

# PASTORS TO PASTORS

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## PROBLEMS and DIFFICULTIES of PASTORAL WORK: Stress & Anxiety

by George Timko

In a recent survey of Orthodox clergymen, the most urgent problems and difficulties of pastoral life were stress, burnout and depression. This is a very significant response, since these problems are all interrelated and products of the same root cause, which is anxiety, and the same root source, which is the mind. But the response is also interesting in that it reflects a condition in the religious sector that is similar to all other sectors of society.

How can we manage stress, prevent burnout and deal with depression? We have been inundated with all kinds of books trying to answer this question from all kinds of perspectives. Some people think that these are new diseases which need new cures and that traditional religion cannot give us any direction. But actually these problems have only been intensified in our modern age, and from ancient times the spiritual traditions have known how to cope with these things in a much more effective way than our mo-

*"The Lord is always near. Therefore, have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." [Saint Paul]*

dern medicine men. In fact some present day scientists are finding their answers to these problems in the ancient spiritual practices of religion.

### WHAT IS STRESS?

In the usual sense, stress means being subjected to some influence and pressure that is deforming and damaging. It is the exertion of forces that cause some strain and destruction. The stress on steel or concrete or any other material results in a weakened and fractured condition. The human stress factor does much the same thing. But the stress on human beings is a mental, emotional and physical influence and pressure and disruption that results in deterioration and distress and breakdown of human person.

The consequence of human stress is burnout, which literally means that burning stops because all the fuel is consumed. Stress and conflict cause us to be burned out because all our energy is used up and dissipated. We end up worn out, enervated and exhausted – physically, mentally and emotionally drained – with no vitality and vigor. Stress is dangerous to our health because it burns up all our life force and power, leaving us in a weak, lifeless condition.

The end result of using up all our living energy or fuel is depression,

a mental and emotional and physical condition of being pressed down and fatigued. Being depressed, we experience a dejected and weighed down spirit, a heaviness of heart and lack of motivation, and a depletion of vital energy and activity. This listless, immobile state robs us of life in its fullest robust substance and tends to destroy us.

Being stressed is a complex condition made up of various factors, both psychological and physiological. The brain, the nervous system, the blood chemistry and pressure, the heart and respiratory condition, the muscular structure are all affected by stress and in turn contribute to stress. Stress is psychosomatic. But the underlying cause of stress is anxiety which generates conflict in the human heart and mind, and prevents humans from ever being at peace, knowing only turmoil.

Anxiety is a worrisome, anguished, fretful state of mind, a mindfull of desire, distress and strife. It embodies a fear and apprehension and conflict which causes mental stressing, emotional pressure and physical strain. Anxiety results in a tension and imbalance of the psyche that is present in most forms of mental disorder. It engenders stress which causes a rigidity and hardening and fragmenting of the mind and soul

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## PRAYER AND DEVOTION IN THE LIFE OF THE PASTOR by Steven J. Belonick

These words from the mouth of St. Dmitri of Rostov simply and concisely define the place of prayer in the life of every Christian. So much more do they define the place of prayer in the life of each and every pastor.

The pastor, we know all too well, is the one who teaches about prayer to those within his care. He often encourages the faithful to lead prayer-filled lives. Parishioners come to him desiring to be taught "how to pray," for he is considered an "expert" in the realm of prayer.

All of us, I am sure, feel extremely uncomfortable in this position, simply because we are treading in a region of which we know so little ourselves. Frankly, we, the pastors, have as much difficulty and frustration in our prayer lives as any of those for whom we care. This, unfortunately, is a sad commentary. All of us, however, who are honest with ourselves, know that it is bitterly true.

We are very busy people. Our calendars are filled with appointments, meetings, services and visitations. We are constantly planning, organizing, helping, persuading, motivating, entertaining, raising money, attempting always to be respected and liked by a majority of the people. There is little time in this kind of schedule for prayer, solitude and silence. We are motivated and inspired more by how the public perceives us than by the Wisdom and Word of God.

Probably the greatest enemy that we face in our pastoral work is anger. Henri J.M. Nouwen, the noted author and professor of Pastoral Theology at Yale University, has stated that "anger ..seems close to a professional vice in the contemporary ministry. Pastors are angry at their leaders for not leading and at their followers for not following. They are angry at those who do not come to church for not coming and angry at those who do come for coming without enthusiasm... This is not an open, blatant, roaring anger, but an anger hidden behind the smooth word, the smiling face and the polite handshake... It is a frozen anger, an anger which settles into a biting resentment and slowly paralyzes a generous heart." Most of us could easily identify with his description. More importantly, however, the cause of this spiritual breakdown is nothing less than lack of a simple, brief, disciplined prayer and devotional life.

