



Department of Pastoral Life and Ministry ♦ Orthodox Church in America

PASTORS TO PASTORS

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VOCATION: The Gateway to the Kingdom

by Fr Alexander Garklavs, Editor



The Holy Synod of Bishops of the OCA has designated 1996 as the "Year of Vocations." To underscore the increasing loss of interest in the priestly ministry the OCA will devote considerable energy to the subject of vocation. A video and study guide is in the process of production, materials for youth groups have been prepared, pastoral letters and other material will be forthcoming. All of these projects are beneficial and will hopefully stimulate interest in and discussion about this important subject. To us who are in the priestly ministry this may seem to be somehow anticlimactic. Supposedly, we already *have* a vocation. We have responded to the call and we can offer help to those who may be searching for their vocation without much consideration about our own.

On the other hand, now is an opportunity for us to reflect upon the very meaning of vocation. In fact, the many problems associated with the priestly ministry indicate that the concept of vocation is much more complicated than we may have thought. Why, for example, is it that more and more men who had a vocation and became priests discover, after a few years, that they no longer want to remain in the ministry? Again, why do men with absolute conviction that they have a vocation to become a priest, have absolutely no real willingness to be a *parish* priest? And further, what about men who claim with certainty that they have a vocation to be a priest and may even become priests, and yet are simply unprepared and unqualified?

These questions reveal that vocation is a subject shrouded in mystery. It is also, by definition, an intimate and personal matter. If it were possible somehow to gather every priest in the OCA and to offer everyone the opportunity to self-evaluate the conditions and reasons for becoming a priest, we would undoubtedly find that *every* case is unique. While certain patterns may be evident, it would be very

Welcome Back to *Pastors to Pastors!*

After a hiatus of four years our clergy publication, "*Pastors to Pastors*" again sees the light of day. The publication was a good idea when it was initiated and in its dormant years, the desire to see it in print again was often a topic of discussion among us.

The Holy Synod is pleased to bless the reestablishment of this publication, being highly supportive of the publication as another means of strengthening fraternal ties between our clergy.

Our dioceses are widespread and many parishes are distant one from another. There are a number of us who experience a sense of isolation. On the one hand, we retain ties with those of our friends together with whom we attended seminary but due to the distance factor the opportunities to enlarge our circle of acquaintances is limited. How can we come to know the pastoral efforts of brother clergy and learn of the fruits of their labor, efforts from which we could learn? "*Pastors to Pastors*" is meant to bridge those distances by bringing to our common attention the good examples and experiences of others. We may possibly learn of a few "caveats."

The Members of the Holy Synod have been diligent in their efforts to seek new vocations for the ranks of clergy and remain dedicated to paternal support for those already in the ranks. In addition to the Pastoral Letter on Vocations issued by the Holy Synod and printed in the newspaper *The Orthodox Church*, June/July, 1996, there were editorials and articles dealing with this important concern. It seems appropriate that the newsletter, "*Pastors to Pastors*", should be reinvigorated during this year in which the need for priestly vocations is especially being emphasized.

We offer our sincere thanks to the Editorial Committee of the new "*Pastors to Pastors*" for shouldering the editorial and publishing activity on our behalf.

+ NATHANIEL

Bishop of Detroit and the Romanian Diocese
Episcopal Moderator, Pastoral Life and Ministries Unit

difficult to formulate anything like a "theology" or "theory" of vocation. In fact, the very existence of something like a vocation for the priesthood, though so common in everyday thinking, is not within the traditional realm of Orthodox theology.

Vocation as a particular calling to be a priest is a theological concept that originated in the Christian West. It was assimilated among the Orthodox, though not without resistance. Some recent Orthodox theologians emphatically denied the existence of a special calling to the priesthood. In the Patristic period, we

may recall, the idea of a call to the priesthood was seen primarily as a matter of Church discipline and practicality. That God would call someone to the priesthood was regarded with great suspicion. The tone of the pastoral writings of both Saints John Chrysostom and Gregory the Theologian indicate apprehension, fear of and reluctance to accept the priestly ministry. After his ordination, St Gregory came to deny that he ever had a "divine call" and when he finally recognizes the need to return to Nazianzus he does so out of a sense of duty, not vocation.

