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Department of Pastoral Life and Ministry

Chairperson	V. Rev. Alexander Garklavs 369 Green Ave. East Meadow, NY 11554	Consultant	V. Rev. John Stefero
	Office 516-483-3649	Department Email	pastorallife@oca.org
		Department Web	www.oca.org /DOdept.asp?SID=5&LID=9
Members	V. Rev. Robert Arida V. Rev. Dan Kovalak V. Rev. David Vernak Rev. John Hopko Rev. Timothy Ullman Rev. Steven Voytovich		

Accomplishments/Progress Since the 13th All-American Council

The Department of Pastoral Life and Ministry has been coordinating the Seminarian Internship Program (SIP) since the 12th All-American Council (1999). Since the 13th All-American Council, as well as for the years between the 13th and 12th All-American Councils, the management of the SIP has been by far the single most important and work-intensive effort on the part of the department. The merits of the SIP are obvious, but the actual realization of the program has been, at times, a frustrating process of confronting unexpected challenges and working out quick, last-minute solutions.

While the SIP Committee was getting accustomed to various obstacles, this past spring we had to face a most unusual situation. Just as applications from seminarians and parishes were starting to come in, the department was notified that, due to inadequate financial resources, the SIP would have to be cancelled for 2005. This cancellation is unfortunate and hopefully will only affect this year. It is everyone's hope that the program will be available in 2006, and continue for many more years.

Because we have had five good and successful years, the SIP has already made an important impact on the life of The Orthodox Church in America. This report presents us with an appropriate opportunity to briefly look at the SIP record. A total of 38 seminarian interns have gone through the program. Most of these are now serving as active pastors in parishes of The Orthodox Church in America. By the grace of God, and because of the hard work of the pastors/mentors and the dedicated efforts of the interns, every season of the SIP has proven to be a resounding success.

What criticisms did come up had to do with certain shortcomings in the matter of completing and filing reports. At no time was criticism leveled at any aspect of the program itself. On the contrary, both interns and pastor/mentors have been extremely enthusiastic. The feelings of good will and fulfillment were not restricted to the interns and pastors; in many cases the host parishes were involved in the internship process and found it to be a rewarding experience.

The SIP originated as a Church-wide initiative at the 12th All-American Council, and its success has truly been on a "Church-wide" level. The implications of the SIP affect and involve every aspect of Church life: hierarchy, national Church administration, dioceses, parishes, seminaries, individual pastors, the pastors' families, the interns, their families, and the parish communities that host the interns. It is hoped that in the future, the department will continue to develop the scope, materials, mentor education, and follow-up for the program. A good deal of progress was made during the past six years, but all of those who have been involved will agree that much work remains to be done.

All of this will require funding, but this should not be too difficult if the parish communities recommit to supporting the project since financial support of the Seminarian Internship Program is one of the most wise and practical investments that we can make. The benefits of educating and nurturing intelligent, dedicated, spiritually motivated, effective, and outgoing priests are self-evident. Expanding the program to include late vocations, choir directors,

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church-school educators, etc., would require even more support and may not be feasible in the near future, but this should not hinder us from thinking about long-range plans that would certainly benefit the Church and The Orthodox Church in America.

A good deal of the success of the Seminarian Internship Program is due to the good luck of having several gifted people working on its committee. Some of these deserve special mention, including the Rev. Steven Voytovich, who has been the SIP chair for the past three years and played a key role in the design, development, and coordination of the program. His occupational and pastoral expertise have ensured that the SIP would be a professional and efficient program of the highest standards. The V. Rev. Steven Belonick, who can be credited with the original idea of the program, has been a great help as the program's contact at St. Vladimir's Seminary, and has helped coordinate many of the meetings of our committee at the seminary. The V. Rev. John Kowalczyk, field work supervisor at St. Tikhon's Seminary, has been an effective, proactive contact at the seminary and a frequent participant at meetings of the SIP committee. Finally, the Chancellor of The Orthodox Church in America, Protopresbyter Robert Kondratick, has always been supportive, without which the SIP would never have become a reality.

