



PASTORS TO PASTORS

Volume 5 Number 2 Fall 1998

The Pastoral Ministries Conference

by Father Alexander Garklavs



The recent Pastoral Ministries Conference (June 9 - 11, 1998 at St. Tikhon's Monastery) was the first such gathering of clergy of the Orthodox Church in America. It was, by nearly all accounts, an inspiring success. For a few, bright Spring days, the clergy of the OCA gathered in an atmosphere almost totally devoid of negativity, mistrust and competition. There was, first of all, the incredible *unifying power of liturgical worship*, which resonated deep into the soul, as communal praise was given to God "with one mouth and one heart." There were other wonders: the comforting spirit of respectful brotherhood, the honest sharing of ideas, joys and heartaches, the worthy presentations and discussions (which we hope to publish and distribute soon), the serene and uplifting monastery surroundings; all of these elements contributed to the fulfilling experience.

In reflecting on the overall positive nature of the clergy gathering, we would like to offer an "editorial-type-of" observation. To begin by stating the obvious: these kind of gatherings are very important. On a diocesan, regional, seminary alumni or deanery level, they are extremely beneficial for the good estate of the Church and for the uplifting of spirit for the priests. On a national level, that is, as a gathering of the clergy of the entire OCA, the importance is raised to a higher level: it becomes a *gathering of the Church*. It is not the only kind of gathering of the Church, but until not so very long ago, the coming together of the Church's clergy (bishops

usually, but priests also in the more recent cases) were the only kinds of meetings, councils, sobors, etc., that the Church deemed possible. We have changed, of course. Today, the Orthodox Church in America accepts the "All-American Council (AAC)," composed of an equal amount of clergy and laity, as the "highest legislative and administrative authority within the Church." This is as it should be, because it does represent the true plurality of Church constituents. But the All-American Council, by virtue of its all-encompassing pluralism, has diluted discussion within individual sectors of the Church. Because every facet of Church life is to be studied and considered, individual issues often receive only superficial analysis and conditional resolution. The AAC, as it is presently conceived, is a unique and recent phenomenon. It is certainly based on scriptural and theological ideals, but practically

speaking, it is in the process of self-evaluation. This is only natural, given the relative novelty of the AAC and the absence of existing paradigms. Church history teaches us that changes do occur, but they take a long time. Because of this, it is absolutely imperative that all clergy participate in the Council with positive contributions and goodwill. However, as has been the case, there are pastoral and priestly issues, that remain unresolved, sometimes even not addressed.

National (OCA) clergy gatherings, such as the one last June, need to become regular, perhaps even "institutionalized"! They can become the needed supplement to the AAC, a forum for investigating and resolving issues that, honestly speaking, are entirely pastoral. Issues involving liturgical practice, liturgical translations, pastoral outreach,

(CONFERENCE to page 4)

Interpreting the Clergy Survey

by Father John Garvey



Before this summer's OCA clergy conference at St. Tikhon's Seminary, a survey was mailed to the clergy. Although all surveys have their shortcomings and aren't as capable of offering us as rounded a picture as we might like, they do tell us something. This one gives us a sense of the life, and mood, of our clergy. The results are interesting and in some cases encouraging.

Of the 611 surveys distributed, 162 (27%) were returned. Many of the questions allowed more than one answer, so some totals are frequently more than one hundred per cent. Here are some highlights:

Eighty-five per cent of the responding clergy are married, 11% are not, 3% are divorced, and 1% are widowed. Eighty six per cent have children.

Twenty-one per cent of the clergy have full-time jobs outside the church, and 11% work at part-time jobs. The majority (74%) work either because the parish can't support the priest, or the family requires extra income. Sixty-six percent of the clergy wives work, either full or part-time, with nearly half (48%) reporting that employment is necessary to support the family, or "somewhat necessary" (18%), or because it provides medical coverage (16%).

(SURVEY to page 2)

Wisdom of ages past

On Pastoral Leadership



"If you are put in charge of the brethren, in your care of them be strict in thought and merciful in action, teach them the way to live both by word and by deed but especially by your deeds, because example is more stimulating than words...

If there is need to rebuke, take into account the person to whom the rebuke is due, and choose a suitable time.... Do not correct too severely, for this is burdensome and piling up corrections leads to insensitivity and contempt and not to orderly government...

At a time of disturbance, when the brother is resisting you, control your tongue lest you say anything simply to vent your anger and do not allow yourself to curse him in your heart but remember that he is your brother, a member of Christ and made to God's likeness."

-- St Dorotheos of Gaza,
quoted in "*Oriented Leadership*"

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(SURVEY continued)

Sixty-nine per cent of clergy wives were described as being involved "a great deal" or "significantly" in their husbands' pastoral work.

