

# PASTORS TO PASTORS

Department of Pastoral Life and Ministry  
Orthodox Church in America



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## Trust Between Clergy and their Bishop: One Diocese, Two Views

*At one of the recent meetings of the Department there was some discussion about trust between clergy and their diocesan bishop. Is there trust? What fosters it or undermines it? It was decided to interview two priests from a single diocese to get their views, with the aim of consolidating them into a single article on trust. But, as you will see, the opinions diverge considerably, so they are given below without any attempt to homogenize.*

*Perhaps the lesson of these contrasting interviews is that they say more about the attitudes and perceptions of the individual priests being interviewed than about the "objective reality" of the bishop and diocese.*

I believe there is trust between our bishop and priests. First of all, he is open about including the clergy in major decisions. He meets three or four times a year with us to talk about the direction of the diocese and to get input from priests. The other factor that builds trust is that the bishop genuinely and completely has the good of the Church at heart. I have never seen him make self-serving decisions. He has always taken the high road, even if this means that clergy will disagree with him. I don't always agree with him, but I do feel comfortable disagreeing with him. And if he doesn't agree, he gives good reasons. He isn't arbitrary. I can talk to him about anything. He isn't caught up in the trappings of being bishop—the ego, the mitre, the "master." He sees himself as put somewhere by God for the Church, and we, as the clergy, are there for the same purpose—we are all called to share in the same priesthood. He has tremendous humility. He's the only one who can talk about "our diocesan family" and not sound corny. He really means it.

When it comes to moving the diocese in some particular direction, he would much rather educate and persuade than make demands and issue directives. He doesn't like confrontation. But he knows that there are a number of clergy who simply refuse to listen to him. And this is frustrating. When push comes to shove, he will stand up and do what has to be done. Certainly, there are some situations that I feel he has handled badly, hastily. But he himself has even admitted this to the clergy. People need to forgive him for the occasional mistakes.

On a personal level, I have never seen him publicly call a priest down. Nor does he gossip or talk about individual priests in the presence of others. If he has something critical to say, he says it privately. He gives you respect. He respects the dignity of the priesthood, and sees it as something we share.

He has genuine empathy for the clergy and sees himself as pastor to the priests. He tries to keep track of people. If someone is ill, or has personal problems, he calls, he offers assistance. I know that he does wonderful things with his discretionary fund.

Bishops often consider themselves above everything—they're not! A lot of bishops are out of touch, they just don't

know what's really going on. Half of our bishops think we live in 17th century Russia. But our bishop does a decent job. His big weakness is administration: he doesn't follow through. But if I could "build" a bishop and God told me he had to have one weakness, that's the weakness I'd choose. We have too many office keepers and administrators and not enough pastors. He has all the strengths in the right places. And that makes me trust him. ♦

Trust between the bishop and clergy has eroded over the last few years, largely because of certain decisions the bishop has made. Just yesterday I was speaking to a senior archpriest who said he's had it with directives and letters.

Initially there was trust, there was a real working relationship with the clergy to build a strong diocesan structure. For the first few years that was happening, but in retrospect I wonder if that wasn't all just cosmetic. One gift the bishop has is that you can approach him about anything. I think everyone would agree on that. But I question whether real communication is going on. Is he really hearing what is said? The bishop does not put much credence in the ability of his priests. There's a certain cynicism: he expects them not to support him, on principle. But there are often very good reasons for disagreeing with him, and this he does not see. What is good is that the bishop is meeting periodically with the deans in the diocese. But there is a question mark: is it to really meet and discuss or is its purpose just to accept a *fait accompli*? There has been a breakdown in communication, and priests are now afraid of questioning him. There is an appearance of openness, but in fact there is apprehension and caution. And there's no one to appeal to—except God. To rebuild trust would require more than one priest to start saying what's really on his mind. Some priests have tried to do that, and laypeople as well, but they don't seem to be heard.

I still think there is hope, but it means making radical, and therefore difficult, decisions. It means reviewing and perhaps backtracking on past decisions. We have an excellent reputation as a diocese, but there are lots of question marks. Most of these can be eliminated if the leadership is strong, if there is genuine communication and dialogue, and if the bishop does not surround himself with admirers. ♦

## "P.K." Struggles — A Mom's View

by Matushka Annice Oleynik

Why do the stresses of life in a clergy family seem so acute? This question has grabbed a strong hold of my thoughts recently — no doubt in large part because of our eldest daughter, who finds herself in the thick of those volatile teenage years.

