensive materials aimed at newcomers and inquirers?

☐small groups - Is there an inquirer's/newcomers class? A Bible study? What service opportunities are there for newcomers to be involved in?

☐social activities, outreach projects - Does the church meet for events other than liturgical services? Does it have any outreach to the community?

☐annual budget - Does the budget make room for the expenses incurred by any of the above?

Special attention should be given to the area of music.

Liturgical Music

The importance of good music and singing in worship cannot be overestimated. Everything in the Church must be done with a spirit of excellence, and this is especially true of music. Our worship is not of this world, and our music should evoke this transcendence. We need only remember the experience of St. Vladimir's emissaries in Constantinople. They too, were "shopping for a church," and reported back to their prince that, standing in the cathedral, they no longer knew whether they were in heaven or earth. They summarized: "We cannot forget that beauty."

If reverent, beautiful liturgical singing reminds us of heaven, then poor singing reminds us of something less. Such singing is a real barrier to the newcomer. A good and committed choir director is a valuable minister in a healthy church, and people capable of doing this difficult ministry should be carefully cultivated and trained, with suitable funds provided by the parish as necessary and possible. A large part of the director's job is to train the choir to lead in congregational singing.

This is a good place to mention that the priest and choir director should give conscious attention to the Saturday night service, whether Vespers or Vigil. Few other religious groups have Saturday night services, and so these become ideal opportunities for inquirers to meet Orthodoxy without making a premature break from their current faith community.

First Impressions: Practicing Hospitality

A missionary-minded church is sensitive to newcomers. It is a church that remembers the Biblical focus on hospitality. Does the visitor feel welcomed; is he or she made to feel at home? The Apostles Peter and Paul both teach us to practice hospitality (*Rom 12:13, 1 Peter 4:9*). Since it is God who builds the Church, it is He who brings the first-time guest/visitor (*Jn 6:44*).

One first-time visitor may come out of curiosity or to accompany a friend. Another may have heard a recording of Orthodox music. Others may have specific questions or have come with deep needs. Some will come with the need for profound healing. This should not surprise us. We live in an individualistic, self-centered society, full of depression and bad news. Many people really do wonder whether anyone cares if they live or die. This may be the day of salvation for the first-time guest. People are hungry for the love of God. They are fleeing from this world of unmet expectations. They need to know God and His Church, and that someone cares for them and loves them unconditionally.

All first time guests come with high expectations. The church community must prepare the person from the time he or she enters the door to meet Christ (and even before, if this visit is connected with an outreach event). All the members of the church have a share in this responsibility, but in practice it seems to work out best to give this work to a particular group of people. It is said that newcomers decide unconsciously whether or not they like their surroundings within the first few minutes. The customer service industry knows that the most important people are those out front who greet the customer: the hotel

desk clerk, the airport gate agent, or the restaurant maitre-d. In church, it is the doorkeeper or greeter who makes the first impression on the visitor: *“Welcome! It is a joy to have you here with us...”*⁸

The Ministry Of Greeters/Door Keepers

Greeters should be chosen with real care. Not all volunteers will be suitable. Although there are no rules, many parishes have had the best success with a man-woman team, or with two women. Sometimes the natural choice for an appointed greeter is the person who is already doing it! Qualities to look for in a good volunteer are:

- knowledgeable of the faith- can answer the common questions- (Why Liturgy? Why icons?, Why vestments?, Why can't a visitor take Eucharist?, etc.)
- a friendly manner; (though not too strong - the greeter should not remind your guests of an overbearing salesperson)
- a good memory; (which helps in introducing “our new guest whatshername” to other parishioners after the Liturgy)
- a good listener. (as important a skill as being a good talker - and much rarer)

Greeters And The First-Time Guest

First-time guests are escorted into the church and receive a packet containing a welcoming message and brief information about the Orthodox faith. Orthodox worship is hard for the first-time visitor to understand, so if this is their first time attending the Divine Liturgy they should be paired up with someone who can assist them in following it and answer their questions. After the service, they must be encouraged to attend coffee hour, and parishioners must make an effort to welcome them. Visitors should not be left unattended, or they will feel self-conscious, conspicuous, or awkward. At the coffee hour, no one should ever leave a first-time guest without introducing them to some one else.

Strong efforts must be made to encourage parishioners to introduce themselves to guests. Part of the greeter's ministry can be to help this along, taking the guest under their wing and introducing them to other members of the church. Nevertheless, hospitality is not only the responsibility of the priest and the greeter. Parishioners must be reminded - perhaps often, at first - to talk with visitors rather than only with family members or friends. Old habits die hard, and some are shy about their ability to “go fishing for men.” We don't have to cast any nets for visitors, though - these are fish that have jumped into the boat themselves! The least we can do is pick them up.

Following Up On The First Visit

Someone should follow up with visitors. A card the next day in from someone can reinforce a positive experience. Hopefully, a repeat visit will follow. A large percentage of repeat visitors join the parish.

If the first visit was a “casual date” (and it isn't always), the return visitor will probably come with some more questions. Give them time to talk about their first impressions. An experienced missionary priest, Fr. Constantine Nasr reminds: “Be a listener more than a talker. Hear their story -- really listen. Emphasize the things you have in common, especially the Bible, our common denominator.” Taking the visitor on a short tour of the church or showing them the bookstore can help questions come up in a natural way. The second-time visitor may not be convinced yet that the Orthodox Church is his spiritual

⁸Good or bad, a first impression is not soon forgotten. One priest likes to recall the □greeter□ in one parish, who met visitors with the words: □Welcome! This used to be such a nice, friendly little church!□

home. He is dissatisfied enough with his spiritual life that he is searching for something, though -- and is at our door to do it.

Outreach Events

The pollster George Barna has written that if churches merely *kept* the people that came to them as visitors, (i.e., the fish that jump into the boat) they would grow. The Lord has asked us to cast nets, however - to go fishing actively. One way of doing this is through outreach events. If the church conducts well-organized seeker-sensitive outreach events - events where people are challenged with Christ, and if already Christian, the fullness of the Orthodox way of life people will join. Remember, the Father draws people (*Jn 6:44*). There should be no proselytizing, and there is no need for it. The key in these events is quality, visitor-sensitive Orthodox literature and knowledgeable, eager, joyful, loving people ready to answer questions. Guests at the outreach event need to know that you are thankful for the opportunity to make this presentation to them and that you are available to serve their needs. This is essential to real servant leadership.

Some ideas for outreach events are:

- guest speakers - especially those who have a story to tell (well-known converts, missionaries), or who speak about items of general interest (raising children, family life, spiritual life, etc.);
- concerts - either by sponsoring a guest group or singer (anything from one of the various Russian choral groups which tour the U.S. to an Orthodox singer of Christian contemporary music.), or by presenting parish choir singing Orthodox hymns of the season;
- seminars, workshops, spirituality - on family life, church history, conflict resolution in families, aging, prayer, vegetarian (i.e., Lenten) cooking, etc;.

Some Specific Examples:

- < When one city had a two-week-long Russian festival, a local parish sponsored a concurrent "Russian Orthodox Film Festival," and rented a large TV to show videos on religious themes and church life. Each film was introduced, and refreshments followed the showing, often with lively discussion.
- < In another city, many Christians were outraged when a controversial and blasphemous film had its debut. A local church hosted a "Service of Praise to Jesus Christ" - the Akathist to the Sweetest Lord Jesus. The service was sung by the congregation, which was facilitated by a well-rehearsed choir and carefully prepared booklets.
- < In a Midwestern city, a small parish choir gave a lecture/concert that introduced the liturgical music of the Orthodox Church. The concert was very well received by the mostly non-Orthodox audience, many of whom expressed surprise and delight that the group sang in English.

In addition to such special, one-of-a-kind events, some of which are specifically aimed at evangelism, we should not ignore the possibility for evangelism hidden in more mundane and ongoing activities. Orthodoxy is as much a way of life as it is a saving message. Orthodox Christians should be at work in the marketplace: doing pro-life activities; joining (perhaps as part of a team from church) in a local project like Habitat for Humanity; tutoring for literacy or ESL; taking in unwed mothers, etc. Such acts of service, as good as they are for our own souls, also lay the groundwork for "preaching the Gospel to the poor."

Newcomers' Class

However initial contact is made, there must be an opportunity for follow-up with the visitor in a non-confrontational manner. A bridge must be built to span the chasm between Orthodoxy and other worldviews. The inquirer needs to have the opportunity to examine the faith in a non-threatening environment, and an inquirers follow-up class provides the perfect forum.. This class is *essential* - even the name is important, and should be chosen with care. An invitation to join an "Orthodox Catechism Class" can intimidate the inquirer; it implies a commitment that may be premature. Better, non-threatening names such as Newcomer's Class, Inquirer's Class, or Introduction to Orthodoxy often are more appealing.

While many people are brought to the Church through the Liturgy, that is not the place for inquirers to learn the faith. Undoubtedly, evangelization and education go on in the services, but this is secondary for inquirers. Orthodox Liturgy is not for outreach. It is for worship. For some, it may be better to till the soil with an inquirers class for a while, before even introducing people to Liturgy. That way, once they do attend, it will be less threatening and more appreciated.

A newcomer's class allows the inquirer and priest to get to know each other. As relationships are built, the priest has the opportunity to encourage and challenge each person with the fullness of the Orthodox way of life. It is a time of witness, testimony, preaching, and teaching. In it, the inquirer should begin to experience the healing, love and wisdom of Christ and His Church through the priest. The newcomer has the opportunity to ask difficult questions that the priest can answer with delicate pastoral precision, considering the person's background and spirituality. These backgrounds need to be taken into account, and different ones may predominate in different parts of the country. An ex-Baptist will have different expectations and use different religious filters than someone coming from a secular Jewish, New Age, or Buddhist background.

After six to eight weeks of class time, it is also a good idea for the church to host a potluck meal during class time and honor the inquirers. Sharing food can say more about Orthodoxy than ten sermons, and is an important part of almost any church group activity, from the coffee hour after Sunday liturgy. It is Eucharistic! When one convert in the Pacific Northwest was asked why he joined the Church, he answered: "Because of the food!"

Integrating The Newcomer

Integrating new people in the community efficiently is extremely important. The priest must pay attention to every person, making sure they are not moving too slowly or too quickly. There are many factors involved in measuring how well people are assimilating. Among the main ones are:

- *regular* worship attendance and private prayer,
- referring to the church using the personal pronouns *my* and *our*,
- making new friends,
- tithing,
- accepting the moral and ascetical life of the Church, (i.e., fasting, Christian standards in personal life)
- participating in small groups-Bible studies, men/women groups, etc.
- and taking on a lay ministry.

Note that many of these factors involve direct involvement, commitment and service (worship attendance, tithing, ministry). Small group ministries, based on common interests, are important for developing interpersonal relationships in the community. People who have intellectually and spiritually become Orthodox through catechism, but have deep roots

in other communities (especially Christian communities), are slow in coming. It is hard to leave one family and join another - once they have *crossed the line*, there is no going back. But this requires a slow and painful reorientation. The priest and the laity must be understanding, loving, and supportive, affirming the inquirer. Converts often lose jobs and friends because of their journey. This is real conversion.

Potential converts must never be pressured. Their freedom must be respected. We may lovingly and gently nudge them, but it is only the Holy Spirit who converts. We are merely conduits of God.

The Sponsor/Godparent

This does not mean leaving the potential convert in isolation, however. Part of the priest's focus on assimilating these people includes assigning laity to befriend them and eventually sponsor them. The role of godparent/sponsor is deeply honored in traditional Orthodox cultures, and we should take a cue from this. A carefully chosen sponsor can and should be a friend and confidant for life, a sort of older brother/sister who helps show the narrow path to the new Orthodox. The godparent also is a living reminder that the new convert has joined a *family*. Often, long before baptism/chrisamation, suitable people meet by attraction. The priest may need to introduce the inquirer towards certain possible future sponsors.

Book & Tape/CD Ministries

We live in an information-oriented society. Information needs to be readily available for inquirers. Therefore, a literature rack, a bookstore, and a church library containing seeker-sensitive material are all must-haves for a healthy church. But one must be careful. The wrong book at the wrong time can seriously derail the inquirer. People need information to make a decision. Nevertheless, we should not be tempted to give out too much information for free. People are not often inclined to read what is free, since they have nothing invested in it.

An audiotape/cd ministry can be very effective. Audiotapes/cds for the car and videotapes for the home are both important. These can augment any study and create thirst for more knowledge. There are many more of these than there once were, on subjects from spirituality to theology. Audiotapes containing testimonies of prominent converts are indispensable and can be given to the inquirer as a gift. Such information should be seeker-sensitive and non-intrusive. The inquirers can then listen at their own pace and develop questions for the priest. In addition, the bookstore should carry a selection of Orthodox music on CD and cassette.

The Priest And The Inquirer

The priest must be able to identify with the inquirer. He must have a working knowledge of the seeker's faith (or its lack), his/her background and previous experience of worship. What is Christ offering to such a person? How does this come to him/her through the Church? These are the questions to which the priest must find a clear and articulate answer.

