Bishops, Priests and Deacons
Aaron was the older brother of Moses and a prophet of God (Exodus 6:16–20, 7:7). He represented the priestly functions of his tribe, becoming the first High Priest of the Israelites. While Moses was being educated at the Egyptian royal court, and during his exile among the Midianites, Aaron and his sister Miriam remained with their kin in Goshen, on the eastern border of Egypt. There, Aaron gained a name for eloquent and persuasive speech, so that when the time came to demand that Pharaoh release Israel from captivity, Aaron became his brother’s “prophet” to Pharaoh (Exodus 7:1).

Aaron is also mentioned in the New Testament in multiple places. In Hebrews 7:11, St. Paul contrasts Aaron’s limited and, as we read in the Old Testament’s account of the golden calf, imperfect priesthood to Christ the perfect and eternal priest after the order of Melchizedek, the King of Salem, the first priest of the Most High after Adam, who is found in Genesis 14, bringing out bread and wine and blessing Abram.

Aaron is venerated as a saint in conjunction with his brother Moses on September 4. Various dates for his life have been proposed, ranging from approximately 1600 to 1200 BC.
For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people’s, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever.

— Hebrews 7:26–28

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

— 1 Peter 2:9–10

Even here in the Church the gradations of bishops, presbyters and deacons happen to be imitations, in my opinion, of the angelic glory and of the arrangement that, the scriptures say, awaits those who have followed in the footsteps of the Apostles and who have lived in complete righteousness according to the Gospel.

— St. Clement of Alexandria

And before a man has, as far as possible, gained this superiority, and sufficiently purified his mind, and far surpassed his fellows in nearness to God, I do not think it safe for him to be entrusted with the rule over souls, or the office of mediator (for such, I take it, a priest is) between God and man.

— St. Gregory the Theologian, Oration 2:73

The shepherd should make is life a clear example of every commandment of the Lord, and not give those he is teaching any occasion to abandon a commandment as impossible to keep, or to hold it in contempt.

— Reg. fus. 43
Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I greet you in the joy of the Resurrection of our Lord as we have been renewed in His grace and presence. In this holy Paschal Season, we are presented with this new issue of *PRAXIS* and its focus on clergy. The role of our clergy in the ministry of religious education is essential. In addition to being called as preachers and pastors, our beloved priests and deacons are called to be teachers (Ephesians 4:11) in all that they do in their service to God and their ministry to His people.

Our clergy are teachers in their sacred task of leading in worship. Through the ministry of sacrament and word in the divine services of the Church, they guide the faithful in relating the Holy Eucharist to their lives. Through the reading and exposition of the Holy Scriptures, truth is proclaimed and taught. Through prayers and sermons, our clergy connect faith and praxis.

Built upon the foundation of our worship, the ministry of religious education in the parish also includes the teaching role of the clergy through Bible studies, Sunday School, catechism, adult training, and many other educational activities. They are called to study the great treasures of our Orthodox faith and provide opportunities within the life of the parish for the people to learn and grow. Many have also been recipients of theological training, giving them a foundation upon which to build a lifetime of reflection and teaching. In these tasks, our clergy have the opportunity to emphasize a love of truth and divine wisdom.

In their teaching ministry, our priests and deacons are also able to show the attributes of our Great and Absolute Teacher, Jesus Christ. As pastors and teachers, they are called to guide the faithful with patience and kindness, learning the spiritual challenges and needs of each person. As shepherds of the people, clergy provide the instruction and counsel that will help each person grow in communion with God and commitment to His will.

Our clergy are also leaders in the organization and administration of quality religious education programs in our parishes. It is critical that each parish has the resources, so that clergy together with teachers, coordinators and the parish council can implement an education program that addresses the spiritual needs of all ages.

As you read this issue of *PRAXIS*, I invite you to reflect upon the role of our clergy in religious education. I ask our priests and deacons to consider prayerfully how they are fulfilling their calling and seeking God's guidance in strengthening the teaching ministry of the parish. I ask our religious educators and parish leaders to affirm this vital role of our clergy and to offer their prayers and support. When clergy and laity in the parish are laborers together in Christ, great spiritual fruit will be produced in the lives of the faithful, and the power of the Resurrection and the truth of the Gospel will be shown.

With paternal love in Christ,
Beloved in the Lord,

As members of the Church, which our Lord Jesus Christ established through His death and resurrection, we recognize the need for correct guides and teachers. Through their ministry we better understand who we are, what our role in life is, and what decisions lead us to inherit eternal life in God’s kingdom.

The need for devoted guides is ageless, as seen in the Old Testament regarding Aaron, the brother of Moses. Chosen by God as the first priest from the tribe of Levi, it was his role to teach God’s people the proper way of worship, the foundational aspect of life, which revealed that God was their Creator and that He was the Source of all blessings in their daily lives. We know that there were three vital components to worship for God’s chosen people: the Law, the Sacrifice, and the Priesthood. In the Ark of the Covenant, which was their most sacred object, were the tablets of stone containing the Commandments, which were given to Moses by God; the manna that appeared every morning for a time when the people were experiencing great hunger in the wilderness of the Sinai peninsula; and Aaron’s rod, which had budded indicating that God had chosen him as the first priest of the Levitical priesthood.

Three basic components find their fulfillment in the New Testament. We see this in the Book of Gospels on the holy altars of our churches, which provides God’s Commandment of Love. We also see there the holy Tabernacle, which contains the reserved Body and Blood of Christ, which is the food of eternal life, the spiritual manna. And, we see the priest or bishop standing before the holy altar, representing the Lord Who is the only high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. In the Old Testament period thousands upon thousands of priests offered the sacrifice of animals and the shedding of blood for the annual forgiveness of the sins of the people. Nearly 2,000 years ago, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, then shed His sacred blood on the Cross in order to destroy sin in the world. For this sole reason no other sacrifice is needed, because the love of God wipes away the sins of those who receive the Sacrificial Lamb in faith, in the Holy Eucharist. The primary responsibility of today’s clergy is to facilitate this life-changing and life-saving mystery.

Teaching and worship take place through the canonically ordained priests and bishops of the Church. However, it is clear that no priest or bishop can claim the holy priesthood as his own. Rather, the clergy are an extension of the eternal priesthood of Christ, the only High Priest, and by their works, Christ Himself ministers, through the Holy Spirit, to all of His faithful.

Through the ministry of the canonical clergy of the Church, we belong to the household of God, as St. Paul reminds us in his Epistle to the Ephesians (2:19–22). Moreover, without the bishops, priests and deacons of the Church, we cannot consider ourselves as members of God’s household, as we read in Hebrews 10:19–25. As members of God’s family, we experience the three vital aspects of worship with the Good News of the Gospel, in the Divine Mystery of Christ’s Body and Blood, and through the holy ministry of our canonical clergy, which come forth from the holy altars of our churches.

By remaining true to this life-giving tradition of the only Church that our Lord established, we will continue steadfastly as faithful and loving members of the household and family of God.

With love in Christ,

† ISAIAH
Metropolitan of Denver
SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Submissions should be 1,000–2,000 words in length and directly discuss education in the theology and tradition of the Orthodox Christian churches. Lesson aids or graphic enhancements may accompany the articles submitted. We also encourage the submission of photographs relevant to parish life (praxis). Please also provide a biographical sketch of the author not exceeding fifty words.

PRAXIS Magazine is seeking submissions of lesson plans based on articles from previous or current issues of PRAXIS. Submissions should use the article as the text/background of the lesson plan. Lesson plans are welcome for any or several age groups. Please send submissions in a Word document with a length of 1,000–2,000 words to tvrame@goarch.org.

Material previously published or under consideration for publication elsewhere will not be considered without prior consent of the editor. We reserve the right to edit for usage and style; all accepted manuscripts are subject to editorial modification. Articles sent by mail should be accompanied by an electronic version on CD-ROM in Microsoft Word for Windows or for Macintosh. Articles in Microsoft Word may also be e-mailed as an attachment to tvrame@goarch.org.

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On Being a Bishop of the Orthodox Church

HIS GRACE BISHOP GREGORY OF NYSSA

The bishop is the highest spiritual office within the Orthodox Church. He is the successor to the Holy Apostles in the services and governance. He has authority over the priests, deacons and faithful within the region he serves, whether that be a metropolis or diocese, and nowhere else. He is not considered infallible. He is responsible for maintaining Church unity throughout the world by ensuring the truth and unity of the Faith and its practices within his own diocese. Since the sixth century, it has been the rule that bishops are either single men or widowers.
In this article I will offer some considerations, observations and reflections on the episcopacy prior to and following my consecration as a hierarch.

