



THE PRIEST AS BUSINESS MANAGER

by Father Alexander Garklavs



The priest's existence is defined by his functions as spiritual father, liturgical celebrant and teacher. Yet these aspects of ministry permeate into other dimensions of parish life. The priesthood is a high calling that requires lowly tasks. Our Lord's life and teachings demonstrate that it should be this way. **"He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much. If you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will entrust to you true riches?"** (Lk. 16.10). The priest is the presiding executive officer of the parish corporation, but he is also, simply put, one of its key workers. For clergy in the Orthodox Church in America, this has become part of the job description. Most OCA churches cannot afford full-time personnel other than the pastor. Occasionally, there may be a part-time secretary or custodian and parishioners often help with maintenance or groundskeeping. Even here the pastor may have to supervise with scheduling and operations. In many parishes he alone is a combination of personnel: secretary, computer expert, custodian, on-site contractor, etc.

Of course, every pastor is a person and every person is different. Some priests are comfortable changing light bulbs and taking out the garbage, some are not. Some have an aptitude for business, some do not. Others will have construction skills, while some cannot use a hammer. Without generalizing, what we can say is that parishes are energized by a pastor who is willing to work and work with people. As communities get smaller, where resources are limited, priests have to assume a variety of duties that

were previously regarded as "unpriestly." Yes, first of all he makes time for prayer, for liturgical services, reading the Bible, the Fathers and meditation. If someone is truly blessed, all of the waking hours can be devoted to these pursuits. However, claiming "pastoral privilege" to surf the internet or look at book catalogs is not exactly an honorable excuse. The pastor who says that his job is not to be mindful of church repairs must be able to honestly justify it with a "cause worthy of a blessing."

"A Christian is one who *labors* whether he is rich or poor. Whatever his social and material position may be, a Christian is a laborer in the field of life. By the sweat of his brow he earns his physical and also his spiritual bread: eternal life in Christ. **'If any would not work, neither should he eat'** (2Thess. 3.10). And if he does not labor he is not a Christian" (from *The Orthodox Pastor* by Archbishop John Shahovskoy). Attention to the physical welfare of the parish is a part of the priest's duties that can actually be spiritually fulfilling. "Yet too often we seek riches, or at least comforts and rest, disliking hard labor" (from *Counsels on the Christian Priesthood* by St. John of Kronstadt). The lives of saints frequently describe the physical labors of great spiritual heroes, who saw nothing demeaning in chopping wood, baking bread, tilling fields, or whatever. St. John of Damascus obediently cleaned latrines without complaint. All honorable tasks can be accomplished for the glory of God. By working around the parish the priest can be a great example to parishioners. A "servant is not greater than the master," and if the master is willing to work the servants will be inspired to do likewise.

While menial labor around the parish may be an option, in matters of business management the priest's active participation is crucial. Here

we touch on what was once, and in certain quarters remains to be, a controversial area. Is the priest the chairman of parish assemblies and the parish council, should he be signing parish checks or not, should he be in on budget committee meetings, to what extent should he have freedom to purchase necessary items, should he have personal discretionary funds and in what amounts? Unfortunately, there exists no consistent policy to address these questions. The Statute of the Orthodox Church in America affirms that the parish priest presides over the parish meeting, but his described role in the parish council is less clear. This is largely due to the historical development of the OCA parishes which saw abrupt and unnatural changes that adversely impacted normal parish administration. For the most part, parishes today abide by a delicate balance, recognizing hierarchical authority and also acknowledging the parishioners' role in decision-making.

Whether he is officially chairing meetings, signing checks or not, the priest *is* the leader of the parish, spiritually, socially and administratively speaking. "No activities in the parish can be initiated without his knowledge, approval, and blessing" (*The Statute of the Orthodox Church in America*). This does not mean that he is simply given *symbolic* respect. Occasionally we hear the proverbial assertion that "the priest's job is confined to the sanctuary and sacramental needs, the business of the parish is run by people who know something about it." Implicit are two untruths, that the priest knows nothing except his liturgical duties and that parish laity are always accomplished business people. Parishes that relegate the priest only to liturgical functions seldom, if ever, have anything like a healthy spiritual life.