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The point is that, while Saints John and Gregory follow the New Testament in affirming a "call" from God or an *inclusive* vocation so to speak, a specific *exclusive* priestly vocation is not recognized. It is true that the Apostles and St Paul were *called*. But theirs was a call to be followers of Christ and only after that inclusive call did they subsequently find a specific role, e.g. as Apostle to the Gentiles, or Bishop of Rome. We too are "called to belong to Jesus Christ" and we are "called to be saints." Within that calling we find our personal specific vocation which *may* mean a priestly ministry.

God does call us, as He calls all, to "His eternal glory in Christ" (1 Pt 5:10). In turn, the Church calls certain men to fulfill the specific function of pastoral ministry, as bishops, priests, deacons, etc. The men (and women, in certain cases) who are called to serve the Church never declare themselves "to be worthy." That affirmation ("axios") is made by the Church in recognition of someone's having the appropriate qualities (i.e. conformity with guidelines [canons] designated by the Church). Therefore it is true that priestly vocations are within legitimate boundaries of the Church. The Church has, in fact, a duty to nurture all vocations that are for the glory of God. The case of bishops, priests and deacons is special because the Church specifically calls and decides who is best suited for the task. Whatever the Church can do to accomplish this endeavor should be welcomed and supported.

For us priests, the question of the inclusive vocation is of course the basis of ministry. We assist, encourage, facilitate and even articulate the call of God to our faithful parishioners, to anyone who may be interested in that call. Not enough people see their religious life in terms of vocation. The Church and religion are rather marketable enterprises which can buy, sell, or lease certain "spiritual" components. Our parishioners and people relate to the Church in terms of "membership" or "affiliation." With that kind of thinking God Himself can be "influenced" or "swayed" by virtue of membership. By understanding our life as Orthodox Christians in terms of vocation we come to the needed corrective to these contemporary aberrations.

The concept of vocation as the fundamental expression of our relationship with God is at the core of New Testament theology. Vocation implies all that makes the Christian faith come alive. Vocation is the affirmation of a stimulating, personal relationship with Christ. It is the presence of the Holy Spirit in our life, the call of God the Father to be His very children. True vocation is the greatest joy that we will ever know while in this world; a joy that faces hardship, abuse and even death with serenity and

forgiveness. With this kind of understanding of vocation, an outgrowth of priestly vocations is a natural consequence.

As consecrated and ordained bishops, priests and deacons, we are better off in understanding our personal vocation as an ongoing spiritual quest rather than as something that happened once and for all. It is ongoing because our personal ministry is always changing. We may have become priests because of our love of ritual, but we subsequently discover that working with people is the "more needful" component of the priesthood. Or, we may have used the priesthood in order to serve a personal desire to assist and counsel people, and then we find a greater satisfaction in meditation and quiet prayer. Then again, we may have had a combination of motives and reasons for becoming priests, thinking that it would bring satisfaction and creative fulfillment, only to find that our vocation is to suffer, be misunderstood and unappreciated!

Without God's call, we would be neither Christians nor priests. Vocation is the gateway to the Kingdom. We may struggle before, during and after our conscious response to our vocation. It is also the comforting recognition that the Creator and Master of this incredible and limitless universe has a unique plan for us. Vocation is the real invitation to find meaning, peace, and wisdom in life, and for us, in the priesthood. □

PASTORS TO PASTORS

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Dear Diary

Tuesday: She called again! This time, somebody didn't empty the coffee pot last Sunday and grounds were getting moldy... *and what am I going to do about it!* ... said she'll never volunteer for another coffee hour as long as she lives! Plus the kids mangled her peach cobbler.

Wednesday: Mrs S dropped in at suppertime. Gave me a check for \$17. \$3 for candles, \$3 for mission offering, \$5 for 'prayers', \$3 for a dozen perogi she forgot to pay for two months ago, \$2 for building fund, *"and the rest for whatever the church needs."* (treasurer on vacation)

Friday: Joe came to clean the church. Can't understand why clorox didn't work on carpet wax .. said he'd be back later with 'industrial cleaner'.

Saturday: group of Baptists came for Vespers. Mrs Y took a collection and tried to sell them raffle tickets! They asked usual questions; *"What's a Theotokos?"* and *"Don't you preach?"* After printing the bulletin, Mr P came to 'chat' ... left at midnight.