St. Paul in his First Epistle to Timothy (3:1–7), wrote about the qualifications for bishops:

This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

In Greek, “bishop” is episkopos, which means “overseer” or “elder.” Later in the first century, the word “bishop” came to designate a presiding elder. St. John Chrysostom wrote about the word “blameless” in his Homily 10 on First Timothy in this way: “Every virtue is implied in this word. [The bishop’s] life should be unspotted so that all should look to him, and make his life the model of their own.”

In the early Church, a bishop could be married. The Sixth Ecumenical Council (681 AD) sanctioned celibacy for bishops. When we study the words of St. Paul’s Epistle to Timothy, we see that a bishop must be gentle, sober-minded, hospitable and apt to teach. He must not be a drunkard, quarrelsome, covetous or greedy. He must always be very careful not to fall into the snare of the evil one.

Many Church Fathers and saints have also written about the bishop and his relationship with his clergy and the people he oversees and serves. St. Ignatius the God-Bearer, bishop of Antioch, connects the office of the bishop with Jesus Christ Himself. For Ignatius, everything that happens to the bishop can be attributed and ascribed to Christ. In his Epistle to the Magnesians, St. Ignatius writes, “For the honor, therefore, of Him Who desired us, it is right that we obey (the bishop) without any hypocrisy; for a man does not merely mislead this bishop who is seen, but seeks to deceive Him Who is invisible.” In his Epistle to the Ephesians, St. Ignatius urges them to see the bishop as the Lord Himself. His Epistle to the Philadelphians further emphasizes this, wherein St. Ignatius exalts the place of the bishop so highly that those who wish to be with God must be with the bishop. This theme is revisited in his Epistle to the Magnesians, where he warns against assembling illicitly without the knowledge of the bishop and causing a schism in the Church. The same directive is found in his Epistle to the Philadelphians; St. Ignatius warns against doing anything in the Church in secret without the knowledge and blessing of the bishop.

St. Cyprian of Carthage carries this into the bishop’s relationship to the Church. We read this in his Epistle 66: “The bishop is in the Church and the Church in the bishop; and if one is not in communion with the bishop, he is not in the Church.”

The Apostolic Constitutions further elaborate on the role of the bishop. It states, “The bishop, he is the minister of the word, the guardian of knowledge, the mediator between God and you in your worship of Him. He is the teacher of piety; and, next after God, he is your father... he is your ruler and governor; he is your king and potentate; he is, next after God, your earthly god, who ought to enjoy honor from you...; for let the bishop preside over you as one honored with the dignity of God, which he is to exercise over the clergy, and by which he is to govern all the people.”

In addition to the writings of the Church Fathers, there are various canons of the Church regarding the bishop. Three are offered as examples. For the clergy, Apostolic Canon 39 states, “Let presbyters and deacons not carry out anything without the knowledge of the bishop.” Apostolic Canon 35 deposes a clergyman who insults a bishop, and in Canon 3 of the Synod of Hagia Sophia, we read that a layperson is to be anathematized if he or she strikes a bishop.

Prior to my consecration and enthronement as a hierarch, I served as a priest for six years under the omophorion of His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios of Atlanta. During the first five years, I was the Ierokyrix (Itinerant Preacher and
Confessor) of the Metropolis. During my time serving under and working with him, I saw, up close, the joys and triumphs as well as the sorrows and disappointments of the life of a hierarch. You are constantly on the go—the only true way to be with your people is to visit them and so nearly every weekend of the year you travel to one or more of the parishes in your metropolis or diocese. As Metropolitan Alexios used to tell me: “Father, we work the first hundred years of our lives, we rest the second hundred years.” Maybe the pastoral visit is to celebrate the feast day of the community, or a new Church consecration. Perhaps it is another significant milestone in the life of a community—perhaps its fiftieth, seventy-fifth, or hundredth anniversary as a parish. Maybe the parish is hosting a convention or retreat. On occasion there is an ordination of a recent graduate from Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology. The bishop is also blessed to celebrate sacraments like baptisms and marriages. Maybe a longtime priest has fallen asleep in the Lord and the bishop comes to preside at the funeral and to comfort the people. There are myriad occasions to experience the emotional and spiritual richness of the lives of the parishes we visit.

The administrative responsibilities of overseeing the activities of the clergy and laity in the parishes are significant in number. Although a bishop is assisted by his chancellor in many things, ultimately the final decisions are his alone. This sometimes can be very difficult. Now and again, it can be very lonely at the top, as they say.

I have known several bishops of the Church. The first hierarch I remember, from my early life as an acolyte, was His Eminence Archbishop Iakovos, when he visited Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Charlotte, NC. I watched how he was always in command when celebrating the services and how there was a presence to him. He and other hierarchs served as role models for those considering the priesthood.

I never dreamt that one day I would join their ranks. At Holy Cross, we studied what it meant to be a deacon, but until you are ordained and are standing next to the priest or hierarch in front of the holy altar, you just cannot know that it actually means. We also studied what it was to be a priest, but again until you are ordained and are standing in front of the holy altar leading the services, you just do not know. I doubt many, if any, seminarians during their studies on the episcopacy thought about the possibility of becoming a bishop themselves or imagined what it was like—I know that I certainly did not. But now following my consecration and standing in front of the holy altar as a hierarch, I know: it is an unbelievable feeling of awe and at times a feeling of unworthiness. My brother hierarchs know what I am talking about; it is an unreal sensation, really indescribable.

As you can see the relationship among the bishop and his priests and his people is a special one. The bishop holds an awe-some responsibility for the people that he has received to oversee. The relationship should be like a beautiful marriage where love and respect are mutually expressed.

His Grace Bishop Gregory of Nyssa is Primate of the American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese, headquartered in Johnstown, PA. His Grace graduated from Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in 2006.
In my priestly highlight reel there is no footage from grand banquets or the interminable meetings. Just precious moments of quiet, private beauty: watching the first dance of a couple who overcame all odds to be married; seeing a child who needed baptism right after birth walk up on her own for communion years later; enjoying a birthday recital for a nonagenarian given by his grandchildren; hearing a confession that marked the turning-point in a life ravaged by severe depression. No one publishes a commemorative album for what really counts in ministry.
Nothing before ordination could prepare me for the immediate and unearned reverence from so many; nor for the contempt of a certain few.

When I first came to my parish, we lost several parishioners in a short time. I thought it hard to do funerals for people I never met. Through the years I came to know my people. Now funerals are truly hard.

I would have been a better deacon if I could have been a priest for a few years first. He could be a better priest, perhaps, who could walk a few miles in the bishop’s shoes first.

Parishioners with burdens on their conscience are slow to come to confession for fear that the priest will forever remember their sin. Not so: the grace that descends to wash away transgressions, I find, wipes clean my memory also.

A thought after confessions at camp: Millstones should be more readily available. For those inclined to abuse children.

In fourteen years I have made almost every mistake in the book. But the parishioners I truly hurt have all been quick to pardon; whereas the ones who blame me for their own problems never, ever forgive.

One of the greatest sins a priest can commit against his flock—aside from the obvious and unspeakable—is to be slow to admit, “I don’t know.”

There is a second like unto it: faking feelings.

Quotation for inscription on seminary walls: Thales was asked what was difficult; he answered, “To know thyself.” Then he was asked what was easy; “To give advice.”

Parish finances should be no more complicated than the average household’s. How can parishioners vote on budgets and financial reports they can’t understand? Complex accounting leads to a dictatorship of the treasurer.

Plutocracy is a poor system of governance always, and most especially for a Church.

Saints walk among us and we know it not. Many “ordinary” people, I have witnessed, choose lives of extraordinary sacrifice and forbearance. Whereas the “important” people are driven by jejune passions and fears.

Stewardship has been a failure, both as an exercise in proportional thanksgiving and as a source of reliable revenue for serious ministries. Should we return to the dues systems of the 1970s? If we adjusted rates for inflation: might we double our churches’ revenues...or lose half our adherents?

After I was first ordained, a veteran priest at the Archdiocese told me that the schedule can be demanding. Actually, the word he used was cruel: cruel for priests, cruel for their families. His words come often to mind.