(over)

"Business Manager" continued

Mistakes made by those "accomplished business people" are visible coast to coast, in numerous unsightly churches, ugly icons, unnecessary and inappropriate renewal projects, missed opportunities, financial misappropriation (almost always due to infractions by laity who nevertheless dreadfully fear the clergy's involvement in parish finances), etc. Priests have not always been courageous in challenging this. While one's good intentions can be overtly disregarded, in other cases priests deliberately choose to abstain from parish business and thus contribute to failures that would have profited from their involvement. The opposite extreme is no better and there is no justification for priests' abuse of power. Insisting on their way or no way, pastors who refuse to listen to prudent advice embark on projects that are impractical and financially unwise. Here too, numerous cases (impractical church buildings, unnecessary renovations, etc.) remain as lasting examples.

Parish councils and committees should be chaired by the priest not for the purpose of rubber-stamping his every wish, but because he sets a tone of courtesy and objectivity, where all

viewpoints are considered and an informed decision is reached by consensus. Effective management of parish business means being able to assess what is useful and realistic and to convey that in a dispassionate way. Often parish councils fall into a rut known as the "garbage can model." In studies of organizational systems the garbage can approach consists of a diverse group of people with differing motives and goals, with limited time and energy, all of whom have ideas that they would like to see accepted. Add to this mix an irrational mistrust or blind loyalty between certain personalities and you have the perfect setting for hours of fruitless, frustrating and spiritually damaging parish council meetings. Remarkably, these situations can go on for months or even years, because nothing is easier than to find some rationale to justify irrational behavior.

A priest may struggle with personal human passions that can impede parish business, but he must rise above them and proceed in a Christian (read also "practical and efficient") manner. Though some Orthodox clergy reject *Robert's Rule of Order* as "unchurchly," they are helpful in conducting business in an orderly way. Familiarity with them is very useful. However, the priest's most potent management tools are his exemplary Christian life! Therefore, his influence is strongest when it is least obvious. He inspires meetings by being reserved and respectful, and by considerate listening of all people, even those who may disagree with him. Then too, there is the "behind-the-scenes" influence: encouraging and nurturing talented and pious laity to get involved, developing bonds of trust and respect by consistent fairness, demonstrating a sincere personal commitment in acts of stewardship, etc.

Sometimes an outspoken lay leader may sway the congregation into adopting a plan for something that is quite useless. This can be a challenge. A quiet, prayerful surrender may be the only option. At other times, the priest musters all of his wisdom and

courage to logically demonstrate the folly of the proposal. The pastor consciously represents the general welfare of the parish, not just certain groups. Sometimes he takes the initiative and advocates projects that seem unimportant. These may range from repainting over old icons to putting in a parking lot. Here the pastor becomes a salesman, PR person, fund-raiser, research consultant and possibly even a general contractor. However, the priest never forgets his essential task to witness to the "only needful thing" whatever projects are at hand. He must be able to see and show how all parish business is directed for the glory of God and the good estate of the Holy Orthodox Church. The success or failure of parish projects does not necessarily correlate to the spiritual health of a community and sometimes failure can be a means of spiritual growth!

The pastor's role as parish leader is never easy. His involvement in the community as business manager requires great patience, skill and Christ-like humility. Useful also is a good sense of humor. The vicissitudes of parish business can escalate human emotions into violent outbursts, but at the core are usually rather insignificant details. A little levity can go a long way to ease tense situations. Priests rarely receive any formal business training though some occasionally take a continuing education course and find this to be beneficial. Today there is an increasing amount of helpful literature on the subject, even from an Orthodox perspective. Most of all we learn from trial and error, and by honest evaluation of the outcome. In discussing and sharing with capable pastors, it is possible to acquire fairly competent business skills. Experience clearly shows that productive, growing and spiritually alive parishes are characterized by productive, cooperative, and hard-working pastors, who inspire their parishioners with dedication and industriousness. Efficient business management can only be advantageous for pastors in their vocation to witness to Jesus Christ and His eternal Kingdom. □