Every day we grapple with trying to bring together two divergent points of view: our household's and "what everyone else thinks/does/says..." The fact that young people have a tremendous desire to "fit in" comes as no surprise to battle-weary parents. It's at this time that resentment towards an Orthodox way of life emerges. One does not fit in when one doesn't eat meat all of Great Lent, when one celebrates Easter on a different Sunday than everyone else, when one does not "just this one time" miss Liturgy on Sunday morning in order to make a sports practice or concert rehearsal. When we are honest with ourselves and honest to our faith, we know that the Orthodoxy we embrace will never diminish itself by stooping to the lowest common denominator. It is not an easy religion. It is certainly not a once-a-week religion. It is an every day way of life for each member of the Church. It is several rigorous fasting seasons; it is frequent confessions; it is sacramental celebrations with their requisite preparations; it is a clear voice in our hearts guiding our personal relationships.

When we are honest with ourselves, we know this to be true. But, again when we are honest with ourselves, we know that in reality it is the attitude and expectation of far too many Orthodox Christians that only the priest and his family must adhere strenuously to all the rules and regulations set forth. All other members require leniency in order to rub along

comfortably in their secular world.

Now we encounter the double whammy, and I think this is the more difficult to accept because, in fact, it should not even be. The separateness inherent in our Orthodoxy is a truth. For me, this truth is a positive force; for my daughter, it is a negative one. I think that, for a young person, the burden of uniqueness is more easily borne when one has the support of a close-knit group outside of the family. I have observed, however, that this shoring up does not take place because the general attitude towards adherence to Orthodox ordinances is minimalism. My children have good friends in our parish and they know other Orthodox in their schools as well, but they are the **only** ones who fast throughout Great Lent; they are the **only** ones who go to church for every service not celebrated during school hours; they are the **only** ones who don't party Saturday nights. Their efforts should be mirrored by every Orthodox Christian they know — and every Orthodox Christian should be an example to follow. No wonder they feel so resentful! And no wonder it's so difficult to stand firm, to refrain from backing down, and to come up with creative arguments that make being an Orthodox Christian seem desirable!

No matter what a family's circumstances may be, every child will go through a period of rebellion. The manner of expression as well as the magnitude will vary, but the breaking away does take place. I suppose that the last point I want to make is that storms will rage. A flower will survive if it is planted in good soil, tended, watered, pruned. It will survive whether it is in a garden of other flowers or if it stands alone. ♦

## MAIL CALL

Dear Fr. Michael:

*(Here is a belated and somewhat reluctant response to your summer 1991 article on Trust. I am not writing only on my behalf, but for fellow-clergymen of the OCA and Greek Archdiocese.)*

If any priest is in "trouble," does something which is not acceptable or which is questionable in any phase of his pastoral or personal life, he should be gently, lovingly, and quietly and quickly confronted first. He should not be reported to the dean, a fellow-clergyman, or his diocesan bishop — until he gives (or does not give) a suitable explanation. After hearing his side of the story, there might not be any need to report him or turn him in. Get his side of the story first.

Every priest, deacon or bishop should read the book, or excerpts with some of the case histories, entitled *The Reality of Evil*, by M. Scott Peck, M.D. It should make him feel more comfortable to realize that people like that are in his parish too. He is not alone.

*Name withheld on request*

P.S. DPLM is an important ministry. Too many priests are quitters and can't hack it. My dad and my father-in-law went through so much and still hung in there.

## Let us hear from you!

Pastors to Pastors welcomes your input, your suggestions, and your writing. Send to DPLM, PO Box 675, Syosset, NY 11791.

## What Business Could Teach the Parish

by Fr. H. Gregory Dudash, Ch, Maj, USAF

There is an old clergy joke that goes: "When is a businessman not a businessman?" The answer: "When he is on the Parish Board!" Nevertheless, modern business thinking could be well used by the priest and parish for mutual benefit.

The first thing any successful business needs is a clear goal of its purpose. One could say that in most businesses this might be "to make a profit." Yet there are many other goals which directly and indirectly contribute to the bottom line: i.e., the goal of expanding into new markets; the goal of good labor relationships; customer satisfaction, etc. Another, often overlooked goal, would be the method of determining if our other goals are being accomplished: "Where are we going and how will we know when we have arrived?"

One can imagine that this might be a good starting point for a pastor considering a new parish. The first question he might ask the parish board is: "What are the parish goals?" The second follows: "How do I fit into these goals?" Even more to the point: "What would you like me to accomplish in accordance with these goals?" "How will we do this?" "How will we gauge our accomplishments?"