In response to a question about helpful influences on pastoral ministry, 61% listed their wives, and 32% named family. Other helps in pastoral work were "friendly parishioners" (66%), older clergy (50%), seminary education (49%), books read (39%), and the Bible (35%).

As far as the priest's attitude towards his own vocation is concerned, a majority of the respondents (75%) had "a definite sense of having a special calling" and became priests "to serve and help people" (63%). Their parish priests were listed by 73% as having had the greatest influence on the decision to become a priest.

In response to the question, "In your pastoral ministry as it has evolved, what reasons do you now consider important in your life?" the great majority answered "To serve God and follow his will" (91%), and most added "to serve and help people" (68%).

A concern for the decline in family values was cited by 68% of the respondents as a major difficulty confronting pastors, along with a loss of interest in traditional religions (48%), the abundance of material possessions (44%), and the worship of mammon (40%), which tied with the influence of television and movies. Other problems include lack of participation in liturgical services (58%), lack of interest in spiritual issues (56%), and lack of interest in adult education (52%).

The great majority of priests found their role as liturgical celebrant one of the most rewarding aspects of their ministry (73%) followed by "working with faithful and active parishioners" (52%).

Although the majority of clergy (79%) have never regretted becoming Orthodox priests, 31% do regret it, and nearly half of all respondents (48%) have considered leaving the parish ministry for some other form of ministry.

On the other hand, the majority of respondents (63%) say they look forward to working as priests for as long as possible. Fewer than a third looked forward to retirement at 65 or soon thereafter. Sixty per cent of retired priests are still involved in part-time pastoral work.

For those of us still laboring in the vineyard it is encouraging that 79% of retired priests "feel a sense of gratitude and fulfillment in my work as a priest," and another 20% "feel a sense of some regrets and some gratitude and fulfillment in my work as a priest."

These last are pretty healthy numbers. In a time when there is much talk of "clergy burn-out" (a lot

of it valid), this survey offers another necessary perspective. It shows that despite everything, a majority of our clergy -- or at the very least a majority of those who responded to this survey -- find their work meaningful and fulfilling, and at the end of their working lives they see the time they have been allowed to spend in pastoral ministry as a reason for gratitude. □

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(Copies of the Survey may be obtained from the OCA Chancery.)



"Thoughts and Recollections"

"Pastors to Pastors" looks to another of the "elders" of the Church for guidance and inspiration. We are pleased herein to share our interview with

Fr Eugene Pianovich

Pastor of Saints Peter and Paul Church, Springfield MA

Q. What were some of the reasons that led you to enroll at St. Tikhon's Seminary and to become an Orthodox priest?

A. Going to St. Tikhon's to become an Orthodox priest seemed to be a natural process in my life. As the son of Archpriest Paul Pianovich, of blessed memory, we were brought up in a family atmosphere that was completely involved in Church life. This included all of the Church services, daily Church School, learning to read Church Slavonic by the age of twelve, being an altar server and a choir singer. This was very common and normal activity for young Orthodox people in the 1930's and 40's.

Seminary life in 1946 was rather primitive. As I remember it, a total of nine students were enrolled at the former Russian Orphanage building on the monastery grounds. Fr. Nicholas Bellavin (a nephew of Patriarch St. Tikhon) was the Dean of the Seminary. When Bishop Nikon arrived from the St. Sergius Academy in Paris, many positive changes occurred. The quality of life improved, the staff was expanded, the student council was instituted, seminary parochial visits were established, as were community outreach programs. Our pilgrimage at that time came into focus.

Q. What happened after your studies at St. Tikhon's?

A. After graduation in 1950, my first assignment was as choir director at Holy Trinity Church, Yonkers, New York, under the guidance and wisdom of the late Fr Joseph Pishtey. After marriage, I was notified by the Church authorities to prepare for ordination, which occurred in March, 1951.

Immediately assigned to Holy Resurrection Cathedral, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania (salary unknown!), I served as assistant to the Rt. Rev. John Krashkevich, of blessed memory. Fr. John was a wonderful teacher from whom young priest like myself profited with many excellent pastoral examples. Serving in Wilkes-Barre in the old cathedral, at the altar of St. Alexis (Toth), was a very special experience that I recall with much joy. It was a time of growth and change. We began transition to the English language in the liturgical services which did result in some difficulties for a few people. To facilitate this process, I served the first Sunday morning Liturgy in English and Fr. John served the second in Slavonic.

Q. What have you most enjoyed about being a parish priest?

A. I have truly enjoyed being an Orthodox priest. Especially gratifying has been the liturgical life. There were also other memorable times. In 1955, while serving at Holy Resurrection in Wilkes-Barre, I directed a series of television programs on behalf of the local deanery. I had an assignment as the first Orthodox Chaplain at a new VA Hospital and I was a lecturer at St. Tikhon's Seminary in 1956.