The priest himself must be busy developing close relationships between himself, the church community, and all inquirers. Jesus built relationships with people at meals. The priest should take this model and do the same. He should also open his home for dinner on a regular basis with members of his flock and with serious inquirers according to their individual needs and interests. Again, we are a Eucharistic church! As a church grows

past the 150 membership level this may become somewhat impractical. At this point the priest should have mentored others into this work.

Fr. Daniel Byantoro, the planting priest of the Indonesian Orthodox church, has performed more than two thousand baptisms since 1988 in this predominantly Muslim country. Today, there are about 20 native priests. While speaking at St. Vladimir's Seminary in October, 1993, Fr. Daniel stated that his method of evangelism was to get to know people one by one, starting with the ones he was already acquainted with. Perhaps there really is no other way. The Lord calls us each by name - not by number! The easiest people to evangelize are the ones you take an interest in. A shepherd must know his sheep. (*Jn 10:14*)

All Christians by virtue of their baptism are called to share the Good News, so they must be well equipped. For instance, everyone can invite someone to an outreach event, Bible study, etc. It is said that sixty to ninety percent of the people who join a church were invited by a friend. The most successful invitations sometimes come with wheels attached. Car wheels. One way to ensure one hundred per cent attendance is to pick up people who accept an invitation. One hundred percent of the people you give a ride to, - attend.

Evangelism: It's Not A Numbers Game

Evangelism in the early church was qualitative, not quantitative. Though casting nets is quantitative, nurturing is qualitative. The Church is not about numbers, but about people. The real effectiveness of a church is not measured by Sunday attendance, but by its sending power, its fruitfulness, the number of people doing ministry, and the impact it is making in people's lives. Quality attracts quantity.

Critical Mass: Size Counts!

We may not measure our evangelistic success by numbers, but our inquirers and first-time visitors are likely to. As just mentioned, the true effectiveness of the local church is not just measured by the numbers in the nave on Sunday morning, but by the number of people doing ministry. However, the newcomer to the church does not see this. He/she sees a vibrant, growing, enthusiastic church (i.e, a *full* church) - or something else. A full church suggests this is a church where people want to be. A less than full church causes the first time visitor to wonder what is wrong?

We've come to the question of critical mass. This isn't a spiritual question, but a matter of perception. "Nothing breeds like success" goes the old saying. Does the church look alive? Whether we like it or not, people seem to "stick" more readily when the parish reaches a critical mass. What is critical mass, and when has the church reached it? There are different ways of looking at the question. Critical mass occurs when:

- the church seems full. (Full is about eighty percent capacity in the mind of the visitor.)
- the church has enough people that a visitor feels comfortable and doesn't stand out. (One person puts it: "You feel you can hide in the crowd.")
- the church has enough people and resources so that it is meeting expenses and ministry is taking place.
- the church seems to have "arrived," it seems stable and permanent.

It's tragic but true. Often, visitors to small missions do not join - for no other reason than because the mission is so small. Usually they do not want to get too involved. They prefer to visit with God and get lost in the crowd. They may want to be part of the crowds

that sat at our Lord's feet when he fed the five thousand, - but they don't want to do any of the cleanup afterwards!

How big is critical mass? To have critical mass, Sunday attendance is more than 50, and perhaps 75 or even 100. It varies from situation to situation, but the number definitely hovers between 75 and 125 in the healthy church.

Reading such numbers is enough to make some would-be missionaries give up in despair. How many even of our well-established parishes have 150 members? Certainly, if we had started churches only where there were already 75-committed Orthodox gathered America would have for fewer churches than it does. It is important to mention here for communities of 1-50, 50-150, 150-350, and 350+ healthy leadership and programming methods vary. My words in this chapter are specifically for the 150 or less parish size.

We Live for Others

Our faith is full of paradoxes. We lose ourselves to find ourselves. We die in order to live. Likewise, in our churches we need to go outside in order to grow inside. Evangelism has often been a missing element in the spiritual life of our parishes. Lacking this outward focus, it has been all too easy for our churches to become closed in on themselves. When we reverse this trend, and go and do evangelism, give alms, do mission work locally or abroad, etc., God blesses us in return. This amounts to a form of self-evangelism. "To him who has, more will be given." God, seeing that we have been good stewards with what we have received, blesses us with more. In other words, when as a church community we make a serious effort to fast, give alms, go on mission trips etc., God seems to bring more sheep to the fold. Experience has shown that when a parish goes on a mission trip as a community, there is both spiritual and numerical growth afterwards.

The Priest's Leadership Role In Evangelism

I was told, and have seen it proved out in practice, that to be effective evangelically, the priest needs to spend at least fifty percent of his time in evangelism-related activities: visiting people, arranging outreach events, preparing and conducting inquirer classes, making the church seeker-sensitive, and preparing evangelical homilies. Maintenance work is necessary, but when focused on the church stops growing. The priest needs to re-evaluate his time and delegation of ministry when he is unable to do focus 50% of his time on outreach related activities.

Study Questions

1. Define Orthodox evangelism. What makes Orthodox evangelism Orthodox? What makes it different from other models of evangelism? What can we learn from other models?
2. How can we be evangelical? Can a program teach us?
3. What are some of the day-to-day activities of an evangelism-minded Orthodox community?
4. Try to look at your parish with the eyes of a newcomer. What are its strengths? Its weaknesses? Ask a friend to visit and ask the initial observations.
5. What improvements can be made immediately? within 6 months?
6. Discuss "critical mass" in terms of Luke 14:28-33.

Chapter 5

Tithing And Alms: It's Not About Money

"The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof."

"For what do you have that you have not received?"

"The Angel Raphael ...exhorts us to give alms freely and generously, saying to us: Prayer is good with fasting and almsgiving; for alms delivereth from death, and the same purgeth away sins (Tobit. 12:8-9). He shows us that prayer and fasting are not enough, and that they are to be assisted by almsgiving; that supplication avails little to obtain what we ask, unless joined to good works and acts of mercy. The Angel reveals... that our requests become efficacious through almsgiving, that our life shall be delivered from dangers by almsgiving, that our soul shall be delivered from death through almsgiving." (Hieromartyr Cyprian of Carthage, +258 A.D.)

I have never met a person who tithes and was not on fire for the Lord.

If you don't tithe, you may not really trust God. Or, put another way: if you don't trust God with your wallet, do you really trust Him with anything else? Tithing is a faith issue, a spiritual issue. It's *not* a money issue. If you are on fire and seek to love God and serve Him with all your heart, mind and soul, you will tithe. Tithing will flow from within you. You will not see it as giving ten percent of *your* money to the Church. Tithing is returning to the Lord what is His. Does not God own the cattle on a thousand hills, or every beast in the forest? (*Ps 50:10*) Is it not God who puts the breath in your lungs? (*Gn 2:7*) Does He not clothe the lilies of the field (*Mt 6:28*) and know the number of hairs on your head? (*Mt 10:30*) Can your money save your soul? Tithing is the *voluntary* return of ten percent of your income to the Lord's storehouse, the Church.

Tithing can be likened to taking the spiritual temperature of the soul. If a person tithes with a pure heart, he is putting his trust in God. The same can be said for the local Church. If it is resistant to tithing, there is a good chance it is resistant to going outside and sharing the Good News. The people have not put all their trust in God. Often they have put their faith in fundraisers instead. Tithing is an issue of faith and trust. Tithing is evangelical!

There are those "*I-believe-in-God-and-go-to-church-every-Sunday-and-do-this-and-that-for-the-church*" people who do not tithe and will resist it. They argue that it is part of the Old Testament law, not a New Testament *requirement*; that it is Protestant, not Orthodox; that it is legalistic, etc. For these people the question really comes down to an issue of Lordship. Who is their Lord, Christ or themselves? Do they have dominion (authority, control, stewardship) over God's creation? (*Gen 1:26*) Orthodoxy is a complete commitment. We owe our whole life and our whole being to God. Tithing is returning far less to God than He has to given us. I have never heard arguments against tithing from truly evangelical, zealous, Orthodox Christians. Orthodoxy is a 100% faith. God lets us off easy at 10%.

Talk Is Cheap

Often, a local church community needs to follow the lead of its pastor to begin tithing in earnest. However necessary it is to preach about tithing, more than sermons are needed. People must see tithing in action. First the priest, and then the lay leadership must model tithing. The parish council must tithe. There must be no doubt where they stand on the question. When the priest does not tithe, he is robbing the souls he has been entrusted with of the opportunity to tithe. He lacks credibility, and even burdens his people when he

urges them to trust God. The Desert Fathers used to say that preaching such virtues without practicing them is like throwing stones down from the top of a tower.

It takes time for a community to learn to tithe. One sermon or workshop is not enough to create a tithing community. The people must first be prepared to receive this message. They must be convinced of Christ's Lordship in their lives, that Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (*Jn 14:6*). With this conviction comes Christlike living and the fullness of the Orthodox way of life.

Tithing And The Eucharistic Life

Our whole selves are involved in the spiritual life. We Orthodox speak of having a *sacramental world-view*, one that takes into account the place of the body as well as the soul and spirit. Just as fasting provides a way to sanctify our eating, so our money (and all it represents) are sanctified through tithing. Madison Avenue might tell us we are *consumers*; but the Church has baptized us and made us *stewards*. Tithing is a reminder that we are born to a higher calling than to shop till we drop. There is an intimate connection between the Eucharist and tithing (*see Gen. 14:18-20*). Tithing is a mystical-sacramental act, for our attitude toward giving reveals the attitude of our soul. Conversely, if we change the attitude of the soul, then we change the attitude toward giving. It's our fallen nature to be self-centered; we need to understand this first if we can ever hope to do something about it for our salvation. Tithing is a tool that helps us to shift our attitude from having our self as Lord to a confession of Christ as Lord.

Beginning To Tithe

It's hard for first-time tithers to tithe. According to some experts, incremental growth from percentage giving to the (10%) tithe rarely works. It may work for some Orthodox though, because Orthodoxy is highly disciplined. The most effective way to quit smoking or alcohol addiction is to go cold turkey. The same may be true with tithing. New tithers have to step out in faith, out of their comfort zone. The priest has to hold their hands; loving and encouraging them. After the initial stages, success will help to build upon success. I have found over and over again that beginning to tithe causes significant spiritual growth for the new tither. This is what is behind the saying, "Once a tither, always a tither."

Motivating Tithers

Tithing must be preached with love. Timing is key. Any preaching on tithing must build upon an already-existing foundation of commitment to Jesus Christ and His Church. People who have "seen the true Light, received the Heavenly Spirit, and found the true faith" will give up many things in order to keep them. Those who are not so committed may just see another person with his hand out when the pastor begins to preach about tithing. A priest should never preach money, only Christ. If the priest preaches money, people will wonder who is the Lord of the community - God or Mammon. Still, the priest must at some point also preach an uncomfortable reality, also: if you are not tithing, you are robbing God. (*Mal. 3:8-10*)

People do not go to a supermarket just to leave their money at the register. When people go to the supermarket, they leave with groceries. Likewise, we shouldn't ask people to tithe without giving them some nourishment in return. How can people be expected to tithe if they are not being fed and nurtured? The body of Christ must be fed. The people want to be nourished and nurtured. We do not pay the check in a restaurant if we do not receive our food, and we are reluctant to pay if the meal was of a poor quality and disappointing.

We do not give money to things we do not like. Likewise, we will naturally not want to tithe if we are not being fed spiritually. This, however, does not mean that priests should simply cater to the desires of the people - the spiritual world has its junk food, too!

It is said that over ninety percent of our waking time is spent either earning or spending money, and yet most people have not been educated as to how to spend their money wisely. Too many people suffer from spending more than they have. The Church has responsibilities to teach in this area. One effective solution to this problem is for the Church to offer financial management classes for the community. This will increase their trust in God and make them better stewards.

Tithing And Our Children

If tithing is a fundamental part of the Christian way of life, as we believe, then it must find a place in our children's education. Children can be taught tithing from an early age. Tithing can and should be taught in church school, but needs to be modeled at home. In addition to their own example, parents can help by giving their children allowances in denominations that allow for an easy calculation of the tithe. For example, a weekly allowance of one dollar can be divided as three quarters, two dimes and a nickel. The parents should assist their children in placing the tithe in the tithe envelope. It is much easier for young children to learn to tithe than it is to re-educate adults who are constantly fighting the old man within.

Almsgiving

"The truth bids us long for our Heavenly home, and to tread under foot the desires of the body, to turn from the glory of this world, not to desire what is another's, to be generous with what is ours. Let each one then reflect within himself whether this voice of God has become loud in the ear of his own heart, and then he will know that he belongs to God." (St. Gregory the Dialogist, Pope of Rome, +604 A.D.)

The fathers of the Church often speak of *almsgiving*, comparing it to one of the strands of a three-ply rope. These three strands, woven together in the ascetical life of an Orthodox Christian are prayer, fasting and almsgiving. These are the themes of Great Lent as well. The rope is weak and may break if the three are not properly interwoven or if one of the strands is absent. Seen in this way, almsgiving covers what we might speak of more generally as financial stewardship, i.e.: tithing and all forms of gift-giving. For our purposes, almsgiving is defined as giftgiving over and above the ten per-cent tithe. St. Paul the Apostle collected alms for the financially poor Christians in the church of Jerusalem. (2 Cor. 9). This is the only type of fundraising that is blessed in the Scriptures.