If this sounds silly or an overworking of what is usually a free-flowing relationship, it could be suggested that this is just the very thing that causes most of the difficulty in a parish. Sometimes complaints about the pastor are not tied to any sort of job description and he is criticized for not accomplishing what he never considered his job in the first place. Then again, what is the "job" of the parish board? In too many cases they see it as the drainpipe of the church rather than Religious Education. Consider the amount of time a given parish might spend on each of these tasks.

All in all, both the pastor and the parish board are often *blamed* but never *trained*. There seems little understanding of how the general parish goals are translated into the day-to-day activities of the parish and of

the pastor. After spending twenty years serving a parish, working in the business world and in the chaplaincy, I am definitely convinced that so much good could be accomplished by clear statement of goals, of effort, and evaluation.

Most successful parishes do this same thing perhaps without putting it down on paper. Most unsuccessful parishes keep going through priest after priest because they have never faced the real unwritten goals of the parish:

1. To keep the parish going without challenging anyone with the Gospel.
2. To gain new members without ever letting anyone know that the

parish exists and when they do come to make them feel unwelcome.

3. To keep the pastor's salary as small as possible yet have him and his wife always available to any parishioner.

4. To "run" the parish with a board of the most ignorant parishioners who accept the position without ever knowing what they are supposed to do.

5. To criticize the pastor for expectations he knows nothing about and, of course, never telling any of this to his face.

6. And, the most important goal of every dying parish: To *always* do everything as we did in the past — whether it worked or not! ♦

### The Lighter Side



"Actually, this is my son, the pastor.  
He never learned to handle stress well."

#### D P L M

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## Friendship and the Council

by Father Basil Rhodes

*"The Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends." (Job 42:10)*

One could debate for hours the positives and negatives concerning the All-American Councils. Are they an opportunity for the Spirit to speak in the Church, or an effective means of stifling the Holy Spirit? Are they of supreme value, little value, or a total waste of time and money? My purpose here is not to comment on the efficacy or lack thereof of our system, but rather to look at the Councils from another perspective: friendship.

Even if we have the most bleak view about the relative worth of the work of the Councils, there is one element which is nowhere to be found on any of the printed agenda which can always be of the most significant benefit, i.e. the establishment (or more often, re-establishment) of spiritual friendships. "I am a companion of all them that fear Thee," the Psalmist says (Ps 119:63). He is right. Where will we find better opportunities to share our thoughts, bear our souls, compare ideas, solicit advice, express our frustrations, or even plot our schemes, than at the All-American Council? Here we have the chance to be surrounded by multitudes of people, most of whom share our love of God, zeal for the Church, and the desire to work for the glory of God. And perhaps some of the most vital work that we do at the Council is precisely that work of the soul and work of the heart that goes on in the restaurants or the hotel rooms or on the city streets, not on the Council floor. This is the opportunity for spiritual refreshment, growth, education, and love.

"There is a friend that is closer than a brother" (Prov 18:24), and this is our friend in Christ. Our spiritual friends, devout clergy and laity, become for us a wellspring of

blessings, healing and inspiration. Do we require any further inspiration to attend the All-American Council? Some additional prodding? What a treasure this is! What a grace from God! No matter what does or does not transpire in the plenary sessions, this gift is available to all of us. This year we gather in Miami. Let's not neglect such important opportunity. I'll see you there! ♦

## Western Clergy Conference

On October 3, 1991, the Diocese of the West held a kind of "mini-conference" of clergy with Bishop Tikhon, prior to the commencement of the meetings of the Diocesan Assembly. This conference was held at the Redemptorist Retreat Center near Seattle, Washington. Many of the priests and deacons of the diocese were in attendance.

Many topics were presented for discussion by His Grace. Questions concerning policy and liturgical/sacramental problems inspired some animated discussions, but on the whole there appeared to be some uneasiness, a certain unwillingness on the part of the clergy to open up. The bishop attempted to solicit discussion which was weightier, but there was a reluctance to respond. His Grace suggested that trust was the main ingredient lacking, and that we need to learn to be more trusting and open with one another.

His Grace asked me about the work of the OCA's Department of Pastoral Life and Ministry. The response from the assembled clergy was guarded but optimistic. It was suggested that the department's work needed local diocesan expression. The bishop heartily agreed, and decided to establish a Diocesan Department of Pastoral Life and Ministry to augment and implement the fruit of the larger department. This link with the OCA department seemed to be warmly received by the assembled priests and deacons. ♦

-Father Basil Rhodes