Parishioners who open their vacation homes to priests’ families. Without hyperbole, these people save lives.

Clergy-killers exist. Our next Clergy–Laity Congress would do well to invest a plenary session in discussing current research on this issue.

Democracy in the Orthodox Church? Yes, please! Can you imagine? If, before elections, there were an open debate about the qualifications and track record of parish council candidates?!!!

“The carpenter solves every problem with hammer and saw.” How hard it is to convince some of our laypeople that the Church is not to be run like a law firm or a pizzeria.

Satan could not succeed in emptying the churches with Roman persecutions, Turkish domination, or Marxist oppression. Then he devised Sunday morning school sports.

Regarding time management: In recent years the greatest boons to the priest have been email and smartphones. The worst black hole? Ditto.

There is a temptation to preach the Church rather than “Christ and Him crucified.” But what does it profit a man to know the color symbolism of iconography, if he does not practice seventy-times-seven forgiveness?

My finest pastoral moments have been the times I kept silent.

Regarding guru priests: Susan B. Anthony’s words ring true, “I distrust those people who know so well what God wants them to do to their fellows, because it always coincides with their own desires.”
Of early Church writings, I am haunted most by the Epistle to Diognetus. It defends the Christians for living profoundly different lives. Dare any apologist make such a claim in the sports-addled and celebrity-sick society that is America today?

Some have the goal of establishing Orthodoxy as the fourth major faith in America; others, to establish it as the major faith among its adherents.

We live in the day Huxley foretold: “Everyone belongs to everyone else.” Feigned prudery and willful naivété keep us from talking to our children about chastity at an age early enough to make a difference. They lose their virginity, lest we lose our dignity.

The trends in Archdiocesan Registry statistics (at www.goarch.org) should be a topic for consideration at every meeting at every level of our Church.

If each of our families gave up cable TV for one month and added the difference to their stewardship, no goal would elude us.

For any parish fundraiser, if volunteers donated the minimum-wage value of all their man-hours, the total would exceed the net of the actual event every time.

So often true: “Humor is the atmosphere in which grace most flourishes.” (H. W. Beecher)

Sloth defined (for priests): It’s easier to follow the rules than to think for yourself.

The most effective youth ministry: Whatever gets a dad to worship with his family every single Sunday.

Research shows that this more than anything keeps children in the Church into adulthood. If the Church is losing its youth, we should not blame the fathers in the collars, but the fathers not in the pews.

Who are the moneychangers of our temples? Are they not the hawkers of churchy gewgaws and the purveyors of countless books? The one book that is needful we hardly know, and there is no honor for a keychain icon when it is stuffed into a back pocket.

Once said of a popular preacher: “He can preach Christ better, but he cannot preach a better Christ.” This applies to a parish priest: others may surpass him in liturgics, administration, or working the crowd; but their chalices do not commune a better Body and Blood of Christ.

The priest is a spiritual father—one who prepares those in his care for maturity, independence, godly and reasoned decision-making. Some parishioners wish instead for a spiritual daddy. These are dependent personalities who refuse to grow up, who crave incessant emotional support. No progress is possible with such people; they become carrion for the gurus to pick over.

I have yet to meet the person who touts hypakoe (obedience) as the queen of virtues who is not himself oppositional and defiant when he fails to get what he wants.

In my last year of seminary, I went to every veteran priest I admired and asked, “What would you have done differently?” To a man, they all said, “Spend more time with my own family.”

The greatest threat arising in my time as a priest is the mainstreaming of militant unbelief after 9/11. Faith in “Science” has grown into a quasi-religion; old vices are now touted as social virtues. Through popular culture’s subtle propaganda our most intelligent young people will be coaxed from us and made janissaries of the New Atheism. Darwin prophesied a “descent of man” that will surely follow. How marvelous if our Church would mount an organized response to this trend!

Metropolitan Nicholas formally installed me in my parish in September 2000. At the end of the day he said, “Just love them.” A better Position Description I have not yet found.

Often while writing sermons I recall Pascal’s apology: This is long because I lacked the time to make it shorter.

“Whom the Lord loves, He chastens.” Sometimes we feel wounded when we merely have been wakened.

From the heart I have prayed before the Great Entrance each time: “Those who love us, and those who hate us, O God, forgive.” Even so, Amen.

Fr. Mark Sietsema earned a PhD in Linguistics from MIT in 1989 and his MDiv from Holy Cross in 1998. He was ordained to the diaconate by Archbishop Spyridon in 1998 and thereafter served at the Archdiocese. In July 2000 he was ordained a presbyter by Archbishop Demetrios and assigned to Holy Trinity in Lansing, MI. In 2009 Metropolitan Nicholas awarded him the Offikion of Oikonomos. He is married to Presvytera Katherine, and they have two sons.
The panel of angels resembles the orarion, a narrow stole flowing down the front and the back from the left shoulder—the most distinctive vestment and symbol of Orthodox deacons. For St. John Chrysostom, “the thin veil that lies on the left shoulder of the deacon reflects the wings of the angels.” Ordained to serve as mediators between heaven and earth, deacons minister to the awesome mystery of the crucified and risen Lord, tenderly supporting the members of the Body of Christ and silently reflecting light in a world of darkness.
“IN THE SERVICE OF CHRIST”

REFLECTIONS ON THE DIACONATE

REV. DR. JOHN CHRYSASSAVGIS

INTRODUCTION: RE-LEARNING TO SERVE

I learned from a young age, at the feet of my presbyter–father, that our noblest task is to bear the cross of Christ, to imitate Christ, who came to serve and not to be served (Mark 10:45). This means that the noblest thing is to be a Christian—not a bishop, a priest, or a deacon.

Over time, however, our Church established the three ordained orders. The diaconate (derived from the word diakonia, “service”) is the first order of priestly ministry. If no one can become a priest or a bishop without first being ordained a deacon, this means that the diaconate is essential. It can be neither overlooked nor undermined, but it has been. It is time for the revitalization of the diaconate, both for a reorientation of the ordained ministries (a matter of profound theological and spiritual significance) and for practical reasons. Reclaimed in its historical and sacramental dimensions, a revived diaconate could provide a crucial response to contemporary needs.

A REORIENTATION OF THE ORDAINED MINISTRIES

In a meeting of Orthodox bishops several years ago in Chicago, one hierarch touched on the heart of the problem, when he asked: “Is someone called to the diaconate? Do we not say people are called to the priesthood?” Such questions underscore the confusion surrounding ordination. For one is not called to the diaconate any more than one is called to the episcopate; in fact, one is not even called to the priesthood at all—at least, as a distinct order—but to the priestly ministry of the Church, which has three distinct orders. After all, each of the specific terms applied to ordained ministers—episcopos (bishop), ierens or presbyteros (priest), and diakonos (deacon)—are in fact properly reserved for Christ.

In recent centuries the diaconate has enjoyed a symbolic or transitional role. Parish clergy are ordained to the priesthood after serving only briefly as deacons. It is as if they are expected to “move on!” The diaconate has been reduced to little more than a preparation or stepping-stone for the priesthood or episcopate. The latter two stages are often considered more significant for the ordained ministry, whereas the diaconate resembles a kind of sub-priesthood, rarely perceived as a lifelong or permanent office.

In some Orthodox Churches, the diaconate has been still further reduced, relegated to a purely aesthetic or exclusively liturgical office. Although not insignificant, these functions only partially express the full potential of the diaconate. In fact, from a historical perspective, the purely liturgical obligations were traditionally delegated to subdeacons, who were neither ordained nor consecrated but simply “named” or appointed. Deacons were always responsible for more than liturgical order.

So there is something seriously missing from the ordained ministry if deacons are undervalued or omitted from the overall picture. A fuller vision of the ordained ministry should recognize the role of the bishop as the bond of unity and spokesman for doctrine; likewise, it should respect the role of the presbyter in celebrating the presence of Christ in the local community. Yet it should also realize the role of the deacon as servant in completing and complementing this circle of unity and community.

The authentic image of the Church that we should seek—in our minds as in our ministry—is that of a dinner table, not a corporate ladder. The Church is not a pyramid, with all attention and authority turned toward the summit. We are to imagine the Church as comprising a sacrament, where the primary and essential focus is the celebration of the eucharistic feast.

