

Go therefore and make disciples of  
all nations . . . .  
Mt 28:19



Allez, faites de toutes les nations  
des disciples . . . .  
Mt 28:19

# CANADIAN ORTHODOX MESSENGER

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## *At Fall 2005 Archdiocesan Council Meeting* **Archdiocesan Dean appointed**

At the fall 2005 meeting of the Archdiocesan Council, held at Annunciation Cathedral, Ottawa, November 11 - 12, Bishop Seraphim appointed Archpriest Cyprian Hutcheon to the position of Archdiocesan Dean.

Fr Cyprian is Bishop Seraphim's nominee for Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Canada. Because of certain technicalities yet to be worked through, however, the approval of this nomination by the Holy Synod of The Orthodox Church in America has been temporarily delayed. Meanwhile, need for pastoral, and administrative assistance for the Ruling Bishop is so great, that the Council unanimously approved Fr Cyprian's appointment to this Archdiocesan Deanship, as a temporary measure.

Fr Cyprian's responsibilities, reflecting those of other Diocesan Deans in the Orthodox world, will include visitations, travelling, counselling, and pastoral correspondence, helping to relieve some of the Ruling Bishop's enormous responsibilities, and pastoral travelling. His Grace says that "This position is, in fact, one that could be described as Co-Chancellor, and should be understood to carry similar responsibilities."

It was recalled several times during the Council meeting, and emphasized by the Bishop, that both the Bishop, and Council, had followed in every way the correct procedures for nominating the person that Bishop Seraphim believes God blesses for the position of Auxiliary Bishop. Encouraged by Metropolitan Herman's words at the banquet of the Archdiocesan Assembly in Saskatoon in July 2004, in which His Beatitude said that the Canadian diocese would have an Auxiliary Bishop within one year [see *COM, Autumn 2004, p. 3*], Bishop Seraphim and the Council did what the Holy Synod had required, including raising more than

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## **Heavenly patrons given To Archdiocesan youth**

*—by Matthew Francis, St Herman's Sobor, Edmonton*

On Wednesday, 21 December 2005, I had the privilege of meeting with His Grace, Bishop Seraphim here in Edmonton, as part of my responsibilities as Coordinator for Youth and Young Adult Ministry for the Archdiocese of Canada. It was a great joy to spend this time with His Grace, and also it was both practically helpful in many ways, as well as inspiring, since at this time His Grace assigned heavenly patrons for our Archdiocesan youth work.

I will admit that I had a little trepidation, and also great anticipation, for this was my first one-on-one talk with the Bishop. But His Grace immediately set me at ease by offering me some coffee. And of course, anyone who knows Bishop Seraphim understands that his generosity goes a lot deeper than coffee! We began talking right away, and the time set aside just sped by! Thankfully, a later appointment had been cancelled, and I was invited to drive His Grace up to St Albert later on, so I was blessed to have bit more time together with him.

His Grace offered practical advice on many matters, including bridging the distance across our vast country by finding ways for Orthodox young people to make friendships rooted in Christ. Then he also encouraged us young people in Canada to learn about and love the **Holy and Great Martyr Barbara** (+ 306 AD), an amazing and holy young woman of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, who stands as a great example to us all—but especially to us young people. In a world surrounded by idolatry and family pressures, St Barbara stood firm in her faith in Jesus Christ. And so Vladyka has blessed us to have St Barbara as a special heavenly patron for the younger generations of our Church in Canada. She is praying for us already, so we should remember her, and ask for her prayers as she stands before the Throne of Grace.

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. . . **Archdiocesan Dean**, *continued from p. 1:*

the targeted amount of money for the support of the Auxiliary Bishop. Indeed, as His Grace noted, “many people throughout the diocese gave sacrificially, so that the money could be raised in a relatively short time.”

On a further financial note, however, the Treasurer of the Archdiocese, Mr Nikita Lopoukhine, reported that the diocese is facing a deficit in operating income vs expenditures. This appears to be because of a fall-off in regular giving, revealing a need for stewardship education, and encouragement. The Chancellor, Fr Dennis Pihach, pressed both Regional Deans, and Lay Deanery Representatives of the Council, to visit and talk with parishes, encouraging their commitment for ongoing support of the Archdiocese. [See also pp. 8 - 9 of this issue of the Messenger.]

This fall meeting of the Archdiocesan Council was very warmly received and supported by members of Annunciation Cathedral, which is newly located at 15 Lebreton Street in Ottawa. The Rector of the parish and the Dean of Ontario, Fr John Jillions, gave Council members a lively tour of this vast complex, a Cathedral which truly now, as His Grace has many times noted, gives “a real face to the Archdiocese of Canada.”—*ed.*

. . . **Heavenly patrons for youth**, *continued from p. 1:*

There is also an amazing connection between St Barbara and Canada. In 1958 a major portion of her holy body was brought here by Archbishop Panteleimon. This happened because there was serious concern about the safety of her relics, due to Soviet persecution in Ukraine at the time. As a result, St Barbara’s whole foot, uncorrupt for more than 1500 years, is here at St Barbara’s Orthodox Cathedral in Edmonton, and can be prayerfully venerated by the faithful. Bishop Seraphim served together with Bishop Iov of Kashira the Divine Liturgy for her feast day on December 19, and several of us young adults from St Herman’s—Jordan Eriksson, Peter Ewanchuk, Mark Petasky, Jesse Isaac, and many others—all had the opportunity to be there and remember and venerate St Barbara in this powerful way.

In our conversation, His Grace and I also talked about the **Holy Apostle Timothy**, who received the instructions from the Apostle Paul that gave the name to **1 Timothy 4.12**, the popular youth and young adult weblog for the youth and young adults of the Archdiocese ([www.ocacanadianyouth.orthodoxmission.org](http://www.ocacanadianyouth.orthodoxmission.org)). These instructions of St Paul were “Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4.12). His Grace told me something really amazing about this verse that I had

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## University student Describes youth retreat

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—by Mira Motet, *All Saints of Alaska Mission, Victoria BC*

On November 10 - 13, I attended the Pan-Orthodox young adult retreat in Edmonton, sponsored by our brothers and sisters from the Antiochian Archdiocese, and led by one of our own OCA priests, Fr John Hainsworth of Victoria. It was an amazing time, for I was so inspired and filled with love for God.

The whole trip started for me on a Wednesday. I was going to catch the five o’clock ferry from Victoria to Vancouver, but at the last minute, I decided to catch the three o’clock. I got on the ferry just at the cutoff, and “by chance” (nothing happens by chance!), I ran into Peter on the ferry. We had a lovely talk and met up with Fr Justin Hewlett at the ferry terminal. He drove us to his house and we had a beautiful dinner, where I had the blessing of spending time with his Matushka Sarah, and their children Simon and Justin. Then, we caught the last Amen of Vespers at St Herman’s, Langley, and stayed for an insightful look at the Didache with Fr Lawrence Farley. I met up with Heather and Mother Anna and several others from St Herman’s,

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never known. Traditionally, this verse was engraved on the back of the pectoral cross given to each newly-ordained priest! “*Set the believers an example!*” That is what all of us have been called to do. His Grace encouraged us to remember St Timothy as well, taking these two saints—a young woman and a young man—as heavenly patrons for us as young men and women living out our faith in Canada today. May God help us to live according to their holy example as bold witnesses to Christ’s love in the world! And let us not forget to thank His Grace, Bishop Seraphim, for investing so much of his time and energy in the young people of Canada, and for his prayers and encouragement.