The other major accomplishment of the department during the past three years was the 2004 Pastoral Ministries Conference. With the blessing of His Beatitude Metropolitan Herman, the conference was held at St. Tikhon's Monastery on June 2-4, 2004. This was the third such conference and nearly 125 priests and several deacons were present. Hierarchs present were His Beatitude Metropolitan Herman, His Eminence Archbishop Nathaniel of Detroit, His Grace Bishop Nikon of Boston, and His Grace Bishop Tikhon of South Canaan. Although there were fewer participants than at the previous two conferences, the gathering was once again a great opportunity for common prayer, sharing, learning, and fellowship. All three conferences took place during Pentecost week and that seems providential and perfectly fitting with the communal singing of "O Heavenly King," the decorations of trees and branches, the green vestments together with the pleasant spring country air — all interplay to set a conducive atmosphere and an appropriate context for reflection about pastoral ministry.

Highlights included the keynote presentation by Metropolitan Herman and presentations by Bishop Tikhon, the V. Rev. Andrew Morbey, and the Rev. Stephen Freeman. The V. Rev. Vladimir Berzonsky gave an inspiring meditation after the evening Compline service on Monday. Small discussion groups of ten to twelve people met several times during the course of the conference. These groups have become a regular and essential feature of the conferences, because they allow the kind of sharing and interaction between clergy that many find most beneficial.

The V. Rev. Daniel Kovalak served as choir director and liturgical coordinator, while the Rev. Michael Anderson was invaluable in preparatory work and handling registrations. The V. Rev. Leo Poore and John Paluch, with other members of the St. Tikhon's staff, also deserve much credit. Protopresbyter Robert Kondratick was actively involved in the planning of the conference, and members of his staff were very helpful on numerous occasions. While there is no reason not to continue holding pastoral conferences of this type in the future, there may be a need to re-examine some of the logistical variables (such as location, length of the conference, participation, etc.). In any case, the conference has been shown to be both rewarding (spiritually and educationally) and pleasant (as a retreat and gathering for clergy).

Other activities of the Department of Pastoral Life and Ministry include the publication of the *Pastors to Pastors* newsletter and the pastoral reflections "Life in Christ," which are posted on the OCA's web site. The latter, edited by the V. Rev. John Breck, address a variety of pastoral, spiritual, and ethical issues and are intended for pastors and all interested parties. The newsletter is published on a periodic basis and features articles, interviews, and materials chiefly directed toward the OCA's pastors. While the department has not produced many publications, this is one area that can be given some consideration in the future. A number of pastoral publications that the OCA has printed in the past are no longer readily available. There is also a need to publish material dealing with current pastoral issues.

Fr. John Breck and his wife, Lyn, are still available for pastoral direction at the St. Silouan Retreat, on Wadmalaw Island, near Charleston, SC. While the department's association with the retreat is only casual and informal, the resource remains a very useful location for pastors and pastors' wives to go to for spiritual refreshment and renewal.

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If it were possible, the department would like to set up some kind of “fellowship” program that would enable pastors, perhaps with their wives, to go to St. Silouan Retreat for a period of a week or so for quiet prayer and reflection.

Plans for the Future

As indicated above, this year’s hiatus for the Seminarian Internship Program (SIP) is unfortunate. However, the temporary break offers an opportunity for a thoughtful reassessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the program and time to evaluate and integrate adjustments of the program. There has already been one meeting with the Chancellor, and it brought hope for a bright future for the SIP. Plans for next year’s placement of interns will begin shortly and we hope that discussion about the SIP will take place during the 14th All-American Council. This discussion will reaffirm the vision and direction of the SIP, perhaps suggesting how the program can be improved, and affirming that the program continue, something that remains a priority for the department.

The collective successes of the Pastoral Ministries Conferences point to the ongoing need to provide clergy with opportunities to come together. The previous three conferences all profited from being held at St. Tikhon’s Monastery during Pentecost Week. However, thought should be given to other possibilities. Perhaps regional pastoral conferences could be coordinated, which would encourage more clergy participation from areas farther from St. Tikhon’s Monastery. A number of dioceses conduct their own pastoral conferences, and should be encouraged to expand further. Dioceses and regions have their own particular issues, and coming together to reflect on them is valuable. However, when pastoral conferences are sponsored by the OCA, and not just by a diocese of the OCA, they have a special significance and value. Pastors profit much by interacting with clergy from other dioceses, and they are also exposed to a broader vision of pastoral, liturgical, and evangelical life. The past three pastoral conferences all occurred in the summer, during the year preceding the All-American Council. That has apparently worked well enough, and even if there will be no expanded, regional conferences, the Fourth “All-OCA” Pastoral Conference will hopefully take place during the summer of 2007.

As mentioned above, the department is considering expanding its efforts in the area of publications and information. In addition to the *Pastors to Pastors* newsletter and the “Life in Christ” columns posted on the OCA’s web site, a number of reprints and new publications can be prepared, which would not require a major financial commitment.