If the image of the table—the picture of Church-as-Eucharist—is our formative and normative icon of the Church, then we might imagine deacons as waiting on festive tables, rather than as pawns at the bottom of a powerful or political organization. Then, we would appreciate the invaluable and inviolable importance of deacons. After all, what greater gift could anyone ever ask for than to serve at the table of that Mystical Supper? I certainly know of no other, no better, no more sublime.

A PRACTICAL REVITALIZATION

In our Church, we have always had deacons. Although its golden age was in the second and third centuries, the diaconate has never fallen into complete disuse. For far too many years, the potential of the diaconate, including both men and women, has not been fulfilled. What do we and can we do with deacons in our Church?
Today the Church could express the diversity of gifts found among the laity, the “royal priesthood,” through the order of the diaconate, embracing and enlisting them sacramentally, through ordination. Thus, ministerial dignity can be conferred on certain members of the laity, whose particular qualifications would be incorporated and integrated within the community. Such persons would be commissioned or empowered through the imposition of hands and grace of the Spirit, their various charismata recognized and intimately bound with the altar. They would support—and not substitute—the ordained ministry of the Church.

The Church could quite easily delegate matters of pastoral care, practical administration, financial concern and even theological education to deacons. Here is my vision: Someone whose administrative gifts are welcomed for the organization of a parish might be “ordained” to perform this task in the community. He (or she) serves part-time or full-time as a deacon in that capacity. The same could occur when someone has gifts in specific areas: as youth minister or financial comptroller, as catechetical instructor or hospital pastor, and so on. Deacons may be officially called to preach or counsel, perform functions of parish or public service, as well as to assist in liturgical affairs, administering the sacraments to members of the community in need.

I would also claim that there is no reason for theological educators in seminaries to be ordained presbyters unless their principal ministry lies in a parish. There is a long tradition of this in our Church. Otherwise, we are simply surrendering to the temptation of clericalism—no matter how spiritual or logical our justification! Here is the basic question for me: Does someone have to be a priest in order to do what he is doing? “Ordained” is one thing; “ordained a priest” is another!

The rebalancing, the reorientation of our ordained ministries would have both profound theological and spiritual significance.

**LESSONS LEARNED: PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS**

1. I learned over a number of years in church administration, parish ministry and seminary education that the priesthood is also the cause of much confusion resulting from a misunderstanding of authority both by those in priestly orders and by the laity. This has proved deeply hurtful for both those ordained and those aspiring to ordination.

If we understand the diaconate, then we will better understand the other orders of the priesthood, too. We will also understand why—and how—women can participate in the diaconate without arousing hierarchical fears of ordination to the presbyterate or foregoing theological discussion about the male priesthood. Honest conversation about the priesthood can only enrich our appreciation of the ordained ministry and the royal priesthood.

2. Part of the challenge lies in the unrealistic expectations we have of the priesthood. Contemporary theologians cite patristic sources about priests manifesting and realizing the priesthood of Christ and the priesthood of all believers. Yet, it is romantically idealistic, if not spiritually perilous to claim that a priest represents Christ or even all people; it is far more humble to believe that the priesthood presents God to the people (as in the Old Testament) and the community to Christ (as in the New Testament). There are innumerable “ordained” ways of doing this! One of them is the diaconate. It is equally arrogant to claim that the priesthood is “not one of the ministries,” “not one vocation among many,” and that the priest somehow embraces “all vocations” and not just a “religious vocation,” which all people have. So theologians claim that the priest has no ministry because he is somehow the term of reference for all ministries. Such claims are presumptuous, both opening up to diverse forms of abuse and alluding to yet another confusion.

3. One of the critical problems in our misunderstanding of the priesthood is the confusion between priesthood (as inclusively embracing not only the ordained bishop, priest and deacon, but also the royal priesthood) and priest (as a distinct order of the ordained ministry). Unless we disabuse ourselves of this confusion—which only promotes authoritarianism—then we cannot really appreciate any of the three orders of priesthood.

**CONCLUSION: FULFILLING A VITAL ROLE**

Thus, the diaconate, as rooted in the historical apostolic experience, may reflect a modern ministerial expression. Perhaps deacons will awaken other ministries from their hardened roles and traditional expectations. A creative revival of the diaconate could become the source of resurrection for the ministry in general. In this respect, the restoration of the diaconate may well prove both timely and vital.

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Canonical Perspectives on the Roles of Clergy and Laity

DR. LEWIS J. PATSAVOS

Any discussion of the roles of clergy and laity must begin with St. Paul’s theology of the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12–31). In the first epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul defined the Church as a body. The Church is the Body of Christ and the characteristic of a healthy body is that every member performs its own function for the good of the whole. But unity does not mean uniformity; therefore, within the Church there are differing gifts and differing functions. However, every one of them is a gift of the same Spirit and designed not for the glory of the individual member of the Church, but for the good of the whole.
The practical consequences of this truth are to be found in the realization that all believers are called to service in the Church. There is a distinction among believers—the distinction between clergy (kleros) and laity (laos); yet this does not create a division between them. It is the living expression of the divine and human aspects of the Church. The distinction between clergy and laity is mainly functional and creates only external differences, which in no way diminish their equality as members of the one Body of Christ.

Through the sacraments of baptism and chrismation, all the faithful—clergy and laity alike—partake of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Of course, this participation does not afford the laity the same quality of authority granted the ordained clergy through the Sacrament of Priesthood. The perceived superiority of the clergy is due to its liturgical role. Nevertheless, this reality does not deprive the laity of its charismatic role in the life of the Church.

Laypersons are not simply those who are not ordained. They are charismatic Christians by virtue of the holy mysteries. As such, they constitute the holy and revered members of the people of God and of the Body of Christ. Laypersons are those who are pastored and taught in the Church. Consequently, they may not, without ordination, enter into the order of pastors and teachers, thereby going beyond the lay order. Such an action would be in violation of the order and function each member of the Church has been given the grace to perform.

In the spirit of the holy canons and the ancient tradition of the Church, the laity cooperates actively with its pastors for the realization of the Church’s purposes. Thus, in the realm of divine worship, clergy and laity together offer doxology to the Trinity in unity. Furthermore, the bishop or priest does not offer the Eucharist only for and on behalf of the people, but together with the people. He does this as the head of the body and leader of the assembly.

As for administration and instruction, the participation of the laity is fundamental. Together with the clergy it constitutes the vigilant conscience of the Church. The laity gives testimony to the authentic teaching and example of the hierarchy by judging, distinguishing, approving and accepting, or disapproving and rejecting it. This was affirmed by the Patriarchs of the East in their Encyclical of May 6, 1848: “The guardian of Orthodoxy is the body of the Church, i.e., the laity.”

When the laity witnesses to the authenticity of the faith, they are fulfilling a function far more essential than merely serving on church boards and committees. Although performing a worthy task, laypersons serving in these capacities have not been ordained or given a special grace to govern the church, or even to witness for the entire people of God. Democratic principles, no matter how ideal they may be, do not have a place in the Church. The Church is not a democratic institution. She is the people of God chosen to serve Him in the Church.

The issue of the laity’s participation in the teaching and governing ministries of the Church ought not to be raised in a superficial way—that is, the rights granted the laity by the clergy to teach and preach the divine word or to co-administer the affairs of the Church. Rather, the issue to be raised ought to be the degree to which the laity exercises the solemn function of witnessing the Orthodox faith by example. Keeping the conscience of the laity vigilant and sensitizing it to this function is the goal, which the clergy ought always to hold up to the people of God.

Nowhere is the significance of the combined role of clergy and laity as constitutive parts of the one body and their gift of witness better evidenced than in the Church’s understanding of ecclesiastical conscience. Ecclesiastical conscience understood as the common mind of clergy and laity is the sovereign authority in the Church. It is the ultimate criterion of ecumenicity. It is the acceptance and recognition of a council as ecumenical by the whole people of God, by the clergy and the laity, by the body of the Church, led by her head, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Seen in this way, the role of the laity in the life of the Church is not in any way of secondary importance. As noted earlier, through the sacraments of baptism and chrismation, one becomes a Christian, a “member of the chosen people of God,” a consecrated person and active participant in the royal, priestly and prophetic ministry of Christ. As summarized by St. Peter in his First Catholic Epistle: “You are a royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9). Hence, all members of the Church are guardians and defenders of the faith. Nevertheless, the laity is never the official spokesperson of the faith; the laity preserves it.