***Holy Martyr Barbara and Holy Apostle Timothy,  
pray to God for us!***

*[If you are involved in Youth or Young Adult ministry in your parish, why not drop Matthew an email note so that he can get to know you better, especially in the Eastern part of Canada. Or, if you have any events coming up (or pictures of previous events) that you would like to see posted on the youth page of the Archdiocese of Canada website, let Matthew know. He can be contacted via email at [matthew.francis@shaw.ca](mailto:matthew.francis@shaw.ca)]*

which was a real joy. Had I kept to my original plans, I would have been on a bus for three hours and wouldn't have met up with any of these beautiful people. Jesse was at the Bible study, so he just took me from there, and we picked Dan up from his work, and we were on our way to Edmonton.

We stopped in Calgary and had lunch with my amazing friend Margaret. Later that day, we arrived in Edmonton, and the retreat began. We had a dinner together, and I finally got to meet Matthew Francis, as well as many other new and familiar faces. Heidi Machnee, whose brothers Tony and Andrew are going to Project Mexico with me this spring, brought icons to sell, to raise money for the trip. Late that evening, as we were gathering a group together to do the *Akathist to our Lord Jesus Christ* and the Jesus Prayer, Gabe arrived, and to my unexpected joy, so did Michael Luciuk and his friend Kyle. It was wonderful to see them again, and after we did the *Akathist* and Jesus Prayer together, we stayed up talking well into the morning!

The next day, Friday, was full of divinely inspired talks given by Fr John Hainsworth on the topic of "Singleness and Marriage." A group of us went out for coffee together before dinner. Fr John, Kim Francis, and I stayed a little longer at the coffee shop to talk about church camp next summer. As we were wandering back to the retreat centre, two men off the street started asking us for money and walking with us. We had a great conversation with them. As it turned out, they were from the Northwest Territories and knew about Mother Olinka (Olga) of Alaska, an Orthodox matushka who fell asleep in the Lord in the 1970s, and has been performing miracles ever since. After dinner came Vespers, and then discussions on the kinds of qualities we look for in a future spouse. Kim, Gabe, Phil, Muryn, and Fr John went back to Matthew and Krista's lovely house and talked about BC's St Arseny Camp some more. When I got back to the retreat centre, I was so overcome with my sinfulness, and God's grace and mercy overcoming all, that my eyes had been flooding with tears all evening, and Gabe and Phil and I shared some special times in the chapel, contemplating the state of humanity as it plays out in our own selves, asking each other for forgiveness, and beseeching God's mercy on us. It was a beautiful experience.

Saturday, the last day, was a day full of more captivating presentations by Fr John. Then we had Great Vespers, dinner, and then the *Akathist* with the Jesus Prayer. That night was full of both fellowship and waiting for confession, with poor Fr John's listening to about six hours of confessions until 3:00 am. The next morning, or shall I say the same morning, we went to St

Herman's Sobor for Divine Liturgy, where Fr John delivered a splendid sermon. All through fellowship hour, their parishioners were reminiscing about the summer when he had served them there as a seminary-intern.



*Young women who attended the retreat.*

We left Sunday afternoon and drove through the night, well fed and with bags of provisions (God bless those sweet ladies at St Herman's!). We had some special moments on the roadtrip back, as Jesse, Dan, and I were tired and starting to act silly. It was quite amusing. For me, busses followed the car trip, and I finally got on the ferry, and arrived in Victoria on Monday night. I wasn't alone, though, because as usual God looks after everything that we can't even begin to plan,



*Young men who attended the retreat.*

and I met an amazing Christ-centred couple, Jason and Caroline, from Ontario. Jason is a youth pastor and Caroline administers fundraising at the national level for a Spanish orphanage organization. They have been on and led many missions, including to Romania and to Mexico. For those of you who know me, and how I grew up in Romania, you can see how this was a very exciting "coincidence." All in all, the retreat weekend was unforgettable. Glory to God!



## St Arseny Institute news

### New on-line Canadian Orthodox journal

The *Canadian Journal of Orthodox Christianity*, published by the St Arseny Orthodox Christian Theological Institute in Winnipeg, was launched on the internet in January, 2006. Found at <http://www.cjoc.ca> this periodical is one of a growing number of related theological education initiatives being undertaken by members of the Orthodox Church in Canada (OCA), and has the blessing of His Grace, Seraphim, Bishop of Ottawa and Canada. Book reviews, articles and other submissions are welcomed. The guidelines for submissions, reviewed by an Editorial Board composed of Orthodox scholars in Canada, may be found on the website.

The *Journal's* themes, which may also be found on the site, seek to combine quality academic research and competence with application to Canadian and current issues. The *Journal* also is meant to focus on the increase of theological understanding, and growth in the Orthodox Christian way of life for all members of the Church. Finally, we hope that the *Canadian Journal of Orthodox Christianity* will be one means of increasing inter-Orthodox communication, sharing, and dialogue in Canada.

Subdeacon Lasha Tchantouridze (PhD), the first graduate of the St Arseny Institute diaconal programme, is the managing editor of the journal. The editorial board, to which more scholars will be added, includes Archpriest Dr John Jillions,

Prof Richard Schneider, and Archpriest Lawrence Farley from the Orthodox Church in Canada. We are very grateful to them for their willingness to serve in this way.

### Theological education in Canada

Beginning with a meeting during the All-American Council in Toronto in July, the St Arseny Institute has been part of a significant new initiative among various Orthodox study programmes in which a number of members of the Orthodox Church in Canada have been involved. One key goal of this co-operation is to find ways to provide for full education of clergy within Canada. Archpriest Dr Cyprian Hutcheon is chairing the committee working on these matters.

### In the works

The St Arseny Institute is, rather unexpectedly making major progress towards full accreditation of its diaconal programme courses at the university level.

The Institute is also actively working on steps to provide its diaconal programme courses, reader's programme, and lay educational opportunities in other places in Canada.

We are always amazed at how these developments take place, with offers of expertise, and means, and time, by various people. We are very conscious of, and thankful for, the mercy of God, the prayers and influence of our patron, St Arseny, and the support of so many within the Orthodox Church in Canada.—*Spencer Estabrooks, Director of the St Arseny Institute.*

## Calgary-area Orthodox Women's Retreat, 2005

The 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Women's Retreat, held in the fall of 2005, was once again a time of refreshment, prayer and fellowship. Entheos Retreat Center was full to overflowing with women from all across Western Canada, Washington, Idaho, and Minnesota. The retreat's theme, "Accepting God's Will," was eloquently addressed by the keynote speaker, Khouriye Joanne Abdalah, a licensed social worker from Pittsburgh PA. She spoke to the women's hearts, urging them to seek God's will through prayer, the Cross, and the gifts God has given to each.



The retreat, as always, was organized around the services of the Church, beginning with Evening Prayers served by Fr Larry Reinheimer (St Peter's, Calgary). Saturday began with Matins served by Fr Ibrahim Chahoud (Annunciation, Calgary) and ended with Great Vespers again served by Fr Larry. Divine Liturgy was served on Sunday by Fr Richard Rene (St Peter's, Calgary), ending the retreat with one last exhortation to seek God's will by following the Cross of Christ and dying to one's self.

The highlight of this retreat, and every retreat, is the fellowship among Orthodox women from every jurisdiction. The opportunity to pray, eat, rest, and visit with Orthodox women from across Canada and the US was and is treasured by many. Thank God for His many gifts!

*Pictured at left are the many mother-daughter pairs in attendance. Below are all the participants in the retreat.*



## La renaissance D'une communauté

Les 18 et 19 novembre dernier, la communauté orthodoxe russe de la Sainte Trinité de Québec a célébré ses premiers offices en plus de vingt ans.

La communauté fut fondée au début des années 1950 de la première vague d'immigrants russes arrivés de différents pays d'Europe dont la France, l'Allemagne et la Belgique. Les offices étaient célébrés dans la chapelle de Tous les Saints de La Cathédrale Anglicane de la Sainte Trinité de Québec. Jusqu'à la fin des années 1960, les offices étaient célébrés sur une base régulière, suite à quoi les activités avaient graduellement diminué. Pour des raisons économiques, ou familiales, ou autres, plusieurs paroissiens avaient quitté Québec pour s'établir ailleurs au Canada. Certains, comme les familles Maikapar et Klimoff, se sont établis à Montréal pour devenir membre de la Cathédrale St-Pierre et St-Paul. Le dernier office avait eu lieu en 1984.