Offerings are also in addition to the tithe. Offerings beyond the amount of our tithe, for instance the donation of money or a liturgical vessel, are often made by people in thanksgiving to God for many of the blessings they have received or in memory of departed loved ones.

Fundraising And Dues

A front-page article in the local newspaper stirred a lot of conversation in our community. The subject of the article was "Contemporary Worship." Many were shocked to learn that there is a movement in nondenominational-evangelical America to bring rock-n-roll into worship to make it more attractive. This type of worship's aim is to make worship more appealing and thereby to attract greater numbers of people. Two observations we can make are:

- such “contemporary worship” is not Biblical and has never been part of the Christian tradition; and
- this form of worship is type of outreach that lowers the bar. God placed the bar at a certain level, and the Church and its worship exist to help people rise to that level.

The same is true with stewardship. God has placed the bar at a certain level with tithing. To support the church through fundraising instead of tithing is to lower the bar. We must see where the bar is placed and rise to it.

We Orthodox are often grimly amused at the liturgical and dogmatic innovations of other Christian groups. We have to admit, however, that we easily accept very Un-Orthodox things in the area of stewardship and parish management that we would never accept in the areas of parish worship or interior decoration. Can we imagine St. John Chrysostom concluding one of his sermons with an invitation “to support the pastry sale the sisterhood is having to pay for the olive oil bill” at Hagia Sophia? Or can we imagine St. John of Kronstadt reminding his parishioners to buy tickets to the raffle/dinner-dance/Las Vegas night in the parish hall? Of course not.

As Orthodox we would never change our worship and doctrine, so let us not lower the bar either on the holy work of stewardship. Let us seek the Narrow Way. In many parishes this will mean a whole new way of thinking, one that can only be instituted gradually. Extensive fundraising makes newcomers to the faith question whether the Orthodox follow the biblical mandates of stewardship. I know of a specific parish in a fast growing area that practiced tithing and was doing fine meeting its obligations. There was a change in priests and the new priest allowed fundraising. In just a few short years overall income dropped and the priest left because they could no longer pay him. In ten plus years the church has yet to recover and yet has great demographics.

Tithing takes its power from the mystical-sacramental nature of giving, and this is just why fundraising can be a kind of robbery. This may seem pretty abstract, but when lived out, the results can be very concrete indeed. An example: It is unhealthy for a church to have fundraisers to meet week-to-week operating expenses. Fundraising sends the wrong message to outsiders - and to members as well. It says that the members themselves do not value the life of the Church enough to support it for itself, at least not without a pancake breakfast or a chance at winning a pair of vacation tickets thrown in for good measure. If even the members value the Church so little, why should an outsider value it at all?

Fundraising may be acceptable for charitable works. However, St. Paul did not advise the young churches to have a Bingo night, a bake sale, or an ethnic festival to feed the poor in Jerusalem. As alms he said to put something aside at the first of the week (1Cor 16:2) We are to tithe, give alms, and even give from our savings to build the church temple (1 Chr. 29:1-9). This is very different from fundraising.

Why Not A Dues System?

After what has been said above, it should seem obvious that a dues system brings with it many problems. Dues-paying is associated with a whole mentality that is non-productive and self-centered. A person joins a group (whether this is a Toastmaster's International, a country club, a time-share on a beach house, or a church), pays his dues, and rightfully expects that his dues pay for a certain number of rights and privileges. As long as he keeps current with his dues, he is a “member in good standing.” The only good standing membership in heaven is a “broken and contrite heart” that God does not despise. The primary difference between dues-paying and tithing? A club member *pays* dues in

order to get the “rights and privileges” his dues pay for; a Christian returns the tithe in gratitude to God for what God has freely given him.

There are historical reasons why many of our parishes have been legally organized along the lines of a dues-paying club. But this understanding brings with it several unhealthy and unchristian attitudes. Where, for instance, do the Gospels teach us about rights and privileges? And who besides perhaps the Mother of God or the Apostles can really be thought of as “members in good standing” of the Church?

In short, clubs have dues, not churches. The concept of a dues system is antithetical to the Gospel. By itself, this fact should be enough to abolish a parish dues system.

Confidentiality And Practical Concerns

Because money issues are sensitive, church leaders must keep confidential who gives what. Discussing such matters divides a church community and is only from Satan. Avarice may keep people from tithing at all - but vainglory can be the motive behind what looks like charitable giving. *“Do your good works in secret”*, says the Lord. Even the manner we collect tithes can help or hinder our efforts: Boxed envelope systems are good mainly for collecting dust - people forget that they have them, or misplace them. Tithe envelopes mailed monthly are effective because they remind the faithful of the tithe. A priest may congratulate someone for giving above the tithe to the Church, but never thank them. How can you thank someone for being obedient to the Holy Spirit? Praise can lead people into various temptations. In this regard, the recently reposed Elder Cleopa of Romania used to assign almsgiving as a spiritual discipline, but more frequently to the poor (for whom it was a real sacrifice) than to the rich, who could easily donate large sums. The priest must be alert: Are parishioners giving in order to hear the thank you or because God put the call to give in their heart? Either way, the priest must find the way to proper way to encourage and affirm his people for doing God’s work and taking part in His ministry.

We see in the Old Testament that when Israel withdrew from God and stopped tithing, they lost their blessings. God through the prophet Malachi even declared that the people were robbing God when they withheld tithes! (*Mal 3:8-11*) It was not their own money that they withheld from God, but God’s in the first place. St. John Chrysostom, in talking about how Israel gave tithes says “if there was a danger then in omitting tithes how great it must be now.” Responding to a situation where there was a lack of tithing, St. John reminds us that, as the New Israel, we have a greater responsibility to tithe! (St. John Chrysostom Homily IV, on Ephesians 2:1 ff)

Tithing is returning to God’s storehouse what is His. Tithing supports the work of bringing the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Tithing invests in the eternal. It is *not* optional; it is integral to the Orthodox way of life. Tithing churches are driven, not by finances, but by the Gospel. Failure to teach or to encourage people to tithe robs them of the opportunity to trust God with their finances. In so doing, it robs them also of the single greatest tool against the materialism that is the major religious idol of our day. Through tithing, the almighty dollar becomes an instrument we use *for* worship, rather than an object of worship. We rich Christians should remember that most of Jesus’ parables have to do with riches and the proper use of them.

Study Questions

1. Explain the statement: “Stewardship is a Lordship issue.”
2. Explain the statement: “Tithing is not about money.”
3. Why does Jesus give us so many parables on money and material goods?

4. Why are dues-paying and the “club mentality” inappropriate for the Church?
5. Look up and read aloud Malachi 3:8-11. What does this passage say about those who tithe? About those who don't? About you?
6. What is the difference between stealing from the collection plate and not putting in your tithe according to Mal. 3:8?

Chapter 6

Everyone Does Ministry!

And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. (Eph. 4:11-12)

"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." (Mt. 9:37-38)

Project Mexico is a Pan-Orthodox ministry with a support base in San Diego, CA, but which does most of its work across the border near Tijuana, Mexico. The staff and volunteers of Project Mexico build real homes for the poorest of the poor: people who live in dirt-floor shacks pieced together out of construction debris, pallets, scrap-metal sheeting, and other refuse. Their only electricity might be a stray transistor radio battery, the only plumbing - a hole in the ground outside. There in Tijuana I met a family of five living in a pick up camper topper set on concrete blocks.

On the surface, the purpose of Project Mexico is to help bring these people to a better way of life. But all those volunteers (many of them teenagers) who raise money and go there to build homes insist that they themselves receive an even greater blessing. In doing the work of the Gospel, they learn the joy of doing ministry. They who give their free labor to better someone else's life receive a spiritual reward far greater than the material blessing they bring to others. One need not go to Mexico to receive this kind of blessing. Anyone can experience such a blessing by doing work in the parish. Christians, by definition, are to do ministry. The word *Christian* may be a noun, but I like to see it as an action verb - as something we *do*.

For three years our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ walked the earth preaching the Good News, teaching and equipping the disciples for the ministry of bringing this Good News to the ends of the earth. The disciples were simple people. Without theological degrees, but clothed with power from on high (*Luke 24:49*), they changed the world forever.

When we are chrismated, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, that same Spirit who clothed the disciples for the purpose of doing ministry. The gift of the Holy Spirit is dynamic and active. It is a gift to be used, not to be put in a closet or up on a fireplace mantle to admire. The words prayed during the anointing with Holy Chrism, "The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit," are not a certification of membership in some club, entitling us to all the organization's privileges. In chrismation we receive an awesome gift, not of this world, given by grace to help us be disciples, servants and ministers of Christ.

The Church Potato

I call Sunday-morning-only Christians *church potatoes*. Church potatoes come into church, take *their* place, observe the Liturgy - perhaps even take communion, and leave. They return next Sunday to the same place to do the same thing. Some sort of "spiritual loitering" nothing changes in their life. They come only to receive. They are like spectators at a sporting event, not knowing that Orthodox worship is not a spectator sport! Christianity is not for watching, but for doing. Of course I'm overstating. *All of us* come to receive something at church. Becoming conscious of what we receive should make us givers, however. The church potato, by contrast, is more like a baptized agnostic. Such people

have a self-centered, passive approach to faith. They need to get a new paradigm for being an Orthodox Christian. In other words, they need to experience conversion. They may need a lot of love and prayers for this to happen.

The church potato tells himself that he has virtuously done his duty by God in the two hours on Sunday morning that our society allots for it. (We'll leave aside the question of how an Orthodox should spend Saturday nights and feastdays!) He's put in his two hours of worship - but forgets that the other 166 hours of the week are for doing ministry outside the walls of the Church building. Christians are to be like fruit trees, producing fruit. Christ curses the fruitless fig tree (*Mk 11:13-14, 21*) and it withers. The Father prunes the fruitless vine (*John 15:1-2*). The fruit we produce is for the benefit of others - not for our own consumption, but for others to consume. The fruitful Christian bears the fruits of the Holy Spirit (*Gal. 5:22*), and provides an end product for the Kingdom of Heaven (*Jn 15:16*).

God gave pastoral gifts (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers) *to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ (Eph 4:11-12)*. Leadership within the Church exists in order that the whole body of Christ may be *taught, prepared, and equipped*. Thus the Church is enabled to do its work, the ministry of the Church. The ministry of the local Church is fortified and augmented when each member is making use of the unique gift given him/her by the Holy Spirit. Every baptized and chrismated Christian has such a spiritual gift, a gift of the Holy Spirit, and its purpose is to continue the work of Christ in the world. Various lists of these gifts exist in the New Testament, especially in Eph. 4, Romans 12, and 1 Cor.12. These lists are not all-inclusive, and these gifts are interdependent, complementing and fulfilling one another. They all work together.

Since every Christian has a unique gift, and none are superfluous, it follows that everyone's participation is needed for the Church to fully be itself and do the work of ministry. It is hard to do ministry without full use of your limbs! Our sin, selfishness, sloth and apathy (for there is at least a little church potato in each of us) take away from the potential ministry of the Body of Christ.

A healthy church effectively includes people in ministry and gives them a vision to do ministry. Unfortunately, in many parishes the priest does everything from baking the prosfora to taking out the trash, cleaning the toilets, and mowing the lawn. The priest should certainly not be *above* doing this work, but if no one else does some of these tasks (maintenance) the priest cannot do the pastoral and mission work of the church. The priest is a servant-leader, modeling how ministry is to be done, pointing the way. Anyone can do any work in the Church that does not require the laying of hands.

Like the coach of a football team, the priest needs to encourage his team to work together. No game is won by the coach alone. First of all, it is the team that must go out and play the game, not the coach. If the coach goes out and lines up against eleven men, he is sure to be flattened. Priests are flattened regularly because they try to go it alone. Sometimes this is due to a lack of resources - no one else wants to work for the church. Sometimes it is the priest himself who is the obstacle. His own issues (regarding control, insecurity, jealousy, etc.) keep him from allowing anyone else to serve.

How can the local church build successful, inclusive ministries? Much the same way a coach builds a winning team. If the coach trains and develops each player according to his God-given talent, the coach will have a winning player. If, in addition, the coach teaches teamwork, he will have a winning team. If the coach sends quality plays (plans)

into the huddle, the team will win each time, defeating the opponent. If the coach cannot do this, he will lose each time. The church can learn from this.

Ministry And Spiritual Health

An unused muscle becomes atrophied. From the time of chrismation, Christ's people must be dispatched for ministry. It is good to teach catechumens lay ministry and require that before chrismation they take up an identifiable ministry in the church. Developing lay ministry is not as easy as it sounds. There are strong forces that encourage inertia in the church. To go from being a church potato to being a *co-worker with Christ* (to use St. Paul's words) takes some doing! It begins with repentance and conviction from the Holy Spirit, but will require a lot of teaching, vision casting, and retooling before the job is done.