Sunday: Woke up to a call from Mrs P. Mr P didn't come home last night. *"What did you say to him!"*



"Thoughts and Recollections"

Editor's Note: One of the greatest influences on young men who become priests is the example of other pastors. Once ordained, we still look to our *elders* for guidance and inspiration. In this spirit, "Pastors to Pastors" will feature regular interviews with such pastors. To introduce this feature, we look to our beloved Primate,

Metropolitan THEODOSIUS.

Q. Your Beatitude has spoken about the influence you received from your parish priest in your hometown of Canonsburg PA. How would you characterize the person and his influences. Did he show a personal interest in your vocation?

A. Fr Basil Horsky of blessed memory was the priest in Canonsburg during my youth. He helped provide in a most natural way the spiritual formation that eventually led me to the seminary and to priestly and ultimately, archpastoral ministry. His influence was primarily through the self-evident fact that his life was permeated with a powerful love for Christ and the Church. The example of his whole life and person, more than any words or deeds, influenced me.

You ask if he was personally interested in my vocation. I would answer that by saying Fr Basil was genuinely interested in me -- a child of God -- and my salvation. After Fr Basil left Canonsburg and I graduated from college, I wrote and asked him for a letter of recommendation to the Seminary. He was pleasantly surprised by my decision, although he knew of my love for God and the Church. He said he did all he could for me so that I would mature as an Orthodox Christian. His example helped me discern my vocation.

Q. What about Seminary? You attended St Vladimir's at a very exciting time. While the great impact of St Vladimir's on theology is well known, what about the development of the priestly vocation? Who affected you the most in regard to pastoral ministry and how was this accomplished?

A. I attended St Vladimir's when it was still located in an apartment building on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. The whole school -- the administration, faculty, staff, students, etc. -- all lived

and worked together in that one building. There were many prominent people there at the time -- Fr Alexander Schmemmann, Professors Alexander Bogolepov, Serge Verhovskoy, Nicholas Arseniev, Boris Ledkovsky, and more -- and students from every Orthodox "jurisdiction" and from every Orthodox background. The feeling of common work was great. There was great hope for the future of Orthodoxy in North America.

Liturgical prayer was (and remains) the center of life at the seminary. The cycle of services was then, as it is now, full -- we had services in the chapel at least twice a day. This corporate worship was the foundation on which all else was built.

The services were always precisely and carefully celebrated by Fr Alexander and others. They attended to the detail of the services in an effort to bring everything -- liturgical word, liturgical music, liturgical action -- together into one truly prayerful liturgical unity. This strongly affected my service as a priest and bishop. I have always endeavored to serve with that same precise and careful attention to detail. For the liturgy is where we meet God "face-to-face" and liturgical celebration is also one of the main ways in which a pastor is made present to his flock. People do notice how the priest and bishop serves and it does affect them positively or negatively.

It would be unfair for me to answer your question as to who at St Vladimir's affected me the most in regard to pastoral ministry by naming one specific person. Of course, the influence of Fr Schmemmann in his role as dean affected all of us profoundly, but all of the faculty members at that time were strong personalities, and each of them fed the vocations of the students in one way or another -- probably in ways that they did not even realize. For example, these many years later one remembers Professor Arseniev's passion for God, his

zeal for the Lord, perhaps more than the content of his lectures. Humanly, his eyes were weak and he could barely see. Yet, one felt that he in fact "saw" much, and that was extremely edifying. Looking back, one remembers as well that the essence of Professor Bogolepov's vision for the future of American Orthodoxy is the vision that still drives our Church in America today -- we still look forward to the day when we will achieve administrative union of the Orthodox on this great continent.

One could reminisce more, but what is central to this is that we students knew that our teachers, though interested and expert in many and various things, were essentially committed to the "one thing needful" -- hearing the Word of God and keeping it.

Q. What are some of your "favorite" memories while you were involved in parish ministry?

A. From 1961 until 1966, I was the pastor of Nativity of the Virgin Mary Church in Madison, Illinois. What I remember best and value most from those days is the wonderful fullness, rhythm and warmth of parish life. I believe this is an aspect of parish life we must nurture and not take for granted. The "rootedness" one enjoys when one is a member of an established parish community is a wonderful gift.