T-Rév Anatoliy Melnyk, le nouveau curé de la Cathédrale Orthodoxe Russe de St-Pierre et St-Paul de Montréal, a célébré les Grandes Vêpres et la Divine Liturgie dans l'Église Orthodoxe Grecque de l'Annonciation de Québec, dont l'administration a gracieusement mis son temple à la disposition de la communauté russe. Le curé était accompagné des choristes Michel et Ludmila Woinowsky-Krieger, Olena Ilvakhina, et Denis Lessard.

*En bas, la communauté, novembre 2005;  
à droite, la communauté 1950s.*

Par la Grâce de Dieu et par les efforts de M Alexandre Woinowsky-Krieger, secrétaire de la communauté, et de son épouse Tatiana, plus d'une quarantaine de personnes ont pris part aux offices. Bien que la plupart était des nouveaux immigrants russes, ce nombre comptait également des serbes, ainsi que des francophones de Québec, intéressés ou convertis à l'Orthodoxie. Une atmosphère chaude, sereine, et paisible y régnait. Après la Communion, plusieurs avaient les larmes aux yeux. La lecture de l'Évangile pour ce jour (6 novembre, ancien style : Luc IX, 1-6), nous invitant à voyager pour annoncer la Bonne Nouvelle, était particulièrement de circonstance.

Tous et chacun ont chaleureusement remercié le curé, les choristes et les organisateurs de cette initiative, et ont exprimé le vif désir de célébrer des offices sur une base régulière, ne fut-ce que trois ou quatre fois par an pour commencer. Après la conclusion de la Liturgie, personne ne voulait quitter, et les gens sont restés encore longtemps pour faire connaissance, discuter, s'échanger les coordonnées, exprimer leurs souhaits, et proposer des dates pour les prochains offices. Tout est selon la volonté de Dieu. Très Sainte Trinité Notre Dieu, Gloire à Toi!— *Michel Woinowsky-Krieger, SS Pierre et Paul, Montréal*





## Matushka Natalia Boldireff

28 May 1917 – 12 December 2005

Matushka Natalia Vsevolodna Boldireff was born in Moscow on May 28, 1917, with her twin sister Anastasia, to Galina and Vsevolod Maliantovitch. It was the year of the Russian revolution. After learning of her husband's death in 1920, Galina (Matushka's mother) took her twin daughters and older son Nicolai to Prague. The two girls were put in a foster home for eight years, but Galina was able to bring her daughters to Paris in 1928 and later sent them to a Roman Catholic girls' boarding school in Belgium.

Matushka Natalia also had a younger half-sister, Katia, daughter of her stepfather, Vladimir Jeleznoff. At age 18, while visiting Christ the Saviour's Cathedral in Asnières, France, Matushka Natalia met her husband-to-be, seminarian Oleg Boldireff. They were married on November 10, 1935, and Father Oleg was ordained to the Holy Diaconate on November 30, 1935 by Metropolitan Evlogy, and one month later to the Holy Priesthood.

Matushka and Fr Oleg had five sons: Sergei (in adulthood a Church choir director), Vladimir, and Nicholas (in adulthood a priest) were born in France, while Andrei and Oleg, junior, were born in Montréal.

Despite her difficult childhood, the harshness of the revolution, World War II, and famine, through God's grace Matushka Natalia was able, while raising five sons, to serve alongside her husband Fr Oleg in the capacity of caregiver to the elderly, youth group organizer, church reader, choir singer, choir director, Sunday school teacher—as well as offering sanctuary in her home to literally hundreds of refugees at one time or another.

Matushka enjoyed music, singing, and reciting poetry. Together with Fr Oleg, she served God and people in the following parishes:

1935 - 1942: Christ the Saviour's Cathedral, Asnières, France.

1942 - 1946: Saint Spiridon's, Rueil-Malmaison, France (parish founded by Fr Oleg); [Mother of God (Korchin) was also founded by Fr Oleg].

1946 - 1948: Saint Alexander Nevsky's Cathedral in Paris.

1948 - 1963: Saints Peter and Paul's Cathedral, Montréal, Canada. During this period, Fr Oleg also founded parishes in Ottawa, Québec City, Val D'or, and Rawdon.

1963 - 1970: Holy Resurrection Cathedral, Vancouver.

1970 - 1975: All Saints' Cathedral, Detroit, Michigan, USA.

1975 - 1987: Saint Nicholas' Church, Ottawa

1987 - : Saint Seraphim's, Rawdon.

After the repose of Fr Oleg in 1997, Matushka Natalia, in retirement in Rawdon, remained active by



*Matushka Natalia and Fr Oleg in the early years of their ministry.*

keeping contact with many spiritual children of her late husband, clergy in North America, Ukraine and France, as well as her very large family. She joined her beloved husband on December 12, 2005 after a two-month illness. She went to the Lord peacefully during the reading of the Holy Gospel according to St Luke by her son Subdeacon Andrei.

Matushka Natalia Vsevolodna leaves behind five sons, sixteen grandchildren, eleven great grandchildren (plus two on the way).



*Matushka Natalia in retirement*

## Igumen John (Scratch)

2 August 1941 – 15 January 2006

The Igumen John (Scratch) 64, a Member of the Monastic Community of St Silouan the Athonite, former Dean of the Cathedral of the Annunciation in Ottawa, Ontario, and in retirement attached to the Bishop's Chapel of St Silouan, fell asleep in the Lord, in his home in the early morning of January 15, 2006.

Born in Lethbridge Alberta on August 2, 1941, to Lydia and Clare Scratch, a Pentecostal Minister, he spent his early life joining his parents and sister Lorraine on missions to the third world and the Orient. It was during one of these trips that he first encountered Orthodoxy as young boy, in the streets of Shanghai, China, namely in the presence of St John Maximovitch. Fr John would often say that his time in China was a definitive factor and blessing in his journey to and in Orthodoxy.

In 1967 he married Suzanne Park, and continued his studies at Bishops University in Lennoxville, Québec. He was ordained a priest in the Anglican Church in early 1970, becoming the sixth generation of Scratches to serve the Lord in this way. By the late 1970s, Fr John, Matushka Suzanne, and their family, were living in Ottawa. During this time of turmoil and secularization in the Anglican communion, he and his family found refuge in the Orthodox Church. In the spring of 1979, Fr John, Matushka Suzanne, and their six young children, left the financial security of the Anglican Church and were received into the parish of St Nicholas in Ottawa under the omophor of Archbishop Sylvester of Montréal. He was soon ordained to the Holy Diaconate, and then to the Holy Priesthood shortly thereafter, and he worked as a security guard to support the family. Later, his wife also found work.

In the winter of 1980, Fr John, Matushka Suzanne, and a small handful of people, founded the first English Orthodox mission in Ottawa, Holy Transfiguration, in the living room of a house. In March of 1987, Matushka Suzanne suffered a major stroke, forcing Fr John into semi-retirement, to care for her, and his children. With all of this, Fr John was still able to shepherd his flock into amalgamation with its mother parish, reuniting the two under the protection of the Mother of God, the Annunciation to the Theotokos/St Nicholas Cathedral.

For the next few years, Fr John became more involved with the 24-hour care of Matushka Suzanne. After his own serious heart attack, he retired fully, but always he was devoting himself to the care and well-being of his flock, even if he was often not physically available or accessible. On January 10, 1998, Matushka Suzanne fell asleep in the Lord ; and after a time of refection, Fr John came out of retirement, to serve together with Archpriest Dennis Pihach at St Herman's Sobor, in Edmonton Alberta.