Expanding Ministry

To make ministry expand, there must be an intentional, well-planned effort. In places where in the past the priest has been the sole person expected to do ministry, a change in attitude (a.k.a. paradigm shift) will have to be initiated gradually and in stages. A foundation of preaching, Bible studies, etc. on the subjects of fruitfulness, evangelism, giftedness, charity, servant leadership and vocations must be laid before any call is made to enlist parishioners in lay ministry. After the groundwork is laid, the call can go out.

In some situations, the change must begin with the priest himself. It may take some experimentation for him to realize that, by relinquishing some tasks and entrusting them to others, he is actually freeing himself to do the work that is uniquely his. No longer caring for all of the specifics, he can better oversee the whole. This is how churches grow.

It's easy to see how much the health of the church can be improved with a healthy lay ministry. Imagine what would happen if a priest who works 50+ hours per week were able to mobilize 50 adults to do ministry for two hours per week? He would triple the number of hours of ministry accomplished in his church -150 hours! Consider this, what if he had trained other leaders who then trained still other leaders? His effectiveness would be multiplied exponentially. The local church would make a much greater impact on others.

Tithing Our Time

Often one of the factors that keeps people from ministry is the hectic pace of life we're already living. This frenzied speed is a major stress in family life. Is the Church just one more claimant for our discretionary time, robbing our families and keeping them apart?

It's true that we often hear, even from the ambon, that "families should come first." Yet, while we need to protect our family life, we shouldn't forget that our church, too, comprises a family. This is not meant to be an empty platitude. It's true that the most valuable resource most of us have is time. We must spend it wisely. In most cases, we need to admit that it is not church work that is dividing and burdening our families. Nevertheless, while we all should "tithes" some of our time to ministry, we must keep our own house in order. Priests need to watch out for their own family lives, as well as those of their parishioners in this regard. One wise priest known to this author had a volunteer worker at his church who would have been the envy of any other pastor. This fellow was there for almost every scheduled service, and when he wasn't serving in the altar he was wielding a mop, a paintbrush, or a rake somewhere on the grounds. Yet the pastor noticed that the man's two teenagers often acted out in church. They were clearly demanding attention - an attention they lacked at home. Fortunately, after a conversation between pastor and volunteer, the situation righted itself, the volunteer rearranged his priorities, and brand-new opportunities for service opened up for a half-dozen people!

Casting The Vision For Lay Ministry

The same Lord who can turn stones into sons of Abraham can also make fervent disciples out of church potatoes. The process is basically the same: repentance, conversion in Christ, renewal. For this, the only formula and technique is the all-powerful grace of the Holy Spirit and the life of the Church.

It is not within the scope of this work to detail the implementation of a lay ministry program. It is important, however, to note how critical it is that parish members do ministry according to their own gifts and at the service of other's needs. The past twenty years have seen a large crop of books on different types of lay ministry. While some of them are written from perspectives foreign to our Orthodox worldview, many others contain much helpful information.

The value of such resources is two-fold. First, they help to teach and equip people for the work of ministry. Second, they can help to connect people with similar interests. This is particularly important for those of us in small, fledgling communities. Often we are led to believe that our small numbers prevent us from doing anything useful. Our small mission parish may not be able to staff and supply a soup kitchen or thrift shop - but we may be able to help out a neighboring organization that's short on volunteers.

We Orthodox who place so much importance on the Liturgy need to live out its implications. When we receive communion the priest declares: "*The servant/handmaiden of God N_____ receives the most Holy and Precious Body and Blood of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and life everlasting.*" Our most basic identity in the Church is as God's servant/handmaiden - *not* God's church potato. A servant is one who serves, and we learn from the Scriptures that serving is a gift of the Spirit (*Rom. 12:7, 1 Cor. 12:28*). All who are called to the chalice are called to serve Christ. We who are the servants of Christ (a more literal translation would be *slave*), serve in His name to His glory. Everyone called to the chalice is called to do ministry. In a healthy church all participate in ministry.

Study Questions

1. What does the author mean by the statement: "Being a Christian is an action verb."
2. What is the priest's job in the parish? What is your job?
3. Discuss the implications for ministry of the following statements of the Lord:
"I am among you as one who serves." And *"Where I am, there will my servant be also."*
4. What are some of the needs of the surrounding local community? *Keep in mind that some needs (e.g. spiritual ones) may not be consciously recognized by the community.*
5. How much of the parish budget is set aside for outside ministry? Should this change?

Chapter 7 A Healthy Home

Inadequate Church Facilities Can Make Your Church III

When planting a garden, cultivating flowers or vegetables is the main focus. When planting a church, - it's people. In the first days of a new mission, it can seem as if the site doesn't matter at all. In those days in our own parish, I had a few favorite mantras: "The Body of Christ is not bricks and mortar," and "church is community." There is also the old Russian proverb: "It isn't logs that make the church, but ribs." All these sayings helped us to keep things in perspective when we grew impatient with our facilities, but we quickly found out that the building *does* matter.

For our first sixteen Sundays we held services in a college classroom. We went from a low attendance of 17 to over 50 people. It became evident that the classroom had become inadequate. We were thankful to God for it, but realized that it was not the best environment for us. We began to search for a new location, trusting that God would guide us. We searched....and searched. And then we searched some more! All told, we looked at over seventy-five locations. We prayed and prayed, begging God for direction. Eventually we found the place God had for us -- and rented a Byzantine Catholic church that was currently priestless. It was a fantastic facility for a small Orthodox community. The nave seated 120; it was clean, neat, adequate - it even had icons. We had our own office space and a nice fellowship hall. The location was not central to the community, but the physical plant couldn't have been more perfect. Our hosts were kind and gracious. We camped there for two and a half years. The building was then offered for sale to us. We had some concerns about location and nave capacity, but we looked into buying it, prayerfully believing God would open the doors that needed to be opened, and close the doors that needed to be closed.

The door wasn't just closed. It was slammed shut and sealed! Another community bought the building, and we had to be out within four weeks. We were homeless - and went back on our knees. Ironically, this time it was a monophysite church that was kind and gracious enough to come to our rescue. They had no priest either, and we worshipped there for the next six months as we continued to look for the right permanent home.

Looking back, this whole episode was a momentum-breaker. Attendance had jumped ten percent when we moved from a college classroom to the Byzantine church. Now, at the monophysite church, attendance plummeted over ten percent. These facilities worked, but they were not adequate. Ultimately we lost a few families for reasons related to the move.

Again we began a building search. Our search team approached the task with prayer and fasting. After many months of searching it came down to one of two facilities. They were well-located buildings, one 2000 square feet and one 3800 sq. ft. We could *afford* the 2000 sq. ft. facility, but what we really *needed* was the larger one.

We all met and prayed, looking closely at the buildings. Everyone but the priest was sold on the larger building. I was afraid - the costs were at least \$600.00 per month over budget. I was willing to go follow their lead, but afraid to make a major, perhaps fatal, mistake. I reasoned that a commitment on a three-year lease would cost at least \$22,000. They said "Father we must step out on faith." They had more faith than the priest. God bless them. Although I wasn't 100% sold, I consented.

Over the next two months, with over one thousand hours of volunteer labor, we renovated the 3800 sq. ft. facility, turning it into a beautiful church. Attendance went up over night. In this six-month period of transition our average monthly attendance increased 46%. Since then, three years have passed. Attendance has doubled again, and we have now far outgrown the 3800 sq. ft. facility.

I was wrong. Facilities *do* matter. The meeting place says something about the community, and if it creates a negative impression, such as instability, uncleanliness, or disrepair - that matters a lot! Much can be overlooked in the early days when the focus is on birthing a community. Nevertheless, the right growing conditions will go a long way to help that community take off. The facility is important, but not the only factor in this equation. Much also depends on timing and circumstance, together with our faith. Ultimately everything depends on God.

Building Programs Can Be Dangerous

Experience shows that building programs can strongly affect the life of the church, but not always for good. A community can get *building fever*. This happens when the church becomes so focused on the building program itself that they forget community and ministry outside the walls. Some communities will get a touch of building fever; it's a stage they go through, hopefully quickly. But building fever can become a full-blown and dangerous illness. This is one way a healthy church can become ill.

All building programs require a lot of time and money. One sure way of getting a severe (even fatal) case of building fever is to be unrealistic about a community's limitations. A building project that's too big will gradually eat up all a church's resources, starting with its human ones. The focus of the leadership can move from *other-centeredness* to *self-centeredness*; from fishing for men to hunting for contractors and building inspectors. This paradigm shift can be very slow and thus more dangerous. The leadership is consumed with raising money, and if the church decides to finance a portion of the building cost, the leadership may continue to focus on meeting the mortgage. Story after story makes the rounds of churches biting off more than they could chew. The first tell-tale symptom? In those churches you hear, "The priest only talks about money."

Unless The Lord Builds The House... (How and when to buy or build)

God is good. When He closed the door on our first building, He did us a favor - though it didn't look like it at the time. We would have always stayed small, since both the location and small size of that church were working against us. A community that starts too ambitious a building program might never live to see it finished, but staying in a cramped, inadequate meeting place is no better. Buying or building too small a church actually keeps the church from growing. How big is big enough? A general rule of thumb to follow in assessing size is to remember that churches grow to about 80% of their capacity. To determine how much your church can grow, take the number of square feet of your nave, divide by 10 and then multiply by 0.8. So if you want to have 100 people in church, you need at least 1250 sf. of nave, that is, approximately a 30X40 ft. area.

As children grow up, their parents buy them bigger clothes. But it is not so easy to buy, build or expand an existing church. Jumping the gun on buying a permanent facility can have long-range effects - long-range, that is, if the community survives to endure them! Building or buying too early in the life of the community can and will limit your growth to the size of the building. Sometimes a good temporary location is best. The community can grow in numbers in a rented facility until it is able to afford a move to a permanent home.

In assessing size and suitability, be sure to include adequate fellowship space. The nave and fellowship hall ideally should be about the same size. Don't disregard this, as so much ministry is done in the fellowship hall, and not just by the priest.

Location, Location, Location

Orthodoxy (at least in this country) is what might be called a "destination" faith. People looking for a church generally don't just drive by an Orthodox parish and say, "Hey, let's take a look." People who already come to Orthodox churches will go out of their way to get to one. But there are limits. A very inconvenient location *will* reduce attendance, even from already committed Orthodox - and it will strongly discourage inquirers. Studies indicate and experience has proven out that, typically, people will travel only as far to church on Sunday as they do to work. (Orthodox people may tolerate - even expect - a longer commute, but this does not mean that inquirers will.) A high-visibility location is not critical, but relatively convenient access is.

Facility Assessment

It would be naive to attempt a complete checklist of all the things to look for in assessing a church building. *Some* of the considerations (in no particular order) are:

- C Is the building easy to find? Is it visible and recognizable from the street?
- C Is it visually appealing? (Or can it be made to be?)
- C Is there sufficient parking?
- C Is there room for a fellowship hall? Church school classrooms? Storage? Kitchen? Study? Library/Bookstore?
- C Is there room to grow?
- C Does it lend to Orthodox worship?

People Do Judge A Book By Its Cover

How do we show guests that they're welcome at our house? We clean the house, lay out nice china, cook an inviting meal. We spend time with our guests; we're hospitable.

The basic approach is not different in the church. We should expect guests every time we have a public service in the church, especially on Sundays. We need to look at the church from the visitor's perspective. What kind of message does it send them? What does it say about our attitude towards what we are doing in that facility? Dinginess, for example, is depressing. A dingy worship space also makes a spiritual statement; It tells the visitor just what we think about God and His service. Even from the outside, the condition of the church building is making a statement about the church, making friends for it or, perhaps, doing the opposite.

A short checklist:

Is it neat? Are the bathrooms and kitchen clean? Is the trash empty? Are there any mysterious smells coming from anywhere? (This is not a reference to incense!) Are the walls and carpet dirty and stained, or are the colors bright and positive?

Are things color-coordinated? Or is it just a hodge-podge? Are coverings (from tablecloths to altar hangings) clean, or dirty and worn? Are the priest's and servers vestments in good repair?

Are the grounds neat - or covered with litter? Is the lawn trimmed? Are there any flowers, shrubs, etc.? Is the sign conspicuous? Is it attractive? Legible? In English? (Or other languages as needed)

Like a home ready to receive welcome guests, the church must be neat and ordered. If not, it can send out the wrong message. People do judge a book by its cover.

Study Questions

1. Does your church facility add to or take away from the potential of your ministry?
In what ways?
2. When is a “safe” time to implement a building program?
3. What are some of the signs of “building fever?”
4. What are the first impressions of a visitor when they enter your church?
5. Are there any improvements that need to be made? What are they?
6. Does your church have any persons or committees with the ongoing responsibilities of taking care of upkeep and decoration (gardeners, caretakers, altar guilds, sisterhoods)?

Chapter 8

Protestant America And The Challenge Of Secularism

Since Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door in Germany, Western Christianity has never been the same. It has been fragmenting ever since. There are now some 2,500 different and often competing and contradictory Christian religions in America,⁹ and according to the U.N., some 23,000 worldwide.¹⁰ As Western Christianity continues to splinter, the Christ preached by some denominations would be unrecognizable by even Charles Wesley or John Calvin, much less Sts. Athanasius or Gregory the Theologian. Many mainline Protestant Christians are in an uproar over the collapse of doctrines that they held to be revealed by God and thus eternal truths. Their Roman Catholic neighbors can offer them little solace.