It is the clergy in the person of the episcopacy that articulates new doctrinal formulations by virtue of its apostolic succession. A bishop’s apostolicity is what enables him to articulate new definitions of faith. Such apostolicity is conferred upon him by and in the whole Church, so the bishop acts in the mind of the Church, never in contradiction to it. The bishop does not do whatever he wants to do—this is contrary to the very nature of the episcopacy. The bishop, like the laity, is bound by the life experience of the Church; he is not somehow above that life experience. As for the other members of the clergy—the presbyters and deacons—both they and the laity may teach and preach with the permission of the bishop. However, the bishop must not teach or preach anything, which is contrary to the “mind of the Church.” In other words, the episcopate is the teacher, whereas the whole people of God—from the bishop to the last layperson—is the guardian of the pure and true faith.
A distinction must be made between the guardianship of the truth and the proclamation of the truth. Guardianship is entrusted to all those who have been baptized. The formal and official proclamation of the faith is the exclusive task of the bishops as successors of the apostles. Herein lies the need to exercise caution in avoiding two extremes. On the one hand, the bishop should never be isolated from his flock if he is to know the mind of the Church. On the other hand, the role of the laity must not be interpreted as mitigating the special charisma of the bishop. It is, after all, the episcopacy that assures an uninterrupted succession back to the source of the faith.

Once the faith has been proclaimed, the people of God assume an active role in applying the conciliar decisions and in carrying them out in practice. Reception of conciliar decisions by the conscience of the Church leads to the fundamental issue of conciliarity in general. When exercising pastoral ministry, the clergy must act synodically, i.e., their whole attitude and pastoral method must express the synodal nature and conduct of the Church. This same basic truth can be said of every ecclesiastical body in which the laity participates, from the parish council to the diocesan assembly.

The concept of conciliarity, i.e., the conciliar or synodal approach to handling the affairs of the Church, is not confined solely to convening various types of synods, but also includes every expression of ecclesiastical life and pastoral ministry. By means of conciliarity, the nature of the Church as divine–human communion in Christ is expressed. This is why any ecclesiastical or pastoral practice that does not result from conciliarity is a deviation from Orthodox ecclesiology.

At all levels the Church functions as synod, i.e., as a community of persons freely gathered in Christ and by Him, so that each may offer his or her gift for the building up of the body in love. From the perspective of Orthodox theology, the person is neither absorbed nor identified with the many. Fellowship with Christ and His assigned shepherds does not cause one to be diminished, but to come alive through communion with Him and one’s fellow human beings. That is why conciliarity, as a way of life of the Church, is directly related to ecclesiastical practice and pastoral ministry. It seeks to fashion ecclesiastical life in such a way as to express faithfully the essence and the ethos of the Orthodox Church.

Taking into account this concept of true communion, one understands cooperation, mutual respect and recognition of the God-given worth with which each member of the Church is endowed. Everyone must hear prayerfully, attentively and respectfully what one’s fellow Christian has to say, providing, of course, that person has not fallen into heresy. Only by listening with humility are discussion, agreement and obedience in Christ possible.

The pastor who administers his parish synodically will afford the opportunity for the members of his community to offer their gifts for the building up of the body. The pastor and flock in every parish can realize in their lives the Church’s truth in a communion of faith and love. Truth is not something that the pastor offers and the flock accepts passively. Rather, it is the gift of God in which pastor and flock commune in unity, with the guidance and leadership of the pastor.

It is evident that the voice of the laity must be heard in the decision making process of church administration. One of the strengths of the Orthodox Church, especially in this country, is the high level of lay involvement in all aspects of Church life. It is of paramount importance, however, that there is a clear understanding of roles, prerogatives and limits. Furthermore—and herein lies the key to harmonious relationships within the Church—only believing and worshipping laypersons should be allowed to assist in the governing of the Church; nominal Christians should be excluded at all costs. Vigilance, of course, is necessary, particularly in view of the fact that the lay element is becoming more and more secularized, at least from the perspective of Christian knowledge and understanding. Thus, the laity is in danger of straying from a canonical ethos and lifestyle, while at the same time being accorded more and more ecclesiastical rights.

Today, as seldom before, the laity has acquired a self-awareness that the Church belongs not only to the clergy but also to the laity. Together they are the Church in the world. What is needed is a definition of lay participation in the life of the Church, i.e., guidelines that are in harmony with the work of the clergy on the model of the early Church. We must avoid the extremes of both clergy and lay superiority. At the same time, we must remain inflexibly disposed to the mutual interdependence between the ministerial priesthood of the clergy and the royal priesthood of all the faithful. Only then will the Church indeed be what she is—the salvation of the world in Christ Jesus.

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Challenges and Opportunities of the Ancient Faith Today

KEVIN ALLEN

We are witnessing major changes in the fluid religious landscape in America and the world. Protestants are still the majority Christian faith tradition, encompassing 51% of all Americans. However, according to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, Protestant and Evangelical adherence is down from 65% fifty years ago. Those who are “non-affiliated” with any religion now represent 20% of all Americans and comprise the fastest-growing segment in America.

What got me thinking about Orthodoxy’s challenges and opportunities in the twenty-first century were several articles written by Evangelical and Protestant writers about the decline of Protestantism in the United States. Protestant professor of Theological Ethics at Duke Divinity School Stanley Hauerwas writes direly, “We are now facing the end of Protestantism.” He makes this argument on the grounds that “More Americans go to church than their counterparts in Europe, but the churches to which they go do little to challenge the secular presumptions that form their lives…”

Another article, “The Coming Collapse of Evangelicalism,” was written by an evangelical pastor—now deceased—named Michael Spencer. His apocalyptic opening line was: “Within two generations, evangelicalism will be a house deserted of half its occupants.”

One of his predictions caught my attention. He wrote, “Two of the beneficiaries will be the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox communions. Evangelicals have been entering these churches in recent decades and that trend will continue with more efforts aimed at the ‘conversion’ of Evangelicals to the Catholic and Orthodox traditions.”

Whether we agree with these observations or not, we have seen positive trends in Orthodox Christianity in America. Orthodox mission and monastery growth in the past decade is up 15% over the previous decade. This is at a time when the Catholic Church and the mainline Protestant churches are in decline. In fact, according to the number of new churches, missions and monasteries planted, the Orthodox Church is one of the fastest-growing religious bodies in the United States, surpassed only by Southern Baptists, Mormons, Seventh-Day Adventists and Muslims.

However, a sober review of the data reveals that the growth has been largely by immigration from Orthodox countries (e.g., Romania and Bulgaria) and not by organic growth or the influx of new members. Observers predict a new wave of immigration from Eastern Europe and the Middle East to the United States, which will have an impact on Orthodoxy, as well as taxing our limited resources if we are not prepared for it.

Nevertheless, there is more good news. We have been blessed with many new converts over the past decade (more in some “jurisdictions” than in others). According to the data, Eastern Orthodoxy has in fact a higher percentage of converts when compared with Protestants and Roman Catholics.

In 2010, Eastern Orthodox parishes grew more in regular weekly attendance than Roman Catholic, mainline Protestant churches and even Evangelical churches. This is not the case in most of the “ethnic” archdioceses, but primarily those with the highest number of converts, e.g., the OCA and the Antiochians.

Orthodox Christian religious educators from around the country gathered at Antiochian Village for Orthodox Institute 2013: “Blessed Is the Kingdom.” This is a partial transcript of Kevin Allen’s presentation at the conference, which was sponsored by the OCEC, the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese, the Orthodox Church in America, and the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

Mark your calendar now for Orthodox Institute 2014: “Theosis: Your Life with God,” to be held October 30 – November 2 at Antiochian Village. This year’s keynote speakers are the V. Rev. Dr. Thomas Hopko and Dr. Kyriacos Markides. See facebook.com/orthodoxinstitute2014 for more information about the speakers, schedule and registration.
We have also seen an explosion of Orthodox old and new media over the past decade—books, webcasts, blogs—introducing the “ancient faith” to the English-speaking world.

So there are reasons to be optimistic. But before we start raising high-fives and doing back flips, we need to consider some of the real challenges the Orthodox Church faces in the United States.

I want to begin by suggesting what I believe might be the greatest of the obstacles to addressing the challenges the Orthodox Church faces in the twenty-first century in North America: the lack of a cohesive and coherent strategic vision and plan for the future of Orthodoxy. The reason we do not have such a vision or plan is directly connected to the fact that we do not have a coherent and cohesive ecclesiastical structure in the United States, despite the unity we proclaim.