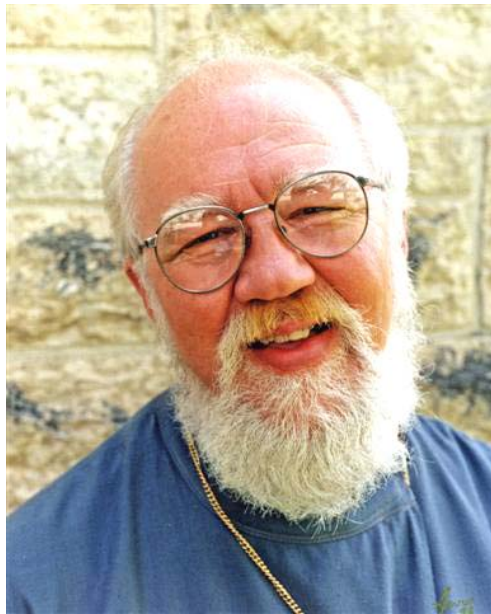
For a time, Fr John ministered to the flock in Edmonton, but after a second, more serious heart attack, he retired fully again. He moved back to Ottawa, to be with his family, and his ever-increasing number of grandchildren, and later to witness the ordination of his eldest son, Gregory, to the Holy Diaconate in 2003. In August of 2004, Fr John became, as Bishop Seraphim described, "what he was," in being tonsured a monk, and named John (after the Baptist).

It was in these last few years as a monastic, that Fr John's witness of faith, perseverance, and suffering for the love of the Lord, was truly blessed, and revealed to others. For him, and those around him, the assurances of the Lord's abundant mercy always brought consolation and peace. It was in this context that he always cared for, and in a fatherly way nurtured those who turned to him. It was in this context that he was a Christ-like pastor, to the very end. In the days just before his death, he was diagnosed

with a large tumor in his colon. Immediately, he blessed and thanked God for all that was given him in his life. He accepted the situation with great peace, and open confidence in His love. He lived in the Scriptures. In one of his last quotations of Scripture, he cited Isaiah 26 .3 : "Thou dost keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusts in Thee." Glory be to God for all things!

Fr John is survived by his sister Lorraine and her husband Roy, his nephew Gregory, and by his six children: Deacon Gregory and Taesia (and the child to be born of her) Scratch; Jeremy and Helen Scratch; the Subdeacon Sebastian and Helen Scratch; Lydia and Michael Holden; the Subdeacon John and Michelle Scratch; Mary-Teresa and Karl Nye; and by his grandchildren Juliana, Gabriel, Alexandra, Sevastjan, Maria-Suzanne, Taiece, Seraphim, Benjamin, Elizabeth, and Parryn.

Memory eternal!



*Igumen John*

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## Giving : what the Bible says

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—David Grier, *Holy Resurrection Sobor, Saskatoon*

During the winter of 2004-05, our parish conducted a Bible study on “giving.” It consisted of reading a number of Scriptures addressing four questions about giving, and discussing what these quotations from the Bible might mean. Bp Seraphim has asked me to share this exercise with you.

### *What has God given us?*

First, we looked at 20 quotes that gave answers to the question, “what has God given us?” The quotes listed physical things such as food, wine, crops, livestock, even the rain to grow the crops and livestock that God has given us.

Clearly, God doesn’t ignore the fact that our efforts are involved; people plant seeds, care for livestock, and prepare food from those crops and livestock. We may even have used our abilities wisely and acquired much wealth. However, God reminds us not to get proud of our accomplishments, but to remember that it was He who actually gave us the power or ability to acquire material things.

In fact, the scriptures explicitly tell us that “all things” are from God. And, “all things” include more than physical things. God provides us with spiritual food (love, righteousness, the gift of salvation) and eternal life (an everlasting home). To access these gifts, we need only to believe in Him. Believing requires faith, and, guess what?—God gives us that too! He has given us all that we have, and all that we need. So, He is, by His all-encompassing acts of giving, setting an example that He would like us to follow. We investigated that idea in the second session.

### *Has God asked us to give?*

We looked at 19 quotes from Scripture that explored “Has God asked us to give?” The Old Testament quotes led us from Abram’s giving one tenth to Melchizedek, priest of God Most High before the giving of the Law to the Israelites; through several quotes from the Law and the Psalms, giving explicit instructions and exhortations to give to God, and to the poor; to an admonishment from Isaiah to give as a form of fasting.

The 10 New Testament quotes have the same themes, but with a difference. They present giving as a requirement, and provide a formula for an acceptable amount—the tithe or 10%. The New Testament still stresses giving, through the words of Jesus and the Apostles, but does not present a formula. We are asked to give to whomever asks, and to respond to any need we see. In fact, we cannot claim to have faith, if it is not evidenced by our works of giving for the needs of friends and enemies alike.

Has God asked us to give? Clearly the answer is undeniably yes. The challenge for us living in our day is to know what, when, and where God is asking us give.

### *Do we receive benefits for giving?*

In the next session, we looked at 25 Scriptures. The Old Testament tells us that he who gives is blessed, will be rewarded, will be paid back, will be delivered in the time of trouble—his barns filled with plenty, his vats overflowing, and his suffering no lack. The Lord promises to guide him, and to satisfy his soul. He even challenges the people to bring their tithes, and see if the Lord won’t pour out such blessings that there won’t be room to receive them.

The New Testament completely agrees. It tells us that if we give in secret, our Father will reward us openly, and that if anyone gives anything in God’s name, he will receive his reward. If we give, we will receive “good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over.” God gives to us in proportion to our generosity : “he who sows (gives) sparingly, will also reap (receive) sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.”

But we will receive more than “things” if we give. We will become perfect as He is perfect; we will have treasure in heaven that does not grow old; and we will receive eternal life. The Bible clearly tells us that we receive benefits for giving, both material and spiritual. God will supply to him who gives, all he needs according to His riches.

### *Are there consequences for not giving?*

To address this question, we looked at nine quotes. The three Old Testament selections were very direct : withholding more than is right will lead to poverty ; hiding our eyes from the poor will result in many curses. And strongest of all, we are told that by not giving tithes and offerings, we are cursed because we are robbing God.

We reviewed the consequences of not giving, in four passages spoken by Jesus in the Gospels. He said that those who did not give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothes to the naked, or their time to those sick or in prison, would be sent from Him into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. In the parable of the talents, Jesus tells us that those who do not use the talents that God has given us to do what He has created us to do, will be cast into outer darkness. In the parable of the rich man who planned to build more barns for his surplus, he says that the man is a fool, because the time of his death is upon him, when he will lose his earthly wealth, and have no treasure stored with God. Finally, in the parable of the Pharisee and Publican, we see that if we give with a prideful heart, we are not justified before God.

In the epistle portion of the New Testament, we learned that giving sparingly will have few benefits, and that he who has wealth, and withholds it from people in need, doesn’t have the love of God in him. The first consequence for not giving is missing out on the benefits that God has promised when we give. But more seriously, not giving shows God’s love is not in us, and our eternal salvation is at risk.



**Conclusion**

The evidence is overwhelming. The Bible clearly tells us that God has given us all that we have, and all that we need. He has asked us to follow His example by giving a portion of what we have to His work (the Church), and to those in need. He rewards with physical and spiritual benefits if we give, and there are serious consequences if we selfishly hoard what He has so freely given to us. How can we, who are Christians, not respond to God's call to give?

Don't just take our word for it. Read the references yourself, and see what you think God is saying in His Word.