As is often in life, the pleasant and joyous events are closely connected to the difficult and challenging episodes of the priesthood. Appointed pastor of SS. Peter and Paul Church, Springfield, MA in 1958, I came to a very difficult spiritual and financial situation. But with God's help we began to move forward. At first there were house-to-house pastoral visitations, with questionnaires about the parishioners and requests for

financial help. Spiritual life grew steadily and many parish projects and activities were initiated. A new altar table was acquired, a new iconostasis with icons was constructed, there was a complete renewal of the church interior, gold leafing of the domes (twice!), purchase of three lots behind the church, acquisition of a new rectory and the production of our Sunday radio program for eight years.

There were activities outside the parish that were also very interesting. For a period of about twenty-five years, I served in a combination of the following Church roles: as Dean of the Connecticut Deanery, as Diocesan Chancellor, and as a member of the Metropolitan Council. I also served the community by being a member of the school board Advisory Committee and the City Council sub-committee.

Q. Do you think it is easier or harder for young priests today?

A. Every age has its own difficulties and challenges for young priests. I believe that today the challenges today are very difficult for the Church as a whole and for my younger brothers in their pastoral life. These challenges involve adjustment to the variety of implications of our highly technological and amoral age, where positive progress brings with it a corresponding impoverishment.

Still, I see in younger priests much to be hopeful about. There are many talented and gifted individuals, as we can see from the establishment of new missions, building of new churches and reception of many into the faith. The Holy Bible teaches us that the "*fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*" God will bless our work if we keep that wise instruction in patience, love and with prayer. □

(CONFERENCE, continued)

clergy-family matters, can profit from lay input, but finally they are issues that the clergy themselves need to discuss and decide on. We are not talking here about theological principles of clergy vs. laity (i.e., whether or not the clergy are a class qualitatively distinct from the laity -- that's a hot issue!). We are simply speaking about practical efficiency. When doctors or plumbing supply salesmen meet we do not accuse them of exclusivity, they merely gather as colleagues. When clergy meet without the laity, it too is not because they claim exclusivity. They meet, like other professionals, to determine the problems and solutions that affect their vocation. Because the Church is NOT just concerned with pastoral problems, we do need the AAC. However, because pastoral problems remain in the Church, serious and important problems which need to be resolved, and because the AAC may not be the best place to do so, we feel that clergy gatherings can provide a possible solution.

As priests we do accept the undeniable fact that the Holy Synod will have the last say about these issues, but the hierarchs also need very much to hear what their priests think and feel. It should be noted that the Pastoral Ministries Conference could not have been the success it was without the involvement of the OCA's hierarchs. While not all of the members of the Holy Synod of Bishops

could be present, it was their initiative and their blessings that brought the Conference into being. Those hierarchs who were present, including His Beatitude, Metropolitan Theodosius, blessed the Conference with their spiritual presence, their presentations, their engaging words and their comforting interaction.

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Although the lines of hierarchical authority were never ignored, there was a real sense of a *common task*. Regardless of a particular facet of Christian ministry, administration or function, the collective body of the clerical order of the Church does work for the same purpose: To "**set our hope on the living God, Who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe,**" to pursue, as individuals, "**the way of godliness,**"

and to "**set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity**" (1 Timothy 4).

Orthodoxy in North America is by and large built on a "parish-oriented" perspective. Monasticism, though seeing some real growth in certain areas, is unfortunately neither much known nor appreciated. There are historic reasons for that. Unlike medieval Russia where Christianity spread with expansion of monastic communities, Orthodoxy came to America because ordinary Orthodox people immigrated here and the Church sent priests in their wake to minister to their needs. Yes there has been mission and evangelization but, again, in the context of parish life. Both the present and future of American Orthodoxy is tied to the state of the parishes and of pastoral life. This is especially true of the OCA and this makes the mission of today's parish clergy quite formidable. There are hosts of complicated problems and no clear-cut solutions. Clergy conferences will not provide any miraculous or easy remedies. They will, however, make it possible for bishops, priests and deacons to come together, in a spirit of mutual respect, to come to some degree of understanding. In this, there will be growth, for when there is concord and brotherly affection with love, "**they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ**" (2 Peter 1.8). □



PASTORS TO PASTORS is published by the OCA Department of Pastoral Life and Ministry, PO Box 675, Syosset NY 11791, and is distributed to all hierarchs, parish and institutional clergy, military chaplains, and monastic clergy, active and retired, on the rolls of the Orthodox Church in America, and to OCA seminarians.

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