In many ways the parish community is where the Church "happens", where it is manifested, in our day-to-day lives, and my ministry has always been aimed first and foremost at fostering that experience, so that people might be brought to God and be made worthy of salvation and eternal life. For this reason, I really enjoy visiting parishes and being with the "people of God". Seeing the Body of Christ concretely manifested in any given place is wonderful and edifying.

(...continued)

A new opportunity for

PEACE AND QUIET

by Fr John Garvey

✱

During discussions at the Tenth All-American Council, the idea of priests and their wives having places to go for retreat was considered as a serious need. Recently an exciting prospect has appeared to answer that need!

Fr John Breck, who taught Biblical studies, ethics, and Greek at St Vladimir's Seminary for twelve years (following six years at St Sergius Seminary in Paris and three years at St Herman's in Alaska!) has retired — *but not exactly*. Fr John and his wife Lyn, a psychotherapist, have moved to Wadmalaw Island near Charleston, South Carolina to establish St Silouan's Retreat. This promises to be a positive development for the OCA, especially for the clergy. The Retreat has been put under the Pastoral Life Ministries Unit of the OCA by His Beatitude, Metropolitan THEODOSIUS. In this way it will be open to all OCA clergy (as well as interested laity) for prayer, meditation, silence and profitable discussion.

St Silouan's is situated on 70 acres near a tidal river. There are two one-room guest houses with bath and kitchenette. Priests, their wives, and others who feel the need for some time in quiet may spend a few days or even a week or so, but of course you must call ahead to see about the availability of the guest houses. Vespers, Matins, and Compline are celebrated regularly, and the Divine Liturgy is celebrated on Sundays and feast days. There is no set fee, but donations to defray costs are appreciated: it costs about \$40 per day to house a guest.

Fr Breck also hopes that small groups of priests and lay people may meet there to discuss specific themes: St Silouan's will be a place of continuing education as well as a retreat. St Silouan Retreat is affiliated with the International Association of St Silouan, which also includes the monasteries of St Silouan in France and St John the Baptist in England. If you are interested in a visit, you can contact

**ST SILOUAN RETREAT
6102 ROCKEFELLER ROAD
WADMALAW ISLAND, SC 29487
(803) 339-1404.**

Every priest knows how welcome a vacation is but not enough of us take time for retreats, for times of silence and regular liturgical prayer, away from our ordinary parish duties, whether alone or

with our wives (who usually need such quiet time at least as much as we do).

In addition to the newly-established St Silouan's Retreat, we are blessed with several places which offer us this opportunity — always assuming, of course, that you call ahead about room availability. Among other possibilities are the following (see the OCA directory for further information):

**ST TIKHONS MONASTERY
South Canaan PA
HOLY TRANSFIGURATION
MONASTERY
Ellwood City PA
NEW SKETE MONASTERY
Cambridge NY
COMMUNITY OF THE
HOLY MYRRHBEARERS
Otego NY**

Metropolitan THEODOSIUS (from page 3)

Q. As Metropolitan of the Orthodox Church in America, Your Beatitude is also our chief Archbishop! What do you see as some of the urgent issues challenging the Orthodox priesthood today? Are they much different today than twenty-five years ago?

A. There is a saying with which we are all probably familiar; "The more things change, the more they stay the same." One might also refer to the Biblical phrase; "there is nothing new under the sun" (Eccles 1:9b). In some ways the challenges facing the Orthodox priesthood today are different than they were twenty-five years ago. For example, many moral and ethical issues we face today are the results of scientific developments and social changes that have occurred during the course of the

last quarter century. But still, "The more things change, the more they stay the same." In other words, we are always faced with new and different challenges by the world we live in, but we must never forget the basic challenge, the basic task. The priest is called to follow the example of the Apostle Paul, who said "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings" (I Cor 8:23).

Our challenge then is to preach the unchanging Gospel, the Good News of Christ, in a changing world, finding the means to reach all those whom we have been called to pastor, "working out our salvation with fear and trembling." I pray for our priests, both those who have fallen asleep in the Lord, and those who continue to "take up their cross daily" in this life, every day, that they might "preserve to the end." □

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