**What has God given to us?** Ge 1:29, Ge 9:3, De 8:11-18, De11:13-15, 1Chr 29:14, Jb 5:8-10, Ps 68:19, Ps 104:24, Ps 145:15-16, Ec 3:9-13 and 5:18-19, Je 9:23-24, Mt 7:11, Jn 3:16, Jn 4:10, Jn 6:32-35, Ro 5:8, Ro 6:23, Ro 8:32,

Ep 2:8-9, Ep 5:1-2

**Has God asked us to give?** Ge 14:18-20, Le 27:30-32, De 12:19, De 14:22, De 15:11, De 16:16b-17, De 26:9-11a, 1Chr 16:28-29a and Ps 96:7-8, Is 58:6-7, Mt 5:42-48 and Lu 6:27-36, Lu 6:30-31, Lu 14:12-14, Ac 20:35, Ro 12:10-13, 20, Tit 3:14, He 13:2, He 13:16, Ja 2:14-17, 1Pe:4:10

**Do we receive any benefits for giving?** Ps 41:1, Pr 3:9-10, Pr 19:17, Pr:22:9, Pr 25:21, Pr 28:27, Ec 11:1, Mal 3:10, Is 58:6-12, Mt 6:1-4, Mt 10:42, Mt 19:21-22, Mt 25:34-40, Mk 9:41, Mk 10:21-22, Lu 6:38, Lu 12:22-34, Lu 11:13, Ga 6:9-10, 2Co 9:6-9, Phil 4:16-19, 1Tim 6:17-19, He 6:9-12, He 10:32-36, Rev 22:12

**Are there consequences for not giving?** Pr 11:24-25, Pr 28:27, Mal 3:8-9, Mt 25:41-45, Mt 25:14-30 and Lu 19:12-27, Lu 12:19-21, Lu 18:11-14, 1Co 9:6, 1Jn 3:17-18

*From the Bishop's desk :*

## **Bishop Seraphim's directive on stewardship**

**The text below is from a letter sent to all Rectors, Priests-in-Charge, and Parish and Mission Councils in the Archdiocese of Canada. It was dated 12 January 2006 :**

"The following resolution was passed by the Assembly of the Archdiocese of Canada, Orthodox Church in America, in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, on 22 July, 2004.

*'To aid in the spiritual growth and salvation of the people of the Archdiocese of Canada, and to address the many needs of this growing missionary diocese : be it resolved that this Assembly direct each parish, and mission of the Archdiocese to embark on, and give priority to, an organised programme to teach Christian stewardship to the faithful.'*

"Of course, by the fact of its presentation and passage, this resolution has my full support. The spiritual growth and salvation of the people of the Archdiocese has always been my highest priority. It must be so, and shall continue to be the main concern of my heart for the Faithful of the Archdiocese, and for those to whom we are called to witness for Christ by our Christian living.

"I therefore direct that you, each Rector, Priest-in-charge, and Parish/Mission Council, develop a plan for implementing this Resolution in your Parish/Mission. Please present this plan, even if it is not yet complete, to your regional Dean, by **6 March, 2006**, in time for him to include it in his report to the Spring meeting of the Archdiocesan Council (7-8 April in Edmonton, Alberta). This plan must outline the activities undertaken in order to address this resolution, for the period 1 September, 2004, to 1 January, 2006.

"I will further require that you provide a report on the activities of this local plan, actually undertaken in the first six months of the plan. This report is to be presented to your regional Dean in time for it to be included in his report to the Autumn 2006 Meeting of the Archdiocesan Council. The exact date of this will be given after the Spring meeting sets the date.

"I realise this is yet more work, but the development of the Archdiocese in a healthy direction requires a lot of work from us all. May we all remember to turn to the Saviour for the needed strength and focus.

"I thank you all for your Christ-loving labours. May the Saviour, indeed, bless you all.

the unworthy

*+Seraphim*

+SERAPHIM

Bishop of Ottawa and Canada"

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## Recovering our balance

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—by *Igumen Philip (Speranza), All Saints', Edmonton*

In *Fiddler on the Roof*, Tevye says that each of us is a fiddler, perched on the pinnacle of a roof, “trying to scratch out a simple living . . . without breaking his neck.” Scratching out a living, a life, we can do (or so we think); but managing not to fall headfirst onto the rocks of sin, failure, conflict . . . well, that’s another matter. Most of us will knock our noggin on the ground ±6,463,927 times before we are finally planted beneath the ground.

Why? Because we keep losing our balance. We lose the balance between being made in God’s image, according to God’s likeness, having within ourselves the spark which the grace of the Holy Spirit seeks to fan into full deification, and being humble creatures; instead, we keep trying to be gods ourselves . . . the Hellenic kind of gods that the true and living God refuses to be : selfish, ego-centric, manipulative, exploitative, occasionally vengeful, and frequently just plain nasty. (Think about it: when we accuse another of “playing god,” are we paying him/her a compliment?)

We lose the balance in our relationships with other people by vying for power and supremacy. The “battle of the sexes” is a prime example. Genesis 1:27 is plain, simple, clear: “So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” It is only in male and female together, in mutual complementarity, that we can see as much of the totality of God’s image as can be crammed into a human being. But in our fallenness, each gender keeps fighting to gain dominance over the other ; and the creative balance intended by the Creator is destroyed. In the life of the Church, the relationship among hierarchs, clergy, and laity is too often a battle among snipers, rather than the coordinated, and balanced functioning of various parts of the same Body (*cf.* 1 Corinthians 12-14, and Ephesians 4).

We lose the balance in our relationship with creation, with things. These days, there is much talk about “ecological balance,” and “thinking green.” That merely reflects, at least to some degree, the balanced relationship between humanity and the rest of creation that God intended, and that the Fall sabotaged.

In Genesis 2:15-16 we see that “the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden, [*not to strip-mine it or ravage it, but*] to till it and keep it,” while at the same time, “the LORD God commanded the man saying, ‘You may freely eat of every tree in the garden’.” But again, in our fallenness our relationship with creation is marked by a battle for dominance. We treat the planet as if we own it, rather than as stewards of another’s property; at the same time, we end up being owned by things. (Ask anyone with a mortgage.)

We lose the balance within ourselves. In 1 Thessalonians 5:23, the Apostle prays that “your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (RSV). The spirit : that part of us which connects directly and intimately with God ; the soul : our mind and emotions ; the body : our whole physicality—each element is **essential** to what it means to be human (which, by the way, is why we look for “the resurrection of the body, and the life of the world to come,” rather than imagining that the “true” goal of our development is to become angels or discarnate energy). And because we are made in the image of the God Who is spirit (*cf.* Genesis 1:26-26, and John 4:24), the soul and the body are intended by God to work not only in tandem with, but also under the primacy of the spirit.

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and other missionary labourers  
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But in our fallenness, it is the body and/or the emotions which run the show. We sometimes recognize that disorder, that dis-ease. When one has the ‘flu or a very bad cold, and finds that one cannot pray or even think with accustomed ease, one realizes there is something wrong. But how often, especially in our culture of instant gratification, do we take it for granted that “I want what I want when I want it” is how life is *supposed* to be, and that if we have a given appetite, it is *natural*, and must be fed? How often do we simply assume that our emotions *should* be indulged, even validated, regardless? We live under the tyranny of the body and/or the emotions, and do not even realize the depths of our slavery.

So what’s that got to do with Great Lent? Quite a bit, actually. Great Lent and its disciplines of more intense prayer, greater focus on God and the things of God, strict fasting, and generous almsgiving, have really only one purpose : to put us back into balance in our relationships with God, with other people, with creation, and with ourselves.

Consider, for example, what the late Protobishop Alexander Schmemmann writes on pages 96 and 97 of his book *Great Lent* concerning fasting: “. . . [Fasting] is not a theoretical but truly a practical challenge to the great Liar who managed to convince us that we depend on bread alone and built all human knowledge, science, and existence on that lie . . . . If one is hungry and then discovers that he can truly be independent of that hunger, not be destroyed by it but just on the contrary, can transform it into a source of spiritual power and victory, then nothing remains of that great lie in which we have been living since Adam . . . . Ultimately, to fast means only one thing: **to be hungry** . . . and, being hungry, to discover that . . . it is in its last reality **hunger for God** . . .” (emphasis in the original).