Western Christianity will continue to splinter and crumble, and we Orthodox had better be ready to say to the disenchanted: "Here we are. Let us show you the ancient unchanged Church." As I said earlier, I believe we in America live in historic times. In a certain sense the fields are ripe for mass conversion to Orthodoxy. But are we prepared? We need to make ourselves available to those who seek the Truth. How? - By living the Orthodox life faithfully- through prayer, worship, fasting, and ascetical discipline. This Orthodox life - what some technically people call lifestyle evangelism - must be modeled if it is to be believed. If we approach this task with humility, even our failures can help point people to the truth, past ourselves and our failures to Christ. Our Christian living is a bearing witness that Christ is Truth incarnate; the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth. Orthodoxy is only the Truth in that it is held up ("indwelt") by the Truth. Thus our witness cannot be triumphalistic.

Protestant America is used to seeing truth as the right answer to a question. Our task is to challenge people to seek truth praying on their knees. This above all must be modeled; we must pray for them and love them.

Orthodox evangelism in Protestant America will require more than prayer, however. The ground must be prepared before the seed can be sown. It is encouraging to note that many Protestants are open to religious change: according to a 1988 Gallup Poll, 33% of all Protestants change churches in their lifetime.¹¹ Before many of them will be ready to consider Orthodoxy, however, we will have to confront and overcome a couple of obstacles to Orthodox evangelism.

Orthodox mission work in Protestant America has two strikes against it.

Strike one: what Fr. Peter Gilquist calls *Romophobia*¹². Protestantism was born *in protest*; it stands in opposition to Roman Catholicism. Anything that looks or sounds Roman Catholic seems heretical and unchristian to many Protestants. Orthodoxy, which to the Protestant observer often looks like Roman Catholicism, is thus mislabeled and misjudged. (On the other hand, our apparent similarity can win us a hearing among disaffected Roman Catholics.) Some Protestants are taught that the true Christian Church

⁹ Fr. Jon Braun, Finding the New Testament Church, (Ben Lomond, CA, Conciliar Press, 1987) p.2

¹⁰ Schaeffer, Frank, Dancing Alone, (Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline, MA 1994), p.4

¹¹ Warren, Rick, The Purpose Driven Church, (Zondervan Publishing House,

¹² Gillquist, Fr. Peter, Becoming Orthodox, (Conciliar Press, Ben Lomond, CA,

disappeared with the death of the last Apostle, leaving only a false, apostate institutional church in its place. If they can be brought to hear the Orthodox Gospel, they will rejoice to find that the gates of hell did not prevail against Christ's Church (*cf. Mt. 16:18*).

If we want a Protestant to listen to us, we must make clear the differences between Catholicism and Orthodoxy. Orthodoxy does not share the Catholic view of papal primacy or infallibility, its teachings on original sin, purgatory or Mariology, its belief in salvation by works/merits, its Aristotelian transubstantiation doctrine (though we do not deny the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist), etc. We need to be patient with Protestant inquirers. If they get a chance to ask their questions, they often find that the things they object to in Orthodoxy are either:

a) something the Orthodox Church doesn't actually teach at all;

or

b) something that is quite Biblical - but that Protestantism has never come to terms with. (Fr. Peter Gillquist likes to say to Evangelicals: "Open your Bibles - you know, the ones with all the verses you've underlined? Now go back and read the verses you didn't underline. That's where you'll find Orthodoxy!")

And yes, along with Protestants, we love the Bible, we tithe, and we are enthusiastic about our faith in Christ. We are not Rome with a beard!

Strike two: Evangelical Non-Denominational Western Christianity can be seen as a faith of biblical secularism with no real tradition of true worship. According to Father Schmemmann "Secularism ... is above all a *negation of worship*."¹³ Orthodoxy and secularism are two ways of life in opposition to each other. Satan is clothed with secularism, and it is the task of Orthodoxy to convert people from secularism. Man was created by God to worship Him.

As Orthodox Christians, we are to accept the tribulations of secular life and witness to the truth. The Church is called to teach the content of life eternal; i.e., that we are not of this world, not just consumers, but sacramental beings created in the image and likeness of God for eternal communion with Him. Secularism can only be defeated by living the ascetical Orthodox way of life. People thrive on and need the fullness of the Orthodox way of life. Protestants coming to Orthodoxy love its stability and fullness.

The walls of secularism are pierced when Christ is exalted. When people focus on Christ, they come to the knowledge of truth. Experience has shown that when we begin to teach secular Christians about the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and how life is to be focused on the Holy Trinity, Orthodox spirituality and the practice of Orthodox ascetical discipline, there begins a natural movement away from secularism and towards holiness, Christ, worship, and the fullness of Orthodoxy.

As stated earlier, we must always be loving and gentle during this process because many beliefs dearly held must be dissolved, and this is a painful process. We must love those who are going through this process, holding their hands and affirming them. There must be no high pressure. We are not out to convert, but to show truth. We must commit ourselves to love them no matter what decision they make. Again, it is the Holy Spirit that is at work, under His own timing and in His own way.

¹³ Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, For the Life of the World, (Crestwood, NY, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988), p.118

Worship

Non-liturgical Christians need to understand that worship is an experience we enter into and is not of this world. It is not a form of entertainment. It is important for all newcomers to Orthodox worship that the music be joyous and lively, not a slow-paced funeral dirge. The priest, deacon, servers and people should worship with a spirit of genuine devotion. It is not often helpful to bring Protestants straight into Orthodox services fresh out of Protestant-style worship. Without any educational preparation, all they can do is compare -- and so they often see what we do as empty ritual. It is important that they attend a few inquirers classes, to get a new paradigm to measure what they are experiencing. They will need to learn that it takes a dozen visits to enter into Orthodox worship at some level. Orthodox worship is not entertainment it is the work of the people. Worship is central to the Orthodox faith. When Protestants do fully enter into authentic worship, they cease being Protestant.

Study Questions

1. What is secularism? Are we affected by it?
2. How do we defeat secularism? Can the battle be won?
3. How does Orthodox spirituality defeat secularism?

Chapter 9

A Church Goes For A Check-up

In order to stay in good health, people make regular visits to the doctor's office for checkups. It is no different for a maturing church. With parishes as with people, there are certain illnesses associated with certain times of life. There aren't too many cases of lung cancer (thank God!) in the pediatrics ward, just as there aren't many patients with chicken pox in the geriatric unit. It's also true, just as with people, that as a parish grows older it comes more and more in contact with various illnesses. Preventative care and frequent check-ups become the rule, and often-supportive medication is prescribed.

The main focus of this work has been from the perspective of maternity and pediatrics, but for this chapter we will look at the church from the perspective of a family physician, an oncologists, or even geriatrics.

The priest is the family physician. In synergy with his bishop, brother clergy and his lay leadership, he must constantly assess the parish, looking at its general health. The priest will need the loving, encouraging, friendly and honest opinions of brother clergy.

General Assessment:

- Heartbeat: Is it strong, regular and healthy? Do the people keep the church fasts? Do they keep a prayer rule? Do they read the Scriptures daily and attend worship regularly? Do the people practice asceticism and seek the narrow path?
- Low Blood pressure: Is enthusiasm and commitment dropping? Do the people tithe?
- High Blood Pressure: Is there anger or power struggles in the Church?
- Temperature: Are the people warm and friendly when visitors come, or are they cold? Does a visitor catch a cold when he enters the church? Does the church have a greeting ministry? A coffee hour?
- Reflexes: Is the parish relevant - that is, does it respond in an Orthodox manner to felt needs? Does the church present itself as timeless? Or as an antique museum piece?
- Eyes: Is the vision clear or is it blurry? Is it focused on the Gospel? Or on something else? Is there a vision gap between the priest and the parish?
- Mental Health: Is the parish alert and oriented? Does the parish know who/what it is? Where it is? What time it is? Does it have a positive attitude? Does it see the glass as half-full or half-empty? Is it a Good News or bad news church? Does it have a healthy self-image?
- Breath: During worship, are the breaths shallow and weak, or regular and deep, with everyone singing with their whole heart? Or is there any breath at all? (Is the patient out there in the nave still breathing, or should we call the paramedics?)
- Vitality: Is the patient thriving? Is the parish growing 5% or more per year? What is the average age of the parishioners? (20 yrs old?, 35?, 55?, 70?, deceased?) How many children are in the nave on Sunday? Has the church plateaued? Is it in decline? Are there demographic shifts taking place that are not being addressed?
- The Body: Is the Body of Christ willing to do ministry (1 Cor. 12) or are its muscles atrophied? Is the church self-satisfied, fat and lazy, or is it known for its work and exercise? Is the church maintenance-minded? Does it see itself as a club?
- Weakened Immunity: Do parishioners practice ascetical discipline? Is their spiritual life formed by Orthodox sources and principles, or is it rooted outside of the Church? Are the parishioners regularly strengthened by Confession and Communion? Is the parish divided by resentments, feuds, party spirit, lack of forgiveness?

The Head: Is the priest an effective leader and pastor? (Pastor + leader=Shepherd). How is the lay leadership? Are there divisive politics in the church or parish council?
 Speech: Is the Gospel effectively communicated in the homily and/or in parish education programs?

Diagnosis

After the assessment, a diagnosis follows. If we are selflessly seeking the Kingdom as a community, we will have a completely clean bill of health - in which case our community should be somewhere *on* an iconostasis, not praying *in front of* one! If not, the doctor may prescribe medication, a hospital stay, and perhaps even surgery.

If The Patient Is Ill

The most important thing is that the patient be humble and desire to come under a physician's care and be healed. This is easier said than done. The first step towards recovery is repentance. We enter the Kingdom through repentance! This is the first words of the Good News: "Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand."

The Specialist

Before turning around an ill parish, the parish needs a priest who has the skills to do this. It is a rare priest that can turn a parish around. He has to be a church planter plus. He will have to weather many storms. Like the church planter, he has to be totally committed to the task. It requires tremendous patience, humility, and excellent people skills.

Recovery

Healing an ill parish takes a long-term commitment. It takes a while to turn around a big ship and head it in the right direction. The solution is not technique driven, but Spirit-led. The effective medicine isn't always the best-tasting; there will have to be a real will on the part of the parishioners to get well. There may also be the occasional necessary surgery to remove cancerous cells - with follow-up chemotherapy, and its associated nausea. Such treatments can make the parish feel sick, but ultimately are for the good.

The therapy needed for all unhealthy parishes is to introduce asceticism. By giving them hope, the priest can give his people a reason to put down old fears and resentments and embrace the life of repentance and self-denial. The priest must continually and firmly nurture the flock with love, pointing the community to the eternal truths of the Gospel and outside of itself. Generally speaking an ill parish needs to be thinking outside of itself. If the approach is selfless, the prognosis is excellent.

Death entered the world through sin (Romans 5:12), and we have to be honest, unrepented sin in the parish can be fatal. Is this why Christ says to cut down the fruitless fig tree (Lk 13:6-9)?

Paying The Doctors Bill

At the end of all medical procedures there is a bill. This same truth still holds. Churches that become healthy, tithe. Remember, the tithe income is the thermometer. The tithe gages the health of the community. Also, dead wood will be lost along the way.

Study Questions

Apply the assessment to the parish.

1. Do we have a clean bill of health?
2. Are there areas of disease? Where do we need to change?
 What will such a change cost us? Are we willing to pay for it?

3. How can we stay healthy?

Chapter 10
No Two People And No Two Churches
Are The Same

We are all made in God's image and His likeness, and yet we don't look alike. Around the world, around America, cultures and traditions vary. The same is true with the local church. We all are members of the Body of Christ, but we each look a little different. No two people are identical, no two souls are identical and no two church communities are identical. Still, like human beings, there is a definite shape and form to being church. Like all human beings, churches can and do grow to be vibrant and healthy. Also they must fight illnesses. We all must practice healthy living. Everyone's path to salvation is different, and God blesses it. It is the same with the local church's journey towards the Kingdom. For everyone the path is narrow.

God wants the church to grow and be healthy. He works alongside us and with us. We are His coworkers. This is what enables us to walk the narrow way.

I pray that your journey along the narrow path is joyful and fruitful.

Section 2
Some Priest Thoughts
Chapter 11
Shepherdship

“As goes the priest, so goes the parish.” (Russian Proverb)

Following the ordination of a priest, just after the Epiclesis, the bishop hands the newly-consecrated Lamb to the new priest, saying: “Receive thou this pledge, and preserve it whole and unharmed until thy last breath, because thou shalt be held to an accounting therefore in the second and terrible Coming of our great Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ.”⁹ The newly ordained’s life will never be the same again. His life is consumed with the stewardship of Christ’s sheep. This stewardship of the Lamb means not only the actual distribution of the Eucharist. It also involves the care of Christ’s sheep, and those God has called him to serve, both those in the fold and those outside it. (*John 10:16*). The priest’s salvation is dependent on his being a faithful shepherd. Here the old saying is true: priests can only lead on their knees (that is, in prayer.)