PASTORS TO PASTORS

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"Thoughts and Recollections"

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

His Eminence, Archbishop DMITRI

Archbishop of Dallas, Diocese of the South

Q. Your Eminence, how did you "end up" in the Orthodox Church in America?

A. In 1945, when I was in the army, I was sent to the Port of Embarkation, Camp Stoneman, at Pittsburg, California. I had already been Orthodox for several years, was not yet ordained, and had attended services in churches of various jurisdictions. People and even priests in these churches seemed to be either unaware or indifferent to the existence of other Orthodox Churches, and I rarely found anyone interested in jurisdictional unification. It was there, at Camp Stoneman, that I found, to my amazement, an Orthodox chaplain, Father Vladimir Borichevsky, of blessed memory. I was led to him by an announcement he had placed on all the bulletin boards in the camp, one that invited Orthodox of any and all ethnic backgrounds to services at a post chapel. (He felt obliged, apparently, to name all of them, Albanian Orthodox, Bulgarian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, etc., approximately ten altogether, on his poster.) I met Father before the Liturgy, talked with him afterwards, and spent almost every evening thereafter with him and his family, until I was "shipped out."

During these talks I discovered that a vision existed for the future of the Orthodox Church in this country, that there was a concept of a mission for our Church to the people of this land. As he informed me, that vision and concept were those of St Tikhon, and were still alive in the American Church that had first been planted by the Russians. I learned that he was not alone in maintaining a sense of purpose for the Church's existence in this country, that it was shared by a number of bishops, priests and laymen. I was beginning to understand that my place was with the Church of mission and vision.

I maintained contact with Father Vladimir for many years, and he became my spiritual father and guide. When I decided -- after many personal ups and

downs, after pursuing another career -- to seek to enter the then Metropolia, his counsel and guidance in this regard was crucial. I thank God for him, for his friendship, wisdom and intervention in the realization of my dream. May his memory be eternal!

Even now, some forty years later, I am still convinced that I made the correct decision. It is true that currently the vision of a united Orthodox Church in America is shared by many clergy and laymen in the other jurisdictions, and perhaps the old Metropolia and our Orthodox Church in America provided some type of inspiration for them. I believe our Church did the right thing in accepting the gift of autocephaly from the Russian Church, and that the OCA stands ready to work for unity and to cooperate with the other Orthodox Churches in bringing this about.

Q. The parishes of the Diocese of the South are generally newer, smaller and with fewer resources than the established, older northern parishes. The parish priests in the South often have to find additional employment, which alters the traditional role of a pastor. Yet often the enthusiasm among DOS parishes and priests are exemplary. Do you believe that these "southern-style" parishes exemplify the future of parish life for the OCA?

A. To begin with, I must say that I am thankful to God for the priests and the people of our churches in the Diocese, some of which are parishes, others missions or mission-stations. I am gratified by their zeal, enthusiasm, sacrifices and accomplishments. I am also grateful for this particular question, as it provides me with an opportunity to clear up a few commonly held misconceptions about the Diocese of the South.

Contrary to what some may think, there is no uniformity in the make-up of our churches. There are those which consist almost exclusively of retired people who

have sought warmer climates; some of them are not with us year round, maintaining memberships in northern parishes during the summer months. Disregarding their relatively small facilities, these communities are not very different in "feel" from many parishes in older, more well-established Dioceses. Other churches have a majority of converts. Still others have a good mixture of both cradle Orthodox and converts. I thank God for the fact that enthusiasm runs high in most of our communities, and the desire to grow and develop motivates them. The understanding that the Orthodox Church is alone in preserving the fullness of the Christian Faith and that rapid changes are taking place in both doctrine and morals in other Christian groups, heighten the desire of many of our own priests and people to share the fullness of Orthodoxy with others.