Too advanced? Then try this: fasting (and let us remember that in Holy Orthodoxy, “fasting” also includes the discipline of refraining from sexual relations) brings the spoiled brat of the body back under the rationality of the mind and the balancing primacy of the spirit. The body, which demands, “I want it and I want it NOW!,” has gotten used to being the centre of attention and having that demand met. In fasting, however, the soul and spirit start to say just “No!” The body fights back, and thus we enter into aptly-named ascetical struggle.

And it *is* a struggle. Because we have to eat to sustain our physical life, Lenten fasting is like trying to break the power of any addiction (drugs, booze, cigarettes, *etc.*) while having to continue to use alcohol, tobacco, or heroin. That is why the Church urges and provides for more and more intense personal and corporate worship, greater emphasis on reading the Scriptures, Holy Communion in the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, and other-focused alms-giving as part of the Lenten “package” ; while having their own innate value, these other disciplines are also the “patch” that helps us stay in the fight

This assumes, of course, that fasting is entered into seriously, rather than nominally and legalistically. In one parish somewhere on this planet, the looming horizon of Great Lent initiated the annual “Great Jello Controversy,” the ladies of the parish arguing about whether or not jello was “lenten.” (Of course they missed the obvious : that nothing so bland and boring could possibly be called “food” anyway.) More fundamentally, they missed the point that fasting is not just meticulous abstaining from some kinds of food while continuing to gorge on others, or playing the “substitution game” : olive oil is out, canola or Mazola is in ; fish with backbones is out, lobster and shrimp are in ; butter is out, margarine is in, *etc.* On page 89 of *Great Lent*, Fr Schmemmann captures precisely the absurdity of such Lenten legalism : “. . . we satisfy ourselves with Lenten symbolism. In church magazines and bulletins appear recipes for ‘delicious lenten dishes,’ and a parish might even raise some additional money by means of a well-advertised ‘tasty lenten dinner’ . . . .”

Rather, fasting as we now have it (which is a concession to our inability to fast totally for the entirety of Great Lent) is a cutting of what we eat, and how much we eat, down to the bare minimum we need to function. It is eating as simply, as plainly, as cheaply as possible, so as again to discipline the body and its demands ; to have more time for prayer, spiritual reading, and good works; to derive greater strength for fearless self-examination and genuine repentance; and to have more money to give to the poor.

The result? We regain, at least for a little while, the God-intended balance in our lives that allows us to experience life as whole human beings.



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## Be healthy and grow !

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When I have had conversations about church growth, many people ask “why reach out and bring people in, if we end up losing them just as fast out the back door?” This is a great question. A parish has to be healthy before it can grow. The first step of the church-growth process is to get healthy. So how do we get healthy and how do we know if we are healthy? There are eight key areas that can be used to measure the health of a parish. They are: empowered leadership; gift-orientated ministries; passionate daily life in Christ; functional parish structures; loving relationships; strong liturgical life where the Holy Spirit is present; need-oriented outreach; and small groups to support each other.

Let’s talk about loving relationships, and a passionate daily life in Christ. When a visitor to your parish—from your family, friends, neighbours or co-workers—sees you and those in your parish, does he see true followers of Christ, or does she see people who do not practise what they preach or claim to believe? If non-church goers see you and your parish as no different from them, why would they want to go to your parish? Are you and everyone in your parish truly following the two great commandments : Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, and soul; Love your neighbour as yourself? Many people honestly feel they are doing this. Yet, when it comes right down to it, they really are not.

It is truly amazing how many of us think we are following Christ, and we are not even close to the first step. If someone were to look at you and talk with you or anyone in your parish, does he see Christ? Does she see someone who is loving and forgiving and accepts anyone and everyone the way each one is, or do they see someone who only talks to people with the right social status, skin colour, or ethnic background? Do you and everyone in your parish see Christ in each other and treat each other like Christ, or is there infighting and lots of negative talk? Do you treat everyone who walks through the doors of your home or parish like Christ, or do you ignore them and not talk with them? Are you or anyone in your parish willing to talk to anyone about Christ and share what Christ has done for your life, or do you say nothing because you may be worried about others’ reaction to you? Do you share your love of Christ for others, or are you worried about being ridiculed or feel that your love for Christ is private and not public?

Here is a tough question to ask yourself. This past New Year’s Eve was on December 31 ; how many of us Orthodox Christians stayed home from any New Year’s Eve parties and went to church on Sunday, January 1 instead? If we didn’t go to church on Sunday morning and partake of communion, what are we demonstrating to others about the

importance of our Church life? What comes first—Christ or partying?

When someone sees us at home, work or church, do they see someone who truly demonstrates a passionate daily life in Christ and has loving relationships, or do they see hypocrites?

If church growth is your ministry, we are recruiting volunteers in each parish for this role. After talking it over with your parish priest, contact me, Deacon Gregory Kopchuk, at (780) 451-2758 or email me at [gkopchuk@yahoo.com](mailto:gkopchuk@yahoo.com). Also, listen to our Orthodox radio program, “Welcome Home” at [www.orthodoxradio.ca](http://www.orthodoxradio.ca).

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## Hamilton parish Launches on-line resource On Alaskan mission

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The parish of All Saints of North America in Hamilton ON recently launched a new on-line resource detailing the rich linguistic history of the Orthodox Christian mission in Alaska at [www.asna.ca/alaska](http://www.asna.ca/alaska).

With the blessings of Bishop Seraphim of Canada and of Bishop Nikolai of Alaska, “this ambitious project has been inaugurated to digitize all historic biblical, liturgical, and catechetical Orthodox texts in the original Alaskan languages,” according to Fr Geoffrey Korz, rector of the parish. “Currently, almost 70% of all known published texts have been digitized in PDF format. The texts are in the Aleut, Alutiq (Kodiak dialect), Tlingit, and Yup’ik languages, in the original Cyrillic alphabets. Many of these texts were authored by Saints Innocent Veniaminov and Jacob Netsvetov.

“These are pieces of Alaska’s rich Orthodox Christian heritage which are being preserved for the present and future generations,” Fr Geoffrey added. “In this way, the Orthodox Church continues to show the faithful and the world at large that Orthodox Christians have always taken the lead in defending the interests of the native peoples of Alaska in proclaiming the true faith. The vision of Saint Herman and the brethren of the original Valaam mission to America inspires this work today.”

Work on the project began in May 2005. The linguistic contributions of the Very Revs Paul Merculief and Michael Oleksa, both of Anchorage AK, have been crucial to the success of this project. Seven additional texts will be released on-line in 2006 and 2007.

“It is the belief of the transcribers that Saint Herman is praying for the success of this projet,” Fr Geoffrey said. Comments, questions, and corrections relating to this project may be directed to Fr Geoffrey Korz at [korzg@hotmail.com](mailto:korzg@hotmail.com). [Source: OCA Communications]



For Toronto area

## New deacon ordained

On 13 November 2005, Bishop Seraphim ordained Alexei Vassiouchkine of Toronto to the Holy Diaconate. The ordination took place in Annunciation Cathedral, Ottawa, where the fall session of the Archdiocesan Council was being held. Deacon Alexei has been the Onatrio Deanery Lay Representative to Council for the past two years.

Fr Deacon Alexei immigrated to Canada in 1996. He is a school teacher of French language, and he has completed the OCA's Late Vocations Programme for the diaconate. He is married to Matushka Maria, and they have two samll children, Tatiana and Michael. Fr Dn Alexei is attached to Christ the Saviour Sobor, Toronto.