Accountability

The Department of Pastoral Life and Ministry has no other purpose than to offer support and assistance for the OCA’s clergy, and this makes it directly responsible to His Beatitude Metropolitan Herman, to the Holy Synod of Bishops, and in turn to the entire Church. The Church is composed mostly of lay people, who constitute by far the largest segment. The hierarchy are the smallest segment, but the most important in terms of liturgical, spiritual, and administrative life. But the pastors are the key links between the bishops and the laity. The pastors are the “foot soldiers” and “workhorses” who are responsible for implementing in an actual parish the teachings and traditions of the Orthodox Church. They are the ones who fulfill, on a local level, the mandates of the hierarchy, and they are the ones who provide the laity with an identifiable, clerical representative of the whole Church. Obviously the welfare and state of the pastors has a direct relation with the well-being of the entire Church. By extension, the work of the department, however minimal or inconsistent, is always serving the needs of the Church.

The reorganization of the OCA’s ministry units and departments after the 13th All-American Council may have been a pragmatic measure designed to make administration more practical, but in one sense it has had an adverse effect on the Department of Pastoral Life and Ministry. Previously, sub-units devoted to liturgical translation and liturgical music were part of the department. Both of these areas are very much “pastoral” concerns. While each of these had their own particular committees and specialists, they did work under the “umbrella” of the Pastoral Ministry Unit. Administratively this was an achievement, making related but distinct units of pastoral ministry “accountable” to each other. Other departments and/or commissions that are inherently “pastoral” are those for Theological Education, Canons and Statutes, and Medical/Ethics. Unfortunately, contacts between these departments and commissions exist

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only informally and irregularly. When contacts do occur, they are positive and helpful.

One area of Church life with which the department is more regularly and closely involved is the Office of Institutional Chaplains. The Rev. Steven Voytovich is the chair of this office and his efforts in establishing the office are a result of his work in the Department of Pastoral Life and Ministry. He has succeeded in keeping both of these areas interconnected. Within the institutional chaplaincy office Fr. Steven also serves as Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) coordinator. In this capacity, too, he consistently informs us of developments and ideas about how CPE work can be of service to pastors and to the Department of Pastoral Life and Ministry.

Seminarian Internship Program

The Rev. Steven Voytovich, *Coordinator*

This program is covered under the V. Rev. Alexander Garklavs' report for the Department of Pastoral Life and Ministry. I would just offer a brief addition, along with my gratitude for his support, thanking our committee members, the V. Revs. Steven Belonick and John Kowalczyk, who take time from already full schedules to develop and maintain this program, which remains so important for the future of our Orthodox Church in America. Thank you also to Metropolitan Herman and Protospesbyter Robert Kondratich for their support and leadership.

First of all, gratitude needs to be expressed to the many mentor priests, along with their parish communities, who have selflessly given of time and talent, sometimes over a period of years, to provide the educational context for our seminarians to learn and grow. We need to be better able to support their work in preparing future pastors for our Church. As the program began we met with mentors both before and after the summer internship season, first to prepare them and then to reflect with them on the experience. Later on, we began meeting only prior to the summer to save funding for the interns. The past few years, we have been relying on a homemade videotape introduction to orient new mentors. Investing in good mentors has significant value beyond the program.

It should also be noted that all three seminaries, St. Vladimir's, St. Tikhon's, and St. Herman, have encouraged students to participate in the program. We even have former participants of the program now serving as mentors. We are thankful for the seminaries' support, and yet it is important that this program remain at the national Church level to facilitate the best in pastoral practice from all our seminarians.

The Seminary Internship Program is more than worth the investment on all accounts. Future pastors of our Church are offered an important opportunity to put their learning into daily practice - beyond their normal field education requirements. Pastors and parish communities gain from the experience of opening the doors to the soul of their community life, opening their hearts, and sharing in the intern's successes, failures, and all the moments of uncertainty that lie in between. They have invited interns to taste, touch, and see. The interns are stretched in learning and growth, and the pastors and parish communities have in many cases been revitalized in their ministry.

It is our hope, as stated by Fr. Alexander, that this year of financially necessitated hiatus will not remain a block for future years. It will be important to explore the future in terms of growth and opportunity rather than redoubling efforts to maintain this program's consistent level of function with shrinking resources. This is especially true for our program participants. Knowing that the Church made this investment in their professional and personal growth will help sustain them through the realities of parish life for years to come.