With eleven separate Orthodox jurisdictions all dependent (with one exception) on patriarchates located thousands of miles away from America—most caught up in their own problems, cultures and challenges, and not focused on ours—how can the Orthodox in North America possibly develop and implement a cohesive and coherent strategic vision and plan? No single jurisdiction can authoritatively speak for all of Orthodoxy in North America, and our resources and episcopal leadership are fragmented. As a result, instead of being proactive to our challenges and opportunities, we have been reactive to them, if we recognize or acknowledge them at all.

Another challenge is that—according to recent polling data—a majority of people in many Orthodox jurisdictions see the preservation of ethnic, cultural and national identity as their Church’s key purpose in North America. However, it is vital that we recognize that the task of the Church is not the preservation of ethnic or national identities, but the sanctification and salvation of every land and all of humanity, regardless of ethnic, social, cultural or racial background. This is not some other church’s job. The Orthodox Church in this country is not a guest here; she is a permanent resident.

I believe the major external challenge and threat to Orthodoxy is the same one that looms over all Christian traditions: secularism. How do we as Orthodox actually stack up in our beliefs against the prevailing secular worldviews of our society? Do we reflect Holy Tradition in this post-modern/post-Christian age in our thinking, or are we conforming to the values of the society around us?

In the Pew Religion & Public Life / U.S. Religious Landscape Survey (2009), for example, 62% of the Orthodox polled agreed with the statement “abortion should be legal in most/all cases,” which is in direct contradiction to what our Holy Tradition has consistently taught. This was significantly higher than the Catholic (48%) or the Evangelical (33%) responses. Fifty percent of Orthodox Christians also agreed with the statement “Homosexuality should be accepted by society…” The Orthodox positive response was significantly higher than that of Catholics and Evangelicals.

This data makes it clear to me that we are not doing the job of catechizing on “real life” moral and social issues. As His Eminence Metropolitan Hierotheos (Vlachos) of Nafpaktos—one of our great contemporary Orthodox theologians—writes, “We are of the Church insofar as we are of the holy Fathers.” Membership rolls do not determine our Orthodoxy.

It seems to me there must be an expectation that if we say we are Orthodox Christians, it must mean something for how we live, vote, behave, spend our money and time, and respond to issues of the day.

“Nominal” (in name only) and “cultural Orthodoxy” is also a challenge in the Church, one that Orthodox Christian theologian Bradley Nassif has exhorted us to address for years. In his article “Reclaiming the Gospel” (Orthodoxy Today, 2006), he writes:

Orthodoxy is often failing to meet the spiritual needs of our people—
in America as well as the motherlands of Russia, Greece, Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Parishioners are coming and going in and out of church with little visible change in their lives. In short, they do not know the core content of the Gospel or how to integrate its meaning into their everyday lives. I realize these are sad things to say, but a correct diagnosis precedes the proper cure.

In addition, the Orthodox Church has significant structural and demographic challenges. According to a recent survey, the average age of parishioners of the two largest Orthodox communions is 52 years (GOA and OCA). That is not a favorable demographic trend. Among GOA and OCA parishioners, only one-third are under the age of 45 years. So-called “millenials” (born after 1980) are leaving Christianity in droves. This is an opportunity we are not addressing.

Despite the fact that more than 50 percent of newborns in the United States are not Caucasian, the Orthodox Church has very few African-American and Latino priests and congregants. Overall, our interaction with “minority” society and culture in general is negligible. I am not aware of any plan to address this.

Recent surveys indicate that the financial strength of Orthodox parishes is also weaker on a congregation-by-congregation basis compared to Protestant congregations and Catholic parishes. This affects our ability to provide sufficient incomes and benefits for our priests, missions, evangelism, youth and college ministries, outreach to our communities, social service and Orthodox media—all of which are key to the growth and vitality of the Orthodox Church in the United States.

We also have a serious distribution problem. Forty-five percent of all of U.S. Eastern Orthodox Churches across all jurisdictions are concentrated in just five states: New York (14%), California (10%), Illinois (8%), Pennsylvania (6.5%) and Massachusetts (6%). People in many cities and states in the United States could not find an Orthodox Church within a three-hour drive even if they wanted to.

So are we ready to meet the challenges in this culture and the opportunities presented to us by those who are becoming disaffected with other Christian traditions, as well as by spiritual seekers looking for meaning and purpose missing in the postmodern secular culture?

As much as I love the Orthodox Church, my answer to the question is sadly no, not at this time.

I believe the greatest opportunity of the Orthodox Church is simply to be what we are and proclaim to be: the “One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church” in our time and culture.

Western Christianity has been greatly diminished in its credibility for many reasons. As we have seen, increasing numbers of people are looking for historic authenticity, stability and spiritually-transforming faith traditions, which Orthodox Christianity offers.

We must not see ourselves as a collection of ethnic or religious subcultures. I think our mission requires an intentional commitment to this country by bishops who understand this culture; to its non-Orthodox, to its poor and neglected, as well, of course, as to our own faithful.

This requires us to have before us the goal of continual spiritual renewal and rededication of our priests and people to Jesus Christ.

It also requires an effective, comprehensive “strategic plan” for America, including external and internal evan-
lism; outreach to minorities; a plan for better distribution of churches across the country; and outreach to and integration of the many new immigrants we can expect over the next decade.

I also believe we have a great opportunity to provide a Christian alternative to Western seekers of New Age and Eastern religions looking for contemplative and transformative experience, many of whom have rejected “Western Christianity” or do not consider it to be a plausible option.

We have the opportunity to help redefine what Christianity means in a culture that has generally defined Western Christianity negatively.

As Fr. Alexander Schmemann of blessed memory exhorted us, perhaps it is in God’s will that the isolation among worldwide Orthodox Churches will be healed in America. Perhaps our vision for Orthodoxy in America should be to integrate the best from each national culture, rather than to be isolated or enslaved by and to their forms.

These are all things we must work towards with the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The Orthodox Church has a great opportunity in the coming decades in this country and continent, but not one without its challenges! We will probably never be the “dominant” religious force or voice in this culture. But we can certainly be, as the Gospel tells us, “salt” and “leaven” in a world that is in great and desperate need of what the Church alone can provide.

Most importantly, it begins with each one of us! In a mysterious way, each of us is responsible for the future of our beloved and God-protected Church. As St. John Chrysostom tells us, “If but ten among us lead a holy life, we shall kindle a fire that shall light up the entire city.”

Kevin Allen hosts the live, listener call-in program “Ancient Faith Today with Kevin Allen” on Ancient Faith Radio.
Families and Faith: How Religion is Passed Down across Generations

Vern L. Bengston, with Norella M. Putney and Susan Harris

In the Church, it seems like everyone is talking about the decline of the influence of the family in passing down religious faith from one generation to the next. Many people perceive a decline, but is it real? If so, what might be causing it? Are families succumbing to societal issues about faith and religion? Can anything be done about it?

The authors were surprised at the results. Families are doing better at passing down religion than the headlines would suggest. Six out of ten children remained within the religious community of their parents. So, the question becomes, “What kinds of families do better than others and then what can parishes do?” Here too, the results are surprising.

Warm, accepting, close, affirming families are better at transmitting faith than cold, distant and authoritarian families. The authors state: “When children perceive their relationship with parents as close, affirming and accepting, they are more likely to identify with their parents’ religious practices and beliefs, while relationships marked by coldness, ambivalence or preoccupation are likely to result in religious differences” (page 98). This warm family experience seems to transmit across the generations, pointing to the influence of grandparents and great-grandparents on religious transmission.

The level of involvement of parents in matters of faith and the faith community is central. The authors discovered the same finding that Christian Smith reports in Soul Searching (2005) that the single best predictor of religious transmission is the level of engagement of the parents with their faith and a religious community. In other words, when parents take faith and church seriously, their children are more likely to remain within the same religious community. They also discovered, with no surprise, that parents who share the same religion do better at religious transmission.

But here’s an even more surprising finding about families. When the authors investigated which parent seemed to have more influence, the father or mother, they discovered that “for religious transmission, having a close bond with one’s father matters even more than a close relationship with the mother” (page 76). Notice that they are not saying the father must be more involved religiously, but that the relationship between father and children is close. So, putting a close parent-child relationship together with high religious involvement seems to ensure more successful religious transmission.