*The newly-ordained Deacon Alexei with Bishop Seraphim.*



### **Wanted :**

## **Volunteer personal assistant(s) for His Grace, Bishop Seraphim**

—Archpriest Cyprion Hutcheon, Archdiocesan Dean

During the months of January-April, 2005, Bishop Seraphim was fortunate to have had available to him the services of Peter Ewanchuk of St Herman's parish in Edmonton, who functioned for these four months in a voluntary capacity as His Grace's personal assistant. Amongst a variety of tasks to which Peter devoted time, there were several of particular note, namely: 1) helping to organize and/or re-organize various aspects of the Bishop's office; 2) some answering of the phone and taking messages; 3) booking and confirming travel plans for His Grace; and 4) travelling with, and assisting His Grace during pastoral and administrative visitations within the Archdiocese. With regard to the latter, various activities that were undertaken by Peter included: 1) helping to prepare the Bishop's vestments and travel bags; 2) scheduling and confirming various appointments for the Bishop; 3) assisting in planning his daily itinerary while "on the road"; and 4) ensuring that His Grace's specific dietary requirements were being complied with.

At the conclusion of his stay at Fair Haven, Peter also prepared for the Archdiocesan Council a very helpful report on the physical state of our Archdiocesan Centre, in which he identified for Council members a number of much-needed repairs or renovations of the Fair Haven buildings.

Given the overall success of Peter's stay at Fair Haven, as evidenced by Vladyka's warm appreciation for his efforts, and bearing in mind His Grace's chronic,

desperate need for more assistance (and assistants!), it was deemed worthwhile by the Archdiocesan Council to canvass the Archdiocese to identify other suitable candidates who would be willing and able to serve in a voluntary capacity for periods of 3-6 months as personal assistants to Bishop Seraphim. Although there can be no remuneration for such persons, they would be provided with accommodation, food, and transportation during their stay at Fair Haven.

The following are characteristics and/or qualifications deemed essential and/or desirable for this important position:

- (i) Candidates must be male Orthodox Christians, who are active members in good standing of an Orthodox parish community, and who will provide a Letter of Recommendation from their pastor.
- (ii) They will reside at Fair Haven for 3-6 months where they will be provided with accommodation, food, and some limited local transportation. In addition, if funds permit, their travel expenses will be paid when they accompany His Grace during diocesan visitations.
- (iii) They must be aged 21-30, and preferably single. Married men willing to take on

*continued, next page . . .*

**Personal assistant(s)**, *continued from p. 13:*

this ministry for a limited period of time could be considered, but they must realize that it is not possible (for a variety of reasons) to accommodate married couples at Fair Haven.

- (iv) As a minimum educational requirement, candidates must hold a recognized High School diploma. Additional formal post-secondary education or vocational training would be an advantage.
- (v) Candidates must possess a valid Canadian or US Driving License, with no significant infractions in the preceding three years, and they should be comfortable doing a certain amount of long-distance driving as needed.
- (vi) Candidates must be fluently English-speaking. Spoken and/or reading and/or written knowledge of other languages such as French, Russian, Ukrainian, etc. would be an obvious asset.
- (vii) Candidates must appreciate, and be able to comply with, the need for strict *confidentiality* with regard to all matters pertaining to the Bishop’s episcopal office and its functioning.

*Anyone interested in being considered for this position (or knowing of suitable potential candidates) should contact:*

*The Very Rev Dennis Pihach,  
Chancellor,  
Archdiocese of Canada,  
15992 – 107 A Street,  
Edmonton AB T5 P 0Z2*



**Archdiocesan website**

The Archdiocese of Canada has its own website! Among the many offerings it contains are a special youth and young adults page, a very interesting archival presentation on the early history of the Archdiocese, a listing of the diocese’s parishes and missions, and back issues of the *Canadian Orthodox Messenger*. The site is the creation of Fr John Hainsworth of Victoria, and it is maintained by Fr John and his assistant for the site, Fr Justin Hewlett. The location of the website is :

**www.archdiocese.ca**

**Pastoral Notes**

On 15/08/05, Bishop Seraphim blessed the Mission Station of St John the Theologian in Vancouver BC, with **Priest Justin Hewlett** in charge.

On 01/09/05, the University Chaplaincy of the Holy Cross, at University of British Columbia in Vancouver BC, was renewed and blessed, with **Priest Christopher Rigden-Briscall** in charge.

On 15/09/05, **Priest Eugeniusz Zdrojewski**, “on loan” from the Polish Orthodox Church, was appointed Priest-in-Charge of All Saints’ Mission in Toronto ON.

On 15/09/05, **Priest Alexander Shkalov** was released from his duties at All Saints’ Mission in Toronto ON, and from the Archdiocese of Canada, and provisionally transferred to the Omophor of Bishop Tikhon of San Francisco and Los Angeles.

On 15/10/05, **Hieromonk Vladimir (Lysak)** was recalled from Transfiguration Monastery, Valamo, Finland, and from the Orthodox Church in Finland, and attached to the Bishop’s Chapel of St Silouan the Athonite in Johnstown ON.

On 10/11/05, the Deaneries of Saskatchewan and Manitoba were returned to their previous unified condition, as the **Deanery of Manitoba-Saskatchewan**, with **Priest Robert S Kennaugh** as Dean.

On 10/11/05, **Archpriest Dennis Pihach**, retaining all other responsibilities, was released from his duties as Rector of Holy Trinity Church in Edmonton AB.

On 13/11/05, Bishop Seraphim ordained **Alexei Vassiouchkine** to the Holy Diaconate in Annunciation Cathedral, Ottawa ON. He is attached to Christ the Saviour Sobor in Toronto ON.

On 13/11/05, Bishop Seraphim appointed **Archpriest Cyprian Hutcheon** as Archdiocesan Dean for the Archdiocese of Canada.

On 19/11/05, Bishop Seraphim appointed **Igumen Philip (Speranza)** as Rector of Holy Trinity Church in Edmonton AB.

On 21/11/05, Bishop Seraphim blessed the potential establishment of a Missionary Society of St Innocent in Canada.

31/12/05, Bishop Seraphim blessed the establishment of a Mission Station in Cranbrook BC, which is served from Calgary AB.



## The rebirth Of a community

Under the leadership of its president/administrator, Michael Boyar, the little parish of St John the Divine in Windsor ON, has been for the past few months experiencing a rebirth after a dormancy of nearly three years. The priest, whom Bishop Seraphim has assigned to serve the parish, is Fr Eugeniusz Zdrojewski, who comes from Toronto to serve from time to time. On the Sundays that Fr Eugeniusz is not serving, there is a Reader's Service. Richard Baranko is the choir director, and many other people are also eagerly working for the rebirth of the once-thriving parish—preparing food for after-services, cleaning and repairing the physical plant, planning rummage sales, and organizing a “mission core group” to plan the continuance of all the good effort that has gone into the project so far.

December 25, 2005 was a very big day for the re-organized parish. Fr Eugeniusz came to serve the first liturgy there in about three years. Thirty-five people braved the cold to pray and celebrate this liturgical re-opening. Following the liturgy, there was a wonderful Yolka (organized by Patricia Bowser), a visit from St

*Fr Eugeniusz before the beautiful iconostas of St John the Divine.*



*Some of the children who took part in the Yolka at the Christmas Day celebrations.*

Nicholas, and a banquet of delicious food for everyone. Mr Boyar had managed to get very good publicity for this occasion. The local CKLW Radio ran a feature news item on the church a week prior to Christmas ; a reporter and a photographer from the *Windsor Star* attended the

Christmas Day service and published a very good article in the newspaper about it ; and on the Friday after Christmas, there was a live interview on the Morning Show of CBC 1.