For the example just offered above, it should seem quite clear that a pastor's prayer life is linked not only to his own personal sanctification, but to the sanctification of his flock. Simply, prayer and ministry are inseparable. Prayer is the cornerstone and impetus of the priestly ministry. It guides him,

*"As a bird without wings, and as a soldier, without arms, so is a Christian without prayer."*

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teaches him, instructs him, purifies him and inspires him.

Some important elements of prayer need to be distinguished at this point. These elements are no new revelation. Rather, I share them in an attempt to remind us of their importance and value.

### SOLITUDE

...is the first important element in our prayer life. By solitude, I do not mean "getting away from it all." It does not mean privacy. Rather, it means being alone with God. Solitude brings forth an encounter: an encounter with ourselves (i.e. our false selves, our sins) and an encounter with the Living God. The result of solitude is purification and transformation. It helps us to see how utterly dependent we are upon Him. It helps us to see clearly that we are sinners, to see the compulsions which steer us and dominate our lives. Solitude is, therefore, a cleansing experience. We become pliable once again in the hands of the Lord. Seeing our sins clearly, we are made capable of being compassionate again to those in our flock. Judgement is reserved for ourselves and not aimed at those around us. Solitude, understood in this way, leads us to a closer relationship with others and does not serve to get us away from them.

### SILENCE

...is another important element of our prayer life. As pastors, we are called upon to speak the Word. The way, however, to speak the Word is first to be able to hear the Word. And we can hear the Word only by being silent, by wanting to receive the Word of God. The

Church Fathers taught us that silence teaches us what to speak. It allows us to speak a word that participates in the creative power of God's own Word.

### INTERCESSION

...is another element in our prayer life, keeping alive in our hearts the lives, conditions, sufferings, joys and burdens of the members of our flock. Bringing the lives of the faithful, in intercession, to the throne of the Lord, makes us not only one with them, but God's heart becomes one with ours. We, and those whom we bring with us, enter into His healing Presence.

From that which has been stated, prayer requires a discipline. This discipline should be short, simple but regular. It should be aided with a short, but daily reading from the Scripture and spiritual writings. Regularity and discipline are crucial to any prayer life. Forcing ourselves to pray, at times, (i.e. from instruction of Blessed John of Kronstadt) will be necessary. But our perseverance and struggle will not go unheeded.

In summary, the prayer life of the pastor is unquestionably linked to his ministry. Failure in the one will lead to failure in the other. Prayer life is not just another important activity for the pastor to do. Instead, it is the very center of a new life given to him for the sanctification of his own life and the sanctification of his flock. The pastor's faithfulness to the prayer life will make it possible for him to introduce his flock into that very life as well. In this way, the "whole lump will be leavened" (1 Cor. 5:6).

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DEPARTMENT OF PASTORAL LIFE AND MINISTRY  
ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA  
P.O. BOX 675, SYOSSET, NY 11791

D P L M

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# "In God We Trust?"

by John Tkachuk

This motto, without the question-mark, appears on the reverse of all USA currency. Canadian money omits such a one altogether (is this the reason why it's worth less?). However, in both countries, this motto-with-the-question-mark seems to sum up well how most people think clergy and money ought to relate.

For example, this June the *U.S. News and World Report* highlighted the reemergence of "old-fashioned" costly weddings, stating that the average during 1985 cost US\$6,350. Broken down: the reception tops in at \$2,350; rings, \$808; photographer, \$470; bride's dress, \$345; flowers, \$324; invitations, \$200; bride's headpiece, \$100; limousine, \$58; etc. The average gratuity to the officiating "clergy-person" falls between the last two, at \$83!

So, although in just one generation we've "come a long way" – especially in the Orthodox Church: when my father came from Europe in the early 1950's as a middle-aged archpriest, he had to work nights as a window-washer out in San Francisco to support his family – most people, including many clergy, still think that "In God we trust" means that clerical finances are not quite suitable for open and regular discussion.