It is true that a number of our priests have had to hold secular employment in order to be able to serve our Diocese, but little by little their ranks have been reduced. Even in the last few years several have become full-time. I must relate one extremely important fact that has contributed to the development of some of the missions: that the priests who are technically "part-time" pastors, work two full-time jobs for all practical purposes. They resist the temptation to consider their priestly vocation as something that can be exercised on a part-time basis. To be sure this type of situation places an additional strain on the priest and his family, "altering" as you put it, the traditional role of the pastor. Thankfully the Orthodox Church is attempting to offer "full-time" positions to missionary priests through various means, including the OCA's Church Planting Grant Program. Our own Diocese, through Southern Orthodox Stewards (SOS), would like to reach the point where it can compensate its full-time missionaries, in addition to securing aid from the National Missions Program. *(continued page 4)*

(Archbishop DMITRI, continued)

On the other hand, I have had bi-vocational priests tell me that their "secular" position actually helps them in two ways. First it enables them to identify more with their respective flocks on a day to day basis. This approach may not hold true for all priests, and may not be necessary or helpful for many. It seems particularly useful to our younger brothers in Christ as well as to those who hold teaching or counseling positions outside the Church. In any case, there are those who have found secular employment to be compatible with or even an enhancement to their priestly vocation. Secondly, secular employment provides some pastors with a certain amount of security and peace of mind as they are less dependent for their "livelihood" on the ups and downs of parish life. All of these priests, I am sure, will certainly be blessed for their sacrifice.

With regard to resources, it is correct to say that most of our communities currently have smaller churches and fellowship halls when compared to those of our northern brethren. Some, though, are in the midst of building programs with goals of constructing more adequate facilities with long-term growth in mind. The South in general, however, has become extremely dynamic in terms of population, business and industrial growth. This is having a positive impact on parishes and missions. Tithing is up as well as attendance and membership within many of our communities. In fact I would say that our main deficiency in terms of resources is in the area of personnel. We simply do not have enough priests to service all of the potential mission sites in the South. For example, as it stands now, I know of three areas within our boundaries that could use mission priests almost immediately.

Finally, if anything we have done in the South can inspire some of the older parishes in other Dioceses, in the renewal and the development of missionary zeal, we would, of course, be most grateful. Whether or not one can characterize the "southern-style" parishes as exemplary of the future of parish life in the OCA, I don't know. As I said, it may not be quite so easy to point to a church in the South and describe it as typically "southern." If by southern you mean "mission-minded" then

yes, I hope that our communities in some sense reflect the future of the OCA. But then again, we cannot claim to be the only ones who are oriented towards growth and evangelism. In this regard I would like to stress that we gratefully acknowledge the examples set and foundation laid for us over the years by visionaries throughout the country.

(PART II of our interview with Archbishop DMITRI will appear in the next issue of "Pastors to Pastors")

ON ASCETICISM AND THE PRIESTHOOD

From the writings of Hieromonk Jerome of Solovki (+1847)

In former days monks spent time in their cells living alone and in silence. Priest-monks were rarely mentioned in the lives of these holy fathers. Today, as there are more liturgical services, there are more priests and priest-monks. Sometimes these priests lament that they cannot lead lives in quiet asceticism, wishing to have more time to pray and contemplation. However, that monastic life was fraught with dangers for those who attempted asceticism without guidance and became subject to delusion (*prelest'*). Priests have a great advantage in that they regularly commune with the Holy Mysteries of Christ which, when received with faith, prevent the chances of delusion. Therefore, do not regret that you cannot lead a life of ascetic silence as did the fathers of old, but thank God that He has granted to you the holy priesthood. Your task and that of the ancient fathers is the same: the attainment of moral perfection. They sought achievement by entering into their hearts, you enter into the churches of God. They went from strength to strength, from strength of prayer to strength of deeds, from strength of deeds to strength of visions. You pursue the same, from the strength of faith to the strength of intellectual vision. **"They go from strength to strength, the God of gods will be seen in Zion"** (*Psalms 84.8*). For the fathers of old, Zion was in their hearts, for you it is on the altar in the churches. Therefore, my friend, when standing in front of the altar during the holy service, do not imagine God to be in the clouds; He is there in front of you and will remain there forever. O priest, this is your great reward while you are still on earth; just imagine what awaits you in the hereafter!

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