The Church is the most leadership-intensive organization on earth. When a priest looks at his congregation, he is gazing into a mirror. All their successes, all their problems are his own. He can make no excuses. Herein lies the struggle, and it is only resolved praying - on his knees.

The effectiveness of a priest is largely determined by his ability to inspire and motivate others. Of course the source of this inspiration is the Holy Spirit. “Shepherdship” functions on trust. If the priest intimidates or manipulates others, he will lose credibility and will not be the leader. He will continue to have the title of priest, but he will not be able to lead the people entrusted to him. Credibility and integrity are the most important possessions of a priest. The priest must be consistent in his testimony – “What you see is what you get.” He must be authentic. His integrity must be more than an image. Image is temporary; but integrity lasts.

The skills required of bishops, priests, deacons and lay leaders exceed the skills required in the secular world. If a company needs more help, it hires more people. If an employee doesn’t meet expectations, he or she is let go. If the government needs more money, it raises taxes. The church does not have this leverage. Church membership is understood as voluntary. People are fickle. Long gone are the days when people just followed the priest because he was the priest. We are still living with the motto of the 1960s: “Question Authority.” In post Christian America we have added: “Don’t trust Clergy.” To effectively shepherd today’s sheep requires well-developed leadership skills in addition to pastoral skills. As the Apostle Paul says to the Corinthians “You are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.” (*1 Cor. 9:2*) What kind of an imprint are you making? In the Orthodox Study Bible the footnote to this verse reads: “The effectiveness of the clergy is certified by the spiritual condition of the sheep.” How healthy are the sheep? Are they zealous for God?

⁹ Hapgood, Isabel, Service Book of the Holy Orthodox-Catholic Apostolic Church, Sixth Edition, Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, Englewood, NJ, 1983

Servant Leadership

Great priests are consumed with a God-given vision. When people love and respect their priest, they will share this vision. The priest forges the way, bringing positive change to people's lives. He can take people spiritually further than they have ever traveled. It should be clear to all that his leadership is for the benefit of others, not himself. True leadership is servanthood. If a priest is not willing to wash his people's feet, he cannot serve them the Eucharist (*John 13*). Servanthood is the act of unselfish giving. It is selfless. "Shepherdship" is selflessness. Loving people precedes shepherding people. The priest must add value to others. When he adds value to others, they will add value to the church's ministry. Shepherding is not a right, but a responsibility given to the priest at ordination.

An effective shepherd understands timing and has enthusiasm. He needs a high energy level. An effective shepherd is a positive person with a positive attitude. He must be a people person, secure in himself. Insofar as he is effective, he is transparent and shares his ministry. He is creative in problem solving. The local church will rise or fall to the level of his shepherding. If he has a weak prayer life, he cannot nurture a strong prayer life in others. At worst, he can in fact be a spiritual lid on his community. The leadership skills of the priest are key to the church's vitality.

Priest + Leader = Shepherd

Leadership is both a gift of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 12:8) and part of being made in the image and likeness of God. For those with the gift, it is intuitive and second nature. These people are born leaders. Leadership is instinctive for them. Those without this gift should not be in a shepherding position until they learn, grow into, and develop their God-given leadership skills. Otherwise they will hurt the community organization. Shepherding must be developed, just as the gift of healing is developed in medical school. This takes time, nurturing, and commitment, along with guidance from a mentor. Such a mentor is often a different person than one's spiritual father. The priest must always be growing, spiritually and intellectually, and he must make provision for this. If he is not growing, neither will his people; if his personal development stops, his effectiveness as a leader diminishes.

Shepherding Is A Lifetime Journey

Quality shepherding is key in growing any church. For a missionary priest, the leadership qualifications are more demanding still. The characteristics of a missions priest include:¹

- C *having a God given vision, seeing what God's plan is for the church to be planted*
- C *being highly energized, highly motivated*
- C *committed to excellence--no excuses*
- C *persistent*
- C *creative (bringing new approaches to old problems)*
- C *aggressive in the positive sense--i.e., assertive*
- C *self starting, takes initiative*
- C *hard working, willing to work long hours*
- C *flexible and adaptable to different situations. (does what it takes to solve problems)*
- C *resilient (able to rebound from defeat, making a positive out of a negative)*
- C *secure in himself (Hurting people hurt people!)*
- C *a people person --committed to his people positive*

¹¹ Adapted from Robert E. Logan, & Steven L. Ogne. The Church Planting Toolkit, Pasadena, CA 1991 p.2.9-2.14

- C *willing to develop a winning team*
- C *committed to prayer*
- C *realistic, honest with himself, sober*
- C *enjoys life*
- C *his wife and family must also be 100% committed to the endeavor*
- C *his family life is in order*
- C *is humble*
- C *practices asceticism*

Mentorship

Before starting any church-planting endeavor, the priest must have a partner and/or mentor. This is someone he can develop ideas with and work with in order to bring ideas to fruition. Both priest and mentor must share the same vision and be committed both to the task and each other. The church-planting priest needs a mentor, someone he is accountable to regarding church health and evangelism.¹

The mentor is someone who has been there and can look at the situation objectively. He is someone with whom the church planter can help solve problems and share frustrations. The mentor is a leader who seeks to develop other leaders. There will be failures along the way, and the priest at those times needs the unwavering support and love of this ministry partner. This partner needs to be an encourager, and this encouragement flows from Christian love. With such a relationship, eventually the priest and his mentor will become the best of friends. Our Lord mentored the seventy (Lk 10) and sent them out two by two. Success is severely limited without such a partner and mentor. *As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. (Prov.. 27:17)*

Lay Leadership

The priest must identify lay leaders and core group members. The lay leaders must be people who take a sincere interest in the church plant and have a sense of ownership in it. They must be committed to the priest as a person and share his vision. Lay leadership roles include: choir director, council warden, treasurer, church schoolteachers and doorkeepers (greeters). These people must be responsible, dependable, enthusiastic, willing to learn, and committed to the task. The priest must be committed to developing, equipping, and adding to this team of leaders in the church as it grows. The personality of the team will change as new people and faces come on board. The glue of this team, however, will always be prayer and love for each other and the task at hand.

Time Management

Most valuable of things, I am always running. No king, law, or wall can hold me back. Once spent, I can never be bought. Who am I? *(Ancient riddle)*

¹² Integral with the O.C.A.'s Church Planting Program is having a mentor on both the national level and local (diocesan) level.

Here's one riddle whose answer has stayed the same for centuries. The answer, of course, is time. If anything, the value of time has increased in modern days. Time and resource management are crucial for every leader, but are especially important for the priest. Time management generally involves two main areas: organization and delegation. To a large part, these depend on skills that can be learned, rather than having an innate gift. There is a learning curve involved, but just about anyone can learn to use a planner and map out their activities. Those who begin to use such a system, and stick to it, are amazed at what they can get done.

Many activities that do not require the laying on of hands in ordination can be delegated to others. This is especially true of office work. Looking back to the Book of Acts, we see that the first deacons were ordained because it was felt improper that the apostles "give up preaching the Word of God to wait on tables." (Acts 6:2) This was not an issue of humility; rather, it was a divinely-ordered instance of what a modern CEO would call labor management. The same is true in today's parish. Priests will be answerable before the Throne of God, but not for whether the bulletins got out on time or if the filing was perfectly in order. The priest needs to preach the Gospel and spiritually feed Christ's sheep. It can be an honorable Christian ministry to file reports, lick envelopes, and run errands. But it is not the priest's job. The priest must spend as much of his time as possible in outreach. Therefore, the church should consider hiring a part-time office assistant as soon as feasible. In this regard, many have found it best (sometimes through bitter experiences) to wait and hire an outsider, rather than take on a volunteer from within the parish. Much depends on the scope of the office assistant's work, but often such a position gives access to sensitive and personal information.

Sharing Responsibility

The priest must also develop leaders around him who can expand the effectiveness of his ministry. It is no compliment to the priest if he is the only one able to lead church school, Bible studies, etc. Others need to be equipped to do so. One of the highest compliments paid to a recent political leader of somewhat mediocre personal abilities was that he had an almost unerring ability to surround himself with wise and capable assistants. We can learn from such an example.

Sometimes a church slips into inactivity because an insecure priest fears to share responsibility. On the one hand, he recognizes that he has no great gift for (for instance) teaching; on the other hand, he doesn't want to be upstaged by anyone. So the parish goes spiritually hungry. The true servant shepherd doesn't need to be the center of attention, and so his church isn't held back by his weaknesses. He is so concerned that his flock is fed that he will lead them to good pasture - whether he gets the credit or not!

Sources of Trouble

Finally--Do you know a leader who is in trouble? It is likely he:

- has a poor understanding of people (is not a "people person")*
- lacks imagination (is uncreative)*
- has personal or family problems (his house is not in order)*
- passes the buck (is irresponsible)*
- feels insecure and unsatisfied*
- is lazy*
- is not organized*
- flies into rages (no self-control)*
- is insecure and defensive*

- C *is inflexible (is unwilling to make changes)*
- C *is not praying, studying Scripture*
- C *will not take a risk (lacks faith)*

The good news is - he can change. Skills can be learned, bad habits overcome, and sins repented of. Much depends on our clergy - there's a reason we pray for them at every service!

Study Questions

1. What does the saying "As goes the priest, so goes the parish" mean?
How is this applicable to lay leadership?
2. Does leadership come from position or influence?
3. What is the difference between a leader and a pastor?
4. What is servant leadership? How are the laity servant leaders?
5. Does my church have an administrative assistant?
What would be the advantages of hiring one?

Chapter 12 Seeing Clearly

Where there is no vision, the people perish (Proverbs 29:18 KJV)

Someone once told me a remarkable story. They were working one day, doing manual labor and praying. While they were working, it seemed that God told them, as clear as day, that they were going to plant a church in a specific area. The whole thing seemed absurd. They put the thought out of their mind and told no one. Years later, long after they had forgotten about the experience, it came about. The vision was exactly true. God had given them a vision for a church, casting a vision into that person's life and reinforcing a perceived call.

Evangelists and church planters are consumed by a God-given vision. They may not hear literal voices giving them direction, but they must be able to see with the eyes of faith. Success in leading the Church is based on the ability to cast that God-given vision. The vision is not the priest's brainchild. It is received from God. Like Moses of old, the priest receives such a vision through prayer.

New missions have many temptations. Like the Israelites wandering in the desert, founders of new missions need to be reminded they are *headed someplace*. Up to their ears in the work of making the mission run, they may be unable to look too far ahead. But burnout can come fast if people become exhausted and lose hope. They need to hear about what's waiting for them in the promise land. The vision must be cast.

Before the vision can be cast, however, the leader must have earned the trust of his people. The laity first need to have a positive relationship with the priest, before they take ownership of the vision. The vision also must be credible. It cannot be too idealistic or grandiose. People can be motivated to step out in faith, but they will first demand that the vision pass a *reality check*. Just how much they will demand depends on their trust in the pastor.

If You Don't Know Where You're Going, How Can You Tell If You've Arrived?

The story is told of a young deacon, flustered and nervous before serving a hierarchical service. Back in the altar, he asked help of the wrong person - a harried, distracted elderly priest just as nervous as he was. "What do I do?" asked the deacon. Handing him a censer, the priest barked: "Do something *religious!*" and ejected him out the deacon's door.

Vision means knowing what God wants you to do *before* charging out the deacon's door. It means knowing where God wants you and the parish to go before you set out on the journey. The advice seems obvious, but is too often ignored, and at very great cost. All too often, people do not know what the vision of God for the local Church is. We can no longer afford to start missions aimlessly, with no direction or goal in sight. Too many good priests and far too many good lay workers have burned out and quit. *For want of a vision, the people perish.*

As the mission grows and matures its vision/calling may evolve. There may be more than one at a time. Some will be overarching and beyond measurement or even acquisition in this life (ex: the salvation of the mission's members). Others may be more short-term and concrete (moving into a new church). Whatever the vision, it must be both clear and clearly articulated to the people. They, in turn, must make the vision their own. Success is possible only when both the priest and the laity take ownership of the vision and goals.

One of the greatest gifts for any priest and his church community is to reach their God-given goals. The homily is a primary tool for the casting of a vision. Vision sharing is a matter of timing. It paints a big picture.

Ultimately the vision for all Orthodox is identical: to share Christ and grow in Him, with the goal of *theosis*, to live *in Christ*, in the words of St. Paul. How this will happen varies from person to person, parish to parish, and thus the path of arrival will differ from place to place, depending on culture and circumstance. The same God who creates the vision, provides the path. But neither vision nor path can be seen except in prayer.

Vision/Mission/Purpose Statements

A common business tool for a corporation is a Vision/Mission/Purpose Statement. Non-denominational evangelical church-growth material has embraced this business concept and prescribed it for church planting. I personally cannot imagine the Apostle Paul writing a vision statement for the church in Corinth (though it would make fascinating reading). It might be a useful tool for a church in decline to achieve an understanding of God's vision for the Church. But generally speaking, the "born"-Orthodox intuitively reject the idea. They see it as secular process they have been exposed to in the workplace. The Gospel is bigger than any vision/mission/purpose statement. These statements depend too much on technique. They reflect too little the vitality, conviction and mystery of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church (*Mk. 4:26-32*).