The authors looked at the various religious communities themselves. They noted that Mainstream Protestant and Roman Catholic families did not have as high rates of religious transmission as Evangelical Christian, Jewish or Mormon families. On this front, we can see the characteristics of the latter that are significant: the idea of being a distinct religious group, being a minority group, and a highly interconnected group. In other words, belonging to a relatively close and tight-knit religious community makes a difference.

The authors also noted three trends in religious transmission. They called them religious “Rebels,” “Zealots” and “Prodigals.” Rebels were those who left the religion of the family for a different religion or left religion altogether. Zealots were more religious than their parents. Prodigals were those who left the family religion for a while but returned at some point either to the family religion or to a similar one. All three “types” were found in the families studied, but with some trends.
We have seen a steady increase in the number of Orthodox children's books in recent years. Yet it is encouraging to see that classics like Maria Khoury's *Christina* books continue to anchor the shelves! Her books sweetly and effectively communicate the faith to our little ones. The second edition of *Christina's Counting Book* is another treasure.

This book for preschoolers and young readers is an old friend with a brand-new, come-read-me look. The basic purpose of the book remains the same: to help children learn to count while learning about the Orthodox faith, with text and pictures that also stimulate their spiritual development. The book invites a child to count twelve items relating to Orthodoxy, including a censer, Easter eggs, crosses, the Evangelists, loaves, Holy Communion, candles, altar boys, memorial wheat dishes, holy bread, choir members, and censer bells. The items are described in simple language so the child can learn about traditions and spiritual realities he or she will experience while attending the Divine Liturgy and other services. For example, “Having Holy Communion is the best way to tell Jesus our Lord that we love Him.”

The final chapter of the book had some guidance for churches and religious leaders. A few stand out: “Fervent faith cannot compensate for a distant dad.” “Allowing children religious choice can encourage religious continuity” (so don’t panic when a child looks at other religious communities). “Don’t forget grandparents.” “Don’t give up on Prodigals.” As the authors wrote: “In our sample, Religious Rebels who returned to the fold had parents who waited, were open and accepting and did not push… Acceptance and affirmation, rather than judgment and preaching are the keys” (page 197).

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For example, the children of religious Zealots were more likely to become Rebels or Prodigals. Rebel or Prodigal parents often bred Zealots, and the like. They noted that the Prodigals who lived in warm families were most likely to return, whereas Prodigals who lived in cold families became Rebels.

A last finding was with the religious “Nones.” Families with no religion had children with no religion, and this number is increasing.

Although the purpose of the second edition remains the same as that of the first, there are many improvements. Nicole Hillas Minetos’s bright new illustrations are done in a “primitive” style that children can relate to. On the purple cover, Christina’s bright blue eyes sparkle as she lights her candle in the narthex. The book has more interactive content, asking the children to look for other things in the church, prompting them to learn the vocabulary of the faith. The inclusion of the Russian language is welcome. Fourth, the print and paper quality are much improved.

The reissuing of *Christina's Counting Book* is not just about selling more books. The author’s determination to continue the *Christina* series speaks to her tenacious personality. Not only has she given us delightful children books, but for many years she has also been an educator about and advocate for the few remaining Christians in the Holy Land. Find out more about Maria Khoury’s books and work at www.saintgeorgetaybeh.org. It is all for the glory of God, and may He continue to bless Maria and her family in her ministry of the word and works.

Marilyn Rouvelas is author of *A Guide to Greek Traditions and Customs in America*; co-author with Jeanette Aydlette of *Peter Clashes with Anger and Eleni Looks at Jealousy*; and a Greek Orthodox Archdiocese representative on the leadership council of Churches for Middle East Peace.

Living Our Orthodox Faith curriculum
New Textbook Series for Grade 5

With the help of a generous grant from the Archbishop Iakovos Leadership 100 Endowment Fund, we have completely renovated Grade 5.

The theme of grade 5 is “responding to God” and deepening students’ understanding of God’s covenants with His chosen people, and His continuing revelation to them. It is also an introduction to Church and salvation history.

Respond to God in terms of personal faith & Christian morality:
- The Ten Commandments
- The teachings of Christ found in the Beatitudes and Parables
- The foundations of the Church and faith, elaborated on in the letters of St. Paul
- The living Orthodox Christian faith shown by the saints

God Calls Us consists of six flexible units:
1. God Calls Us to Faith
   Old Testament, Part I: The Hebrew People
2. God Calls Us to Holiness
   Old Testament, Part II: The Kingdom of Israel
3. God Calls Us to His Kingdom
   The Life & Ministry of Christ
4. God Calls Us to His Church
   The Early Church
5. God Calls Us to Share His Word
6. God Calls Us to Serve
   St. Maximos the Confessor, St. Philothei, St. Herman, and St. Nectarios

New format, maximum flexibility
Order only the units you need for your ministries... Maybe your Vacation Church School theme was “Old Testament Heroes”? Sounds a bit like Unit 1—you might choose to start the year off with Unit 2. Planning to spend a few Sunday mornings focused on a special project, such as an All Saints Fair or an arts festival? Perhaps you’ll choose to convert Unit 3 into a series of Wednesday evening sessions during Great Lent.

Hands-on
Building on the Bible study skills they learn from Growing with God (Grade 4), students are ready to go right to the source—with support! For many lessons, students will read one or more brief passages in their Bibles, directed by focus questions and summaries in the zine.

But there’s still time for stories
Supplement, recap, or modify your Bible reading time with Re-Tales. Let Joseph’s brothers tell you their side of the story. Follow the Exodus in the journal entries of a young girl. Hear from each of the Evangelists, in their own style.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEW SERIES</th>
<th>OLD SERIES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rooted in the Living Our Orthodox Faith curriculum’s objectives &amp; content</td>
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<tr>
<td>Memory verses, hymns, prayers, maps, timelines, icons, activities, crafts &amp; games</td>
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<td>Enriched by features on high-interest contemporary and historical topics</td>
<td>Traditional textbook format</td>
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<td>Flexible &amp; budget-conscious – order only the units &amp; quantities you need, when you need them</td>
<td>Books may sit unused during special projects or if enrollment changes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Each unit has its own student zine (short for “magazines”)</td>
<td>Single student book for the entire grade</td>
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<tr>
<td>Each unit has its own full-color teacher guide with all-new lesson plans, and a custom binder for storing all the units</td>
<td>Single teacher guide for the entire grade</td>
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Teenage students perk right up to learn the details of any upcoming church youth event. So, I inquired how they go about letting others know too. Their replies included the printing of flyers, using the telephone, posting the information online, using email, regular mail and person-to-person contacts.

I then asked how successful would they be if they could only use person-to-person contacts and postal mail? Would as many people show up? Their reaction was, “No; it would be difficult and probably be a flop.”

Well, fifty days after the Resurrection of Christ (Pentecost), the Apostles were charged by the Holy Spirit to go out and make Christians of all people, and to establish the Church. It was up to those twelve individuals to accomplish that huge task. Their only means of getting the Word out then was person-to-person contact and letter-writing (i.e., epistles).

Suppose today was 33 AD, and you were one of the Twelve Apostles chosen by the Holy Spirit to establish the Church: Would you do it, if God asked you? All agreed, “Yes, of course.”

Good. But, here are some details you’ll need to know: Some of you will work locally, and others will have to travel far and wide. Does that sound okay? “Sure, yes.”

You should know that you won’t be paid any money for your expenses, so you’ll need to depend upon the kindness of strangers along the way for meals and lodging. Also, your options for traveling will be by foot, horse, donkey or boat. At this point I sensed a bit of hesitation starting to set in.

Oh, one other thing: You’ll have to be careful to not get caught by the Roman authorities, as your ministry work is considered illegal, punishable by imprisonment or death. So, be careful with whom-ever you speak. Okay then, are we ready to do it? (By this point, a feeling of reluctance overcome most.)

Yet these were the hardships and obstacles the Apostles of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church endured to establish it throughout the known world. In some countries, people still risk their lives to secure what we see as routine each Sunday: the freedom to worship at our local church.

The gratifying part of this exercise was seeing the students’ newfound perspective and regard for Pentecost, judging by the reactions and level of participation.

How did Christianity ever grow from an initial clergy of twelve to become the world’s largest religion when, especially over its first three centuries and then some, it had to be secretive and underground? On top of all of that, so many early Christians suffered martyrdom, being torn apart by wild beasts in arenas, stoned to death, beheaded and nailed to crosses.