Clergy are not alone, of course, in ignorance of money-management. The media regularly feature stories about personal financial hardships. Few other professionals, however, face the stigma of not being able to discuss their finances openly since such talk is deemed "unworthy" of their spiritual dignity!

The Catch-22 of the matter is Jesus' dictum "You cannot serve God and Money" (Matthew 6:24), which implies an either/or choice; yet in our society, as in all, clergy need an adequate amount of the latter in order to serve the former.

## EDUCATION

Seminaries should provide mandatory courses on money-management, both on the personal and institutional levels. Many ordinands, eager to begin their work, often receive their first assignments with education-debts still to pay-off, and go to parishes without so much as knowing exactly what their compensation will be. Some clash with parish councils because of their inexperienced insensitivity to money-matters. Bishops and deans must become more open to giving guidance on these topics, both to pastors and their flocks.

## CHILDREN

Early in the marriage, every couple ought to plan for its children's education. For clergy couples, however, the usual rule of "poorer when younger, better

-off when older" is magnified because of the priest's overall lower lifetime salary (i.e. in his 'forties and 'fifties, he won't be earning as much as most of his college classmates); and his wife's career, if she has one, is vulnerable to her husband's assignment to a specific parish.

## COOPERATION

Most parish clergy are married, yet usually only one of the spouses is "in charge" of the family's finances. Even if the wife works, usually only one or the other makes decisions on key money matters (not at all always the male). Unless both learn to share equally the responsibility of the couple's finances, tensions over money will arise: one will feel subservient to the other, who in turn will think "it's all up to me" with the weighty questions associated with money.

## NEGOTIATION

A standing committee of the Parish

Council (consisting of, say: the Warden, Chief Finance Officer, and Secretary) should meet with every pastor prior to drawing up the following year's budget for the Annual Parish Meeting, and discuss with him the total compensation-package (salary, housing, transportation, insurance, health-plans, etc.) in relation to the parish's overall finances and the local cost-of-living situation.

## CREDIT

Used wisely, credit is a cost-effective and convenient way of meeting all sorts of unexpected contingencies; thoughtlessly, it's always a disaster. Very early in their life together, each couple should meticulously monitor one month's itemized expenses. The services of a financial counsellor can be employed by clergy families; if you don't know where to find one, write to: The National Foundation for Consumer Credit Inc., 8701 Georgia Ave., Silver Spring, MD 20910, USA.

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# The Clergy Convocation of the Diocese of the Midwest

by Ted Bobosh

Usually when we think of forty or fifty clergy getting together at an Orthodox meeting, we envision a Diocesan Assembly – budgets, by-laws, reports, rules of order, and assessments. For me, such meetings are hopelessly boring, futile and exasperating. But imagine, if you can, the same group of Orthodox priests getting together solely for the purpose of study, prayer, fellowship, spiritual growth, listening to the Word of God and even for relaxation. Such was the Clergy Convocation of the Diocese of the Midwest February 24-27, near Detroit.

This latter type of clergy gathering is not all that unusual for many denominations in America, but has been little used by parishes of the Orthodox Church in America. This past February, the Midwest Diocese held its first ever Clergy Convocation. About forty of the Diocesan priests gathered for the purpose of fellowship, worship, and study over the three-day period. Travel and housing expenses for the priests were paid for by their respective parishes. This benefit for the clergy was overwhelmingly approved at the 1984 Diocesan Assembly. Clergy and laity gave approval to the resolution which called for this convocation which also made parish support of the event mandatory.

Over the three-day period, the priests had the chance to attend several lectures dealing with issues essential to our own ministry. The presentations were as diverse as our daily work and were very well-suited for continuing education. Fr. Stanley Harakas from Holy Cross Greek Seminary gave two thought-provoking talks on moral issues – a historical overview of the Church's relationship to the medical sciences, and then a talk addressing more specifically the current issues being raised in the field of bio-ethics. Fr. James Doyle of Chicago also gave an excellent presentation on preaching and its importance to Orthodox life. The lecture was very practical and timely, as was shown by a recent Diocesan religious education survey which showed many of our Orthodox clergy feel they were very poorly trained by our seminaries for preaching. Father Alexander Cutler of St. John's Monastery in Ohio then led a discussion on prayer, which I felt was good because he did not just tell us what the Fathers say about prayer, but he related his own experiences with prayer as a parish priest and a monk. He invited others to offer their own experiences and thoughts on prayer. Fr. Vladimir Berzonsky of Parma gave a short presentation on the priesthood which was tied in to the overall theme of the convocation.