Study Questions

1. What makes a vision "God-given"?
2. What is the vision for your church?
3. How effectively is it being communicated?

Chapter 13

The Sword Of The Spirit Is The Word Of God (Eph 6:17)

And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation." (Mark 16:15-16)

Feed my sheep. (John 21:17)

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

I once asked a well-educated catechumen from a Protestant background, "Why do you want to be Orthodox?" I expected a doctrinal response. Recalling that she came from a church with an excellent preacher, she said: "It doesn't matter how good or bad the sermon is, the church's focus is the Eucharist, and Christ dwelling in my life." She was absolutely right, but without meaning to, she was also telling me my preaching needed improvement. God bless her!

We have to take seriously what the Apostle Paul says: "*For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel. I am entrusted with a commission.*" (1Cor. 9:16-17). Woe to us if we do not preach the Gospel! If Orthodoxy is America's best kept secret, perhaps it is in part because we are not effective in communicating the Gospel to our culture. The greatest handicap we as Orthodox have in this country is our inability to proclaim the Good News and the fullness of the Orthodox way of life. Our society is an information-oriented society, but we fail to inform! Growing churches preach effectively. A church cannot grow without effective preaching.

For Protestants who first come to Orthodoxy without any appreciation for its mystical life, the homily becomes a litmus test. Am I being fed? Is this priest and are these people enthusiastic about the Gospel and their life in Christ? Do they really believe what their books say? Is God going to speak to me through these people and the priest?

At the time of his ordination, a priest receives the Great Commission when the bishop, the descendant of the Apostles, prays that he might "*be worthy to stand in innocence before (God's) Altar; to proclaim (to make known publicly!) the Gospel of (His) Kingdom; to minister the Word of (His) Truth that he may receive the reward of a good steward.*" The work of the Church from the day of Pentecost to the Second Coming is to effectively communicate the Good News. Priests are especially commissioned to preach the Gospel to all creation in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit uses the preaching of God's priests to bring the lost to Christ and to soften the hearts of the hard-hearted. But preaching is often neglected.

It is embarrassing to face inquirers, catechumens and new Orthodox who have met priests who do not take the homily seriously. Many priests simply *wing it*, preaching with no preparation. It's disappointing to watch a priest reading the footnotes to his Orthodox Study Bible during the Epistle, and regurgitate them two minutes later for his sermon. Often such preparation shows in their sheep, which wander aimlessly in the wilderness of life. Both God's Word and His people deserve greater respect.

People go all week long hearing bad news. On Sunday they deserve to hear the Good News. The Apostle Paul says: "*How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Good News.*" (Romans 10:15) To rob God's people of God's Word is sin! Homilies should not be just slapped together. They must be prayed together. They are born of the Spirit

and the perspiration that comes from hours of preparation. Sermons are not theological treatise or a presentation of biblical scholarship. People do not care what the original Greek says, or how smart you are, but what God has to say to their lives. They want to know that you love them and what Christ's word is for their lives. A common rule of thumb is one hour of preparation for one minute of effective preaching.

Priests, who do not prepare, often excuse themselves by saying that we have the Liturgy. To be sure, there is an intimate connection between the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. *"The Liturgy of the Word comes to fulfillment in the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the sacrament of sacraments that alone transforms the Word from a message about Jesus into a true participation in His divine life."* Priests know how seriously we need to approach serving the Eucharist (through fasting, reconciliation, reading the canons and rule of preparation); we must priests must approach preparing and delivering the homily with a similar seriousness.

The scriptural readings and the homily together make up the first *high point* of the Liturgy. This high point keeps both newcomers and old challenged, enthusiastic, and informed about the Gospel. More than that, it is a sacramental/mystical act that re-incarnates the Word of God, Jesus Christ, preaching and teaching in the midst of His people.

Feeding The Sheep

The Sunday sermon is the only time of the week that the priest has the undivided attention of his community. It is an important means by which the Holy Spirit renews the life of the people and the church. Preaching consists in lending the priest's lips to the Holy Spirit and allowing Christ's Word to come forth. Priests must beg God to anoint their lips, so that their preaching will come from their hearts and go to the hearts of the people. "Head to head" preaching can teach, but it does not convert people to Christ. Head to head preaching gives information, not transformation. Sermons must glorify Christ and the life in Him. They must present Christ as someone people will want to love, imitate and serve.

As a new Christian I attended a little Protestant church, which had two sermons, one for the children and one for the adults. For a long while I was fed only from the children's sermon! A key to communicating is K.I.S.S: Keep It Simple Silly. Difficult subjects need to be broken down into small, easy to understand concepts that are applicable to people's lives. Eventually it can be reassembled into the big picture. Someone once told me that only professors are paid to make easy things hard to understand.

Use illustrations. The best preachers use illustrations. People need to see the truth, and illustrations help them by making the point stick in people's minds. Let your words paint a picture. Pictures make or break messages. Look at the world's greatest preacher, Jesus Christ. He drew mental pictures extensively, especially in His use of parables. We preachers should follow His example.

Preaching cannot consist of the priest's personal opinion about anything. It should never contain the words "I think." Although homilies are theological, they are about Christ, not academia. Academia must be reserved for Bible studies and classrooms. Academia does not save lives - Christ does. Nevertheless, effective homilies ultimately do teach theology. Theology exists in the threads of the fabric of a well-prepared homily.

Communicating The Word

Preaching is a charismatic art. It is not so much subject-oriented as it is people-oriented. The message must be interesting, relevant, deeply spiritual and well-crafted. There are many how-to books on this subject. Most importantly, the sermon must connect with the people. A priest can't communicate with the people unless he can connect with them. He can talk to them, but he can't really communicate with them. Communication is bi-directional. Priests must draw the people into the *conversation* and enable them to communicate with him. When preaching, the priest needs to use his whole body as a tool. He should use voice inflection, pregnant pauses, and eye contact. Nevertheless, he must remember that the context of the homily is the divine service. The holiness of Orthodox worship leaves no room for theatrics.

The Best Sermon To Preach

The strongest message the priest can preach derives from his own character and his own life. Does he practice what he preaches? Nothing is worse than an inconsistent testimony. Is he a man of character? Does he have integrity? Is he transparent? Does he preach from his life to yours, and from his heart to yours? Is the sermon an extension of his life? Does he preach with his own voice or does it change to a *preacher's voice*, trying artificially to lend God's authority to his words, since they are not born of Christ from within?

Does he love the people he is speaking to? Does he pray and preach from the overflow of that love? (*Jn 4:14*).

God anoints genuine preaching. He wants to anoint His priests, but they have to seek that anointing. Simply put, you can't give what you don't have. Priests must be honest with themselves. Does their preaching change people's lives? Do people listen to the homily, or do their eyes look glazed? Do they make eye contact or are they looking at their watches? It hurts when this happens, but it is a vote on the quality of the message. God wants to anoint our lips. Priests have to seek that anointing with pure motivations to serve and glorify Him. This requires that they learn the skills of effective communication. If priests begin by begging God on their knees to anoint their preaching, He will do so. And lives will be changed. Just remember that positive change comes slowly.

Study Questions

1. How are sermons bi-directional?
2. What is the best sermon to preach?
3. Ideally, how much time is spent in preparing the sermon? How much time was spent in preparing your last sermon?
4. Are your sermons fresh and new, or reruns of years past?
5. Are illustrations used?

Appendix I

Some Things Never Change: Cultural Relevance and Orthodox Evangelism

“Orthodox Christian mission has as its twin goals the incarnation of the Logos of God into the language and customs of a country, and the growth of an indigenous Church which will sanctify and endorse the people’s personality.”⁹ Outside Alaska, American Orthodoxy continues to struggle with questions of ethnicity and jurisdictional unity, so that the “incarnation of the Logos” into modern American culture has hardly begun, and among some groups, the task has been seriously questioned or even renounced as a legitimate concern.”¹⁰

What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; and there is nothing new under the sun.” (Ecc. 1:9)

From the time of the apostles until today, Orthodox mission *methodology* remains the same. Eternal truths do not change. From the Apostle Paul, who became “*all things to all men, that I might . . . save some?*” (1Cor. 9:19-22), to the great missionaries of North America who identified the good in indigenous culture, affirmed it, and built upon it, teaching the eternal truths of the gospel, mission methodology remains the same. There is *nothing new under the sun*. The Gospel does not change, only the cultural context into which it is put. Ss. Cyril and Methodius, St. Stephen of Perm, St. Herman of Alaska, St. Nicholas of Japan and St. Innocent (as well as the countless other missionary saints) each affirmed the good in the cultures they evangelized, and they added value to that culture (for example, developing a written language/alphabet for the people). They brought the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the people in the local vernacular and did not try to re-make the people’s ethnic identity. No doubt, this “indigenization” was part of the reason for their success, based on a principle that goes back to Pentecost. But what united these people more than any technique or principle was their common thirst for holiness. They were all holy men (or women - we shouldn’t forget St. Nina of Georgia or the other female “equals-to-the-Apostles”). They followed an inner call that St. Seraphim of Sarov would express thus: “*Acquire the Spirit of Peace, and a thousand souls around you will be saved.*” Filled to overflowing with love for their neighbor by the Christ they served and loved above all else, they were true witnesses to Christ by virtue of the lives they led.

Ss. Cyril and Methodius

The great Greek missionaries Ss. Cyril and Methodius introduced Orthodoxy to the Slavs more than one thousand years ago. They developed a written language/alphabet (Cyrillic) for the people and translated the Scriptures and church texts. They preached and taught in the vernacular. In doing so, they affirmed the culture. The results of this today are the various Slavic Orthodox Churches.

⁹ Bishop Anastasios (Yannoulatos), *Discovering the Orthodox Mission Ethos*, @ (St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly, Vol. 3, 1964), p. 144-145 as quoted by Oleksa, Fr. Michael in Orthodox Alaska.

¹⁰ Oleksa, Fr. Michael, Orthodox Alaska, p.11

St. Stephen of Perm

St. Stephen of Perm did the same in northwest Siberia during the mid to late 1300s. He developed an alphabet for the natives, making Zyrian a written language, and then translated and produced a Zyrian Bible and liturgical books. Never did St. Stephen attempt to Russify the Zyrians.¹¹ Much of his success was the result of his personal witness. He had a humble bearing and a character that appealed to the peaceful Zyrians. St. Stephen asked for no money from those he evangelized and this was of great significance in earning their trust.¹²

St. Herman

St. Herman was a kind and gentle monk who served the people he evangelized. He not only affirmed the native Alaskan culture, he became part of it. His gentleness and humility to his Aleut neighbors was not due to any personal weakness, however; he fought fiercely against the injustices of the Russian American Company on behalf of the Alaskan natives. St. Herman loved his people, and by living the ascetic life, he became the epitome of Christian witness.

St. Nicholas (Kassatkin) of Japan

The life of St. Nicholas of Japan, and his relationship with St. Innocent of Alaska, bears witness to the vitality and direction that a mentor can bring to a like-minded pupil. On his way to appointment as the chaplain of the Imperial Russian Consulate in Japan in 1861, St. Nicholas had the joy of meeting St. Innocent. St. Innocent imparted to St. Nicholas both the knowledge and the spirit of mission work, inspiring him to reach beyond the maintenance role of a chaplaincy and involve himself in Japanese society. Noting the worn condition of the younger man's *riassa* (outer cassock), the experienced missionary bishop paid for a new one - so that St. Nicholas would make a good first impression on the Japanese.

St. Innocent encouraged the young archimandrite to learn to speak and become literate in Japanese - the latter a feat that few Westerners had ever accomplished. After learning the Japanese language, customs, and way of life, St. Nicholas went on to translate the Bible and many liturgical texts into Japanese, ordain indigenous clergy, and establish a national church.¹³ After fifty years of his missionary labors, Japan counted 31,984 Orthodox Christians.¹⁴ A large part of St. Nicholas' success was due to his extensive use of lay catechists and small-group ministry.

¹¹ George Stephens, "St. Stephen of Perm," Again, Vol.14, No. 4, p.8

¹² *ibid*, p. 10.

¹³ There were never more than four foreigners at work during the entire history of the Orthodox Church in Japan, (p. 36, Stamoolis, James J., Eastern Orthodox Mission Theology)

¹⁴ p. 29, Stephens, George, St. Nicholas of Japan, Again, Vol. 12, No. 2

The Example of St. Innocent

First coming to Alaska as a married priest, upon the death of his beloved wife St. Innocent was tonsured a monk and became the first bishop of Alaska. He is commemorated as “the Enlightener of the Aleuts.” His life and teachings are a prime example for those who seek to do missionary work. An eminently practical man with many talents, he was enthusiastic and always active. A church builder in the most literal sense, much of his handiwork still survives in Siberia and Alaska in the form of everything from icons, clocks, iconostases, to entire buildings and churches. He loved the divine services and served them solemnly and reverently, and was held up as an example to young seminarians.