The fact that the Church thrives today, let alone exists, is nothing short of one spectacular God-guided miracle!

George Makredes teaches the tenth grade Sunday school class at St. Athanasius Church in Arlington, MA.
Fr. Theodore, an African priest, gathered my family around him to tell us stories about life in his homeland of Uganda. I was only six years old, but I remember his visit to our home. Several years later, Mama Stavritsa, a missionary to Kenya, told us about miracles that she had witnessed in her work in Africa, miracles that sounded as if they were coming straight out of the Bible. Every year, various African students who were studying at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology would join our family for the holidays. Although I never traveled outside the United States until I was twenty-one years old, I thank God that my parents brought the world into our home.

Each year, our Annunciation Church would take part in Church World Service's CROP Hunger Walks. Since my father has been the organizer of this event in Pennsylvania for the past forty years, I began “walking for the hungry” at the age of five. The first year we walked (or in reality, somebody carried me) ten miles. The next year we walked fifteen miles. For several years, we actually walked twenty miles during this special Sunday in October. In preparation for this event, we would get sponsors and collect money for the hungry. From a young age I learned about the world around us, and how some people had to walk miles to get food or clean water each day. “We walk because they walk” was the slogan. I still remember the bowl of mush we ate at the end of that tiring day—a meal so common for poor villagers.

In church, we celebrated an annual Mission Sunday. We tried to fill our mission boxes during Lent. One year we sent up hundreds of helium balloons with the message, “Go and make disciples of all nations.” We wanted to remind people of our Lord’s Great Commission. That year, someone from 150 miles away received one of our balloons and contacted our church to let us know it had traveled so far.

These are only a few of the memories I have of growing up in a family and in a parish community that promoted the spirit of missions. Is it a coincidence or a consequence that years later, as a college stu-
dent, I would go on the first summer Orthodox Mission Team in 1987? Did the seeds of faith and missions planted during my formative years help me hear the calling to follow our Lord to Albania as a long-term Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC) missionary?

God loves the world over, and longs for all people everywhere to know Him! If we believe this, we know He is calling some of us to “Go forth” and become His witnesses throughout our global village. Yet Jesus’s words are too true: “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few.” God calls, but few listen. Maybe one reason why few listen is because they have not been attuned to His voice and His will from a young age.

Every serious Christian parent would agree that we need to instill in our children an understanding of and love for God. Through daily family prayers, regular Church participation, frequent Bible stories and reading time, and by talking about and relating God to our everyday lives, our children will learn about the Lord and come to love Him. Yet are we instilling in our children a similar love for the world around them? Love for God implies loving the “other.” How can we help our children cultivate compassion for all God’s children throughout the world? How can we instill a mission spirit in our family?

Exposure to Christ’s children and servants around the world can be a first step. Have you ever considered hosting an OCMC missionary in your parish and even in your home? Maybe your children could even begin a correspondence with a “missionary kid” in advance of their visit to your home. Although our own children grew up in the mission field, their main missionary connection today comes through other missionary children. Correspondence, emails and visits keep their relationship alive with the world around them.

Other exposure can come by inviting an international mission student to your home for the holidays. We have numerous students from different countries studying at our seminaries who have nowhere to go during Thanksgiving or Christmas break. Invite one to your church and Sunday school, and have them stay in your home. Their visit may create memories that will stay with your children forever!

What about your parish’s annual Mission Sunday? If your church doesn’t celebrate this yet, maybe your family can spearhead the effort. In our parish, one way we celebrate Mission Sunday is by having a “Luncheon from around the World.” We ask our Sunday School students and families to make a meal from different countries of the world. Last year we had food from fourteen countries! Each family makes a poster with pictures and facts from the country they represent. Children can have a great time researching about a country, discovering what God is doing in that country, collecting pictures and putting together a beautiful poster, and then tasting foods from around the world.

As our children get older, one of the most special ways to set their hearts on fire is for them to actually participate in a mission project. As a family, begin by doing something locally—serving in a soup kitchen, visiting a nursing home, or collecting clothing for the homeless shelter. A unique event, though, can be preparing for a cross-cultural mission experience. Thousands of Orthodox junior high and high school kids have experienced missions through Project Mexico, the pan-Orthodox organization that builds homes for the poor in Tijuana.

Last year, our Sts. Constantine and Helen parish sent three people to Project Mexico. This year, we have fifteen parishioners ready to go. And most of those going are families—a father and son, a mother and her two sons, even an entire family of five! What an unforgettable experience for a family to travel to another part of the world to share God’s love. And Project Mexico can simply be a first step that leads our children to participate in Orthodox Christian Fellowship’s Real Break mission trips (visit www.ocf.net for more information) and OCMC’s various mission teams.

As Christians, we have a responsibility to raise our children with a love and an awareness of God and His children around the world. A song I still remember from my childhood years (and now updated) summarizes this spirit:

Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world.
Every color, every race, all are covered by His grace.
Jesus loves the little children of the world.

May we consciously instill this love for the world into the hearts of our children.

Fr. Luke and his wife, Faith, served as OCMC missionaries for more than ten years in Albania, with three of their four children being raised in the mission field. He is the author and editor of two missionary books, Lynette’s Hope and Missionaries, Monks and Martyrs: Making Disciples of All Nations. Presently, Fr. Luke pastors Sts. Constantine and Helen Church in Webster, MA, and is an adjunct instructor at Hellenic College and Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology.
Dear Readers,

We cannot easily count all the bishops, priests and deacons who have influenced the lives of individual Orthodox Christians and the Church in America since its establishment on these shores. Their prayer, leadership, teaching and pastoral guidance have been essential to all of us throughout our lives. (I write this as a non-ordained person.) Working together with them, the Church—the parishes, the institutions, the programs and ministries—has been established, maintained and sustained. Yet even more importantly, the people, to paraphrase St. Paul, have been equipped and the body of Christ has been built (see Ephesians 4:11–16). We are the heirs of generations of faithful clergy. As St. Paul says, “Like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and another man is building upon it. Let each man take care how he builds upon it. For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:10–11).

Yet somehow we’ve been operating with the impression that the ministry of a clergyman has not changed since the ordination of St. Stephen the First Deacon in Acts of the Apostles (chapter 6). Elements of that ministry are certainly “changeless”: leading the faithful in worship and officiating at sacraments, preaching and teaching, offering pastoral counsel, and administering the life of a congregation and its ministries. The names of the functions may be the same, but the context has certainly changed and is constantly changing, meaning that the work of the clergy adapts to those changes.

Three changes certainly stand out for our times. First there is the phenomenon of “de-affiliation,” that is, at least the perceived sense, that people have “left the Church” or are leaving it. Second, people have become “too busy” for parish life and are too easily distracted by “competing interests.” Church life appears to have lost the centrality that it had a generation ago. Third is communicating the Gospel and the message of the Church in an information-saturated but virtual environment, while keeping people connected to the actual, physical, institutional community of faith that prays and worships, teaches and preaches, and celebrates and serves. Responding to and meeting these challenges will require as much creativity and hard work as ever. It will be certainly more challenging than any building campaign or new program we’ve ever started.

Asking a bishop, a priest and a deacon to reflect on their ministries for this issue of PRAXIS was an interesting challenge. Describing their work from the perspective of the Church Fathers and the other sources of our Tradition is straightforward, requiring good historical analysis and theological explanation. But we are usually hesitant to ask them to discuss their office and ministry publicly and personally, and to reflect on their work in the present. Talking abstractly is certainly easier and safer than talking personally or practically.

Our bishops, priests and deacons are conscientiously striving to do the best they can for the Church—both the people of God and the institution. They work nonstop so that the Church in America and the Church globally proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ and live faithfully to the Tradition of the Orthodox Church. When you see members of the clergy, before you ask them for something, thank them for their ministry. Ask them what you can do help them in their work.

Anton C. Vrame, PhD
Director
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“Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” – Matthew 18:3

I had just come to pick up my children from day care, and my son asked me, “Baba, just a few more minutes?” And I let him play some more. So to pass the time I walked around and had some flashback moments from my childhood, and started jumping the hoops. What I didn’t know was that Nicole was taking some casual promo shots for the day care. She showed me the picture a few weeks later, and Matthew 18:3 immediately popped into my mind. – Rev. Fr. Nikolaos Tambakis, Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church, Thunder Bay, ON
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