In addition to these presentations, the priests had one evening open forum with their Diocesan Bishop, His Grace, Boris. It was a chance to discuss anything in an open meeting with the hierarchy, who even invited comments and criticisms of his own leadership. The discussion however turned much of its attention on the financial concerns of some of the priests – their low salaries, debts and lack of financial

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reward and incentive in parish life.

Each day of the convocation began with matins, had vespers in early evening, and concluded with compline. We celebrated one Divine Liturgy together. There was a homily preached at every service, which I believe reflects the growing concern over preaching in our church. Those services attended by a group of men who shared a love and concern for the Church were indeed an essential part of the Convocation's success.

Besides the times of worship and study, there were ample opportunities for priests to get together to renew friendships, share stories, to laugh, hold serious discussions and even to have deanery meetings. There also was good opportunity for priests to meet privately with their bishop and to go to the sacrament of confession.

Was it worth it? Absolutely. I was not sure the event was going to be worth it when I went there because I feared business meetings or ecclesiastical conversations. I now believe such convocations should be held annually or if need be biennially in every Diocese. Clergy morale and skill can be raised by such events. Just about every profession today demands continuing education for its members. Many denominations expect and pay for the same for their clergy. Priest convocations cannot resolve all clergy problems but they can help to strengthen our priests and through them our parishes. Other Dioceses may want to shorten the convocation or otherwise adapt it for their own needs. There still is some debate as to what exactly the convocation should accomplish – continuing education or spiritual retreat.

Clergy meetings solely for the purpose of continuing education and spiritual renewal are totally justifiable today and should be paid for by the parishes who receive the services of our clergy. These convocations may ultimately shape and influence the nature of the business assemblies which currently predominate in our Orthodox national or diocesan gatherings. Such meetings can help to maintain and restore the vision we need as priests to minister to our Orthodox Church in America.

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and body, thereby destroying the wholeness of one's being in God.

The Scriptures reveal anxiety as a sinful denial of God's sustaining providence and love and care. It is the fruit of greed, ambition and grasping. It is the failure to let go of the self-center and to surrender the self-will to the divine will. It is the absence of trust and reliance upon God. For as Isaiah said, "Thou dost keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusts in Thee." In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ teaches that anxiety must have no place in the life of those who believe in God. And His message is that we can be free from stress and anxiety by changing the quality and condition of our minds, which is what repentance is really all about. Managing stress and anxiety requires dealing with our minds, with observing and understanding the content and activity of our consciousness.

Our spiritual Fathers give us many directives for dealing with stress and anxiety. For example, our interior detachment of mind frees us from anxiety about material things, says St. Nilos. The various spiritual practices of solitude, meditation, prayer, watching the mind, self-knowledge, fasting, spiritual reading, self-awareness, nurturing a quiet attentive mind, stilling oneself in the presence of God – all these are ways of overcoming anxiety and being free from stress. By achieving a certain state of spiritual being we come to a condition of tranquility and peace

and contentment that dissolves all stress and anxiety.

All anxiety comes from within us and is generated by our own interior being. The basic source of stress is our own minds and not the external conditions that we tend to blame. As St. John Chrysostom so aptly observed: "The confusion arises from within us ourselves – not from the nature of the external circumstances – but from the infirmity of our own minds. If we were affected because of what happens to us externally, all human beings would be in the same mental turmoil. For we all sail the same sea, and it is impossible to escape the waves and the spray. But since there are those who stand beyond the influence of the storm and the raging sea, it is clear that it is not the circumstances which make the storm within us, but the condition of our own minds. If therefore, we so order the mind that it bears all things contentedly, we shall have no storm or even a ripple within us, but always a clear and steady calm."

*NOTE: Of all the different books that I have read about this subject, there are three that I have found to be the most insightful and to embody a basis of spiritual practice in religion.*

*THE RELAXATION RESPONSE*

by Herbert Benson, M.D. (Avon)

*BEYOND THE RELAXATION RESPONSE*

by Herbert Benson, M.D. (Berkley)

*FREEDOM FROM STRESS* by Phil

Nuernberger, Ph.D. (Himalayan Institute of Yoga).

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DEPARTMENT OF PASTORAL LIFE AND MINISTRY

ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA

P.O. Box 675

Syosset, New York 11791

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