St. Innocent briefly became the spiritual father of a man named Kriukov, who was passing through Irkutsk and who had spent forty years among the Aleuts. At that time the Russian Church was looking for missionaries to serve the Aleuts. Kriukov told St. Innocent how zealous the Aleuts were in prayer and in hearing the word of God. At first St. Innocent was not receptive to Kriukov’s petitions that he go to Unalaska, but the last time he was to hear the man speak of the Aleuts he *“began to burn with desire to go to such a people.”*¹⁵

Responding to this inner call from the Holy Spirit, the recently married missionary-to-be enthusiastically volunteered to go. Though they did not look forward to the extraordinary hardships that awaited them, St. Innocent’s family accepted his calling. St. Innocent himself did not consider this vocation as something for which he should be praised or rewarded. He saw this as the will of the Lord.

Upon his arrival in Unalaska, St. Innocent began immediately to study the native language and culture. Wherever he found their Native beliefs to be compatible with Christianity, he used them as stepping stones to the fulness of Christian truth. St. Innocent did not try to tear people away from their non-Christian beliefs by condemning them; instead he let the beauty and truth of Christianity attract them. His dealings with the Aleut people were marked with respect and courtesy. Whenever possible, St. Innocent sat with the native people, talking with them using simple and vivid examples. He created an alphabet for the Aleuts, and translated St. Matthew’s Gospel and parts of St. Luke and Acts into Aleut. The catechism he wrote for them, *the Indication of the Way into the Kingdom of Heaven*, was translated into several languages and remains popular more than 150 years later. St. Innocent’s territory covered thousands of square miles and, to minister to his parishioners, he would have to make long and dangerous trips in a one-man kayak, dog sled, ship or on foot.

Upon the death of his wife, Innocent was consecrated bishop of Kamchatka, the Kurilian and the Aleutian Islands. There he continued his missionary endeavors. He reorganized his diocese in Siberia and Alaska to make its missions more effective. St. Innocent eventually became Metropolitan of Moscow and all Russia. In 1869, he established the Orthodox Missionary Society, which existed until the communist revolution. St. Innocent is the epitome of what an evangelist is and does.

St. Innocent presented Christianity as the *fulfillment* of the native Alaskan’s religion, and not just as its replacement.¹⁶ Following and recognizing St. Justin the Martyr’s notion

¹⁵ Paul D. Garrett, St. Innocent, Apostle to America (Crestwood, NY, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1979) p. 34

¹⁶ Consider how Paul preached at the Areopagus, using the example of the altar “to an unknown God.” (Acts 17:22f)

of *logos spermatikos*,¹⁷ he sought out bridges between Native faith and Christianity. In his *Instruction* to fellow missionary Hieromonk Theophan, St. Innocent warned the priest to tread lightly on Native religious customs - not to end them abruptly, but to explain that they were only tolerated. While maintaining a respect for Native culture (including its religious rites), St. Innocent was discreetly careful to demonstrate how Orthodoxy transcended it. For instance, he gave strict instruction to missionaries regarding the reception of gifts of any kind from new converts or well-disposed pagans. They should not, he wrote, be led to believe that our God, like their spirits, demands offerings, or that Orthodoxy believes in expiatory or propitiatory sacrifices. St. Innocent taught the "eternal process of growth toward godlikeness, understood in Trinitarian terms,"¹⁸ i.e., *theosis*. Unlike many confrontational evangelists (all too common in the American scene), he made no threats of eternal damnation. He rejected any form of coercion or intimidation. Rather, as a true evangelizer, he stressed the "positive transformation"¹⁹ created by baptism and life in Christ.

For further reading:

Orthodox Alaska, A Theology of Mission, Fr Michael Oleksa, SVS Press, 1992

Alaskan Missionary Spirituality, Edited by Fr. Michael Oleksa, Paulist Press, 1987

¹⁷ [the word is seed] See Cyril C. Richardson, ed., "First Apology of St. Justin" Early Christian Fathers, (New York, NY, Collier Books, 1970) p. 272

¹⁸ Fr. Michael Oleksa, Alaskan Missionary Spirituality, (Mahwah, NJ, Paulist Press, 1987) p.32

¹⁹ *ibid.*

Appendix II

St. Innocent's Rules for Missionary Work

The following are excerpts from a valuable text penned by St. Innocent. Undoubtedly reflecting his own approach to missionary work, they are a part of his instructions to Hieromonk Theophan in 1853 as found in Alaskan Missionary Spirituality, p. 238-250 by Fr. Michael Oleksa. Some pertinent highlights include:

- (1) Pray, pray, pray
- (2) Conversion comes from God, not the evangelist
- (3) The missionary is only a tool in God's hands
- (4) Think before doing, do not be negligent
- (5) Love your work and those to whom you are preaching
- (6) Preach to their hearts, not their minds, from your heart
- (7) Keep dogmas strictly, but make necessary allowances for new converts
- (8) Appropriately adjust fasting to the local culture as needed
- (9) Other than Divine Liturgy, church attendance should not be made an absolute duty
- (10) Ancient customs that are non-Christian are not to be ended abruptly and it must be explained that they are only tolerated
- (11) Those who are not baptized may attend Divine Liturgy if they are not a threat and if they will benefit.
- (12) Do not give gifts to neophytes since this may be a temptation for conversion
- (13) Do not make bribes, threats, or promises to induce anyone into baptism
- (14) Act in a dignified manner to gain respect of the people
- (15) Do your best to win confidence and help them whenever you can so that they see your open heart
- (16) When instructing be gentle, pleasant, and simple, and not overbearing or didactic
- (17) Listen courteously and attentively and answer questions carefully and kindly
- (18) Be especially friendly to those who are not willing accept baptism
- (19) "From new converts or neophytes thou shalt not on any account whatsoever demand contributions or donations for the church or any good work; yet thou shalt not refuse, but kindly accept gifts from some such persons as may voluntarily offer anything, -taking care however, to explain on each separate occasion the object of the gift and the use it will be put to, in order that they might not get the idea that God, like their own spirits, demand offerings, or that such gifts are expiatory or propitiatory sacrifices and the like. ²⁰
- (20) Do not require of new converts or those who you are evangelizing contributions and do not enter any commercial transactions with them
- (21) Do not meddle in temporal affairs
- (22) Keep a diary
- (23) Start a primary school for the instruction of children in Catechism, reading etc.

²⁰ Oleksa, "Report of Archimandrite Ioasaph to the Holy Synod, 1797", Alaskan Missionary Spirituality, p. 248). Missionaries need to be financially supported independent of those to whom they evangelize until they are dedicated to the Gospel and the church (p.68, *ibid.*) Missionaries have to be committed to the work God has called them to. Missionaries prior to going to Alaska had to pledge an oath that they would earnestly do the missionary work that God has called them to in a spirit of Christian love. (p. 139, "Missionary Oath," *ibid.*)

(24) "Do thou strive to stand before God, a laborer unashamed, righteously administering the Word of Truth. Devote thyself to the teaching and abide therein, -and thus by doing, shalt thou save both thyself and them that listen to thee.²¹

²¹ Oleksa, Alaskan Missionary Spirituality, p. 250, cf. 1Cor. 9:23 "I do it all for the sake of the Gospel, that I may share in its blessings".

Appendix III

Reality Check: Developing a Vision & Creating a Church Planting Plan

- I. Why start a new Orthodox church in this area?
 - A. Prove its feasibility.
 - B. Is the Church planting priest called to this?
 1. Does he have a mission-vision?
 - C. Define all obstacles and potential solutions.
- II. How will you plant the church?
 - A. What is your church planting method?
- III. Describe those you seek to evangelize: Include:
 - A. Demographics
 - B. Specific needs of the people
 - C. Location
- IV. With whom will you plant this church?
 - A. Who is your mentor?
 - B. Who are your ministry partners?
 1. List any potential launch team members with their profiles.
 - a. What are they willing to contribute to this endeavor?
 - I. Get them on record!
 2. List:
 - a. Any core group members
 - b. Any other confirmed members
 - c. Anyone interested in a new Orthodox church
- V. List and define categories of ministries/task assignments that will need to be filled.
 - A. Identify potential candidates.
- VI. How and when will you plant this church?
 - A. Include:
 1. Detailed time line of the first 36 months
 2. Your plans of evangelism
 3. Any other aspect of your strategic plan.
 - a. Include all important milestones.
- VII. What are your goals?
 - A. Include:
 1. Expected church attendance in
 - a. One, three, five and ten years.
 - B. Define success.
 - C. When will you plant another church?
 - D. When will you obtain your own church building?
- VIII. Define income and expenses.
 - A. Include
 1. Start-up budget
 2. Projected cash flow
 3. Specific funding strategies (grants etc.)

This church planting plan must be a concisely worded with facts well documented.

Church Facilities Checklist

Prepared for OCA Dept. of Missions
Dated January 2002

1. Church facilities are a complex issue for a new church community. A church that is in a poor location, inadequately sized, in poor condition, etc. can severely hinder the growth of a fledgling community. People do judge a book by it's cover.
2. The first thing to remember is that Church is a community, not a building. Orthodox architecture is sacred, but in the first days it is like the tabernacle in the wilderness(Ex 25:8ff) , and not the Temple (2Chronicles 2:5ff). As the community grows, in God's time with God's help the temple can be built.
3. How to find the right facilities
 - a. Perhaps the hardest thing to do is to find the proper building to use as a church facility. Because of high rents, zoning, lack of available/suitable facilities, facility shopping can be frustrating. Unlike searching for an apartment to rent or home to buy, searching for a location that meets all needs can take months and months. You have to commit to a long and relentless search, perhaps visiting 100+ locations.
 - b. This will take a lot of work and prayer. To quote a father of the church "Work as if everything depends on you, pray as if everything depends on God."
 - c. Suggestions:
 - i. Existing churches that do not have a pastor,
 - ii. Seventh Day Adventist and even some liberal Jews have been known to rent to Christian churches
 - iii. Talk to Episcopal and Roman priests.
 - iv. Office-warehouse space (well designed conversion are nice.
 - v. Storefronts
 - vi. Office space
 - vii. Chapels in hospitals, etc.
 - d. It is important to have a contractual relationship. Churches that have "free" rent often are asked to move suddenly and at the Owners whim. This is disruptive to a young community. This rent is really not free because it causes emotional and even long-term financial loss. Always think in the big picture.
 - e. Do not move often!!! Unless planned moving should be only out of extreme necessity. Always move "up". To "step back" and go to a smaller or poorer facility can really hurt the momentum of a church.
4. What does the first time visitor see? Our appearance to some can an indication of what we think about God. Remember the importance of first impressions
 - a. Cleanliness-
 - i. Are the bathrooms clean?
 - ii. The kitchen trash out?
 - iii. Floors swept?
 - b. Aesthetics
 - i. Neatness- is everything in place
 - ii. Color coordination- is everything hodge-podge or do things match?
 - iii. Iconography- self explanatory
 - c. Signage-
 - i. Are the bathrooms easy to find?,
 - ii. Is the church easy to find from the highway
 - d. "Curb appeal"
 - i. Is the church easily identifiable?
 - ii. Is it inviting
 - iii. Does is say church?
5. Location, location, location
 - a. As in real estate, location is critical
 - b. It does not have to be a high profile location, but one that is easily accessible. Orthodoxy is a

- destination church, not a drive-by, drop-in church.
- c. The average person generally speaking does not drive further to church than they do to work.
 - d. Location will influence what socio-economic group that is attracted to your church. A bad neighborhood will be a hindrance to those who are concerned about safety.
6. Sizing things up.
- a. In your Nave estimate 9-10 sf per person. So if your nave is 1000 sf at 100% capacity you will fit about 100 people. This will feel extremely crowded.
 - b. The 80% rule. If on a Sunday morning a visitor attends church and sees it only 50% full, he wonders what is wrong with the church. If it is more than 80% and uncomfortably full, he may think there is no room for them there. (People like their space.) So the above example of 1000 sf is only good for maybe 80 people.
 - i. Chairs can be used to adjust perception of “fullness.” If your church holds 100, and you only expect 50, put out 60 seats and your church will not look only half full.
 - c. Fellowship Hall- Figure 50-75% of attendance stay for fellowship and a minimum of 10 sf per person. High side 15sf. A rule might be having the fellowship hall size equal the nave size. Do not neglect the importance of adequate fellowship space. A lot of ministry is done during coffee hour. This is the time we get to reach out to visitors/inquirers.
 - i. Round tables are better for fellowship
 - ii. Don't forget warming kitchen for food!
 - d. Parking: 1 acre= 100 cars. 1 car = 2.5 people.
 - e. In evaluating a facility, acoustics are important
7. Tear down/set up situations.
- a. On site storage possibilities
 - b. Can you use a censor/light candles?
8. Building Programs
- a. It is not the focus here to talk about how to run a building program, but a few precautions.
 - i. An ill timed, poorly run building program can divide a community, cause a church to lose momentum, etc.
 - ii. Begin your building program when you are sure it is God's timing. Building “fever” can be fatal!
9. Final thoughts: It can be very frustrating finding the right location.
- a. If it is God's will for your church community to exist, through a serious effort of prayer and fasting, begging God on your knees you will find the right location. God will reveal it to you and you will know it is right.