Orthodox Christians (Russians, Bessarabians, Bukovinians, Carpathians, Galicians, Serbians, Ukrainians, Romanians, and Greeks) began to organize themselves in the Windsor-Detroit area around 1914, and by the end of 1916, had built a temple on the corner of Drouillard and Richmond in Windsor, blessed by the assigned priest, Fr Joseph Skekaley. In 1917 the parish was registered under the jurisdiction of Bishop Evdokim. In 1929 a parish hall was completed, under the rectorship of Fr Fedorchuk.

As the years went by, many new Orthodox parishes began organizing, but reflecting more specific nationality and linguistic backgrounds. These times saw St John's changing from being the one Church for all Orthodox, to one of several churches. But it is still recognized as the “mother Church of Orthodoxy” in Windsor. In 1939 Metropolitan Theophilus sent Fr Evgeny Serebrennikoff to the parish. He was a good organizer and obtained a new charter for the church, as well as starting the “Russian Day” picnics.

The year 1942 was the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the parish. On February 1, Fr Anthony, Deacon Lukian, and many area clergy celebrated this Jubilee. The temple was filled with parishioners, friends, and invited guests, including the Mayor of Windsor. After the banquet, a concert with music, dancing and recitations followed. The second event of the Jubilee was held on October 1, the feast of St John the Divine. At this time enough money was pledged to repay completely all the outstanding parish debts.

In 1946, the church was severely damaged by fire. With no insurance, but with true Christian sirit, the people raised funds, organized working groups, and rebuilt the church with brick ; and on November 27, 1949, the corner stone of the new temple was blessed.

It is interesting to note that despite the many previous short terms of clergy at the church, the V Rev Lukian Steciuk served faithfully from 1934 as Reader, from 1938 as Deacon, and from 1944 as Rector, until his death in 1976. Now a group of Fr Steciuk's family members (currently four generations strong) lead the challenge of renovating the church and parish hall ; but their true mission, by the Grace of God and the blessing of His Grace, Bishop Seraphim, is to bring life back to this little church, and to bring Orthodoxy back to the Windsor area for all those who are seeking true spiritual love, help, and guidance.—*Mike Boyar, St John's, Windsor*

*Our mother among the saints*

## Stefanida of Serbia

1887 — 1945

A contemporary of St Maria (Skobtsova) of Russia and France is a holy woman of Serbia, who, in her last days, became known as Mother Stefanida. Her name by birth was Stefanida Jurceвич, and she was born near Vraka (near Skadr, Albania) in 1887. She died in 1945, a martyr at the age of fifty-eight. While uncanonized, her holiness is recognized.

Mother Stephanida began a life of fasting, prayer and silence very early, while still at Vraka, and then the family was forcibly moved to Drenovac in Kosovo. She lived by herself for a good deal of her life, and continued the ascetic life she had undertaken, walking to services at Dechani Monastery. St Nikolai (Velimirovich), Bishop of Ochrida, met her and asked her to move to a monastic setting, so that she could encourage the monks and nuns at the Zicha monastery. She continued her solitary life as long as she could, but given that her legs were in great pain and covered with sores from her longstanding prayers, she eventually took the invitation of her friend and co-struggler, Sister Nada Adjic, to move to Bitolj, where she lived in an isolated little house in the garden of the “Bogday” nursery.

The war years there brought suffering, as it did for many monastics and many others, young and old. Her martyrdom would be brought by the German military. She was beaten by German soldiers for not blowing out her icon lamp during a light ban. Her lamp had continuously burned in her room, and she was not willing to extinguish it. Those who witnessed her suffering said that blood from her leg sores was splattered over the floor and walls of her room. While she was dying as a result, a Bulgarian bishop received her into the ranks of the monastics with the name “Stefanida,” meaning crowned. Her relics today are near Bitolj in the Monastery of St Christopher.

Her *Confessions*, a rare spiritual work of modern times, consist of ninety-two letters written to her spiritual father, Bishop Victor of Skadar. She writes of her life centered around her faith, and describes her struggle. From the letters we learn she was a communicant once a week, sometimes even twice. She fasted the whole year round, eating fish only at the Nativity and Paschal feasts. Any oil she got was used for her icon lamp. Her letters are filled with a particular “bright sorrow.” Especially did she feel the emptiness of the

modern, secular life, the world in its “preoccupation with empty good and beauty, has choked in its desire for them.”

Her life was centred on Christ, Who radiated warmth to her like the sun. He was her closest companion, and her life. Mother Stefanida’s letters express a depth of feeling, of burning love. One of them is a litany of “Blessed art Thou, O Lord,” and each verse is an invocation of His blessing on her soul, body, speech, sight, dreams, reality, every aspect of her being. One of her confessional letters closes with “Extend Thy dear hand, O great Christ! so that I may secretly give to Thee this holy confession, so that I may clean myself, so that I may be ready for Thee. So that Thou givest mysteriously Thyself, O dear Christ, to me.”

A martyr unknown to many, the dear nun Stefanida joins the ranks of other holy Serbian women, such as the earlier “greatest woman on the Balkans,” Staka Skenderova, whose diligence and good works earned her the respect even of the Pasha of Sarajevo and other Turkish officials ; the revered nuns, Stoina and Katarina ; Mother Eufemia of Ravanica ; and Mother Ana, who was none other than Nada Adjic, friend of Stefanida, whom we met at the beginning. These exemplary Serbian women left their mark in education, care of orphans, choir work, crafts and some even in prison work, but especially by the fire of their deep Orthodox faith, which the unique hardships and circumstances of each of their days could not extinguish.

*Mother Stefanida of Serbia, pray to the Lord for us!*

### Cross appears in sky During Sifton temple move

Although it is a little hard to see in the black and white tones of this photograph, note the top right hand corner. Visible there, observed by many witnesses, is the cross which appeared over the Sifton church when it was moved to a new foundation in early November 2005. An organizer of the project said about the move:



“look at the pictures of St Arseny’s little Sifton church! There was a cross in the sky over the church as it moved slowly onto the new foundation. I believe more than anything that divine intervention is happening around us.”



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## Swan giblets and pickled guests : The usefulness of *Domostroi* today

A review of Carolyn Johnston Pouncy, *The Domostroi: Rules for Russian Households in the Time of Ivan the Terrible* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994)

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—by Katherine Szalasznyji, Archdiocese of Canada Archivist

I mentioned *Domostroi* to a lady recently and she spat, indicating that she did not hold this ancient Russian book of household order or its precepts in personal high regard. One of the first things you learn from the book is “don’t spit.” She’s not the only one to react strongly to the work. *Domostroi* in its longer and shorter circulated versions has often been written off as a prescriptive, stiff Russian tome, a medieval compendium of Emily Post and Heloise : useful for only one thing today—kindling a morning fire on a cold day. Written roughly around the time of Ivan the Terrible, for some it evokes images of kaftaned boyars and men beating their wives six times a sunny day in medieval Russia, and little else. The book has been around for three hundred years or so and its real influence is hard to gauge with any exact precision, but today it is a Boogie book along the lines of *The Rudder*.

That *Domostroi* in translation has crossed the ocean, and exerts any influence at all in our day and age—even a disgusted handwave dismissing a frozen social mammoth—is quite remarkable. Can an antique book of household hints and directions really compete with the vast amount of web literature of our wired, coffee-driven times and our current charismatic icons of homestyle? It is not likely that today’s France is much bothered by *Le Menagier de Paris*, written by an elderly Parisian merchant for his young wife in the 1400s. So why do we react to *Domostroi*?

First, because it is an Orthodox book written for an Orthodox people, and so it attracts the interest of the Orthodox in America. We take our faith seriously, wanting to live it in every aspect of our lives. We sense that just as with our theology, there has to be something lasting about an Orthodox domestic perspective, an Orthodox household *phronema* even from a half a millennium back. We so want Truth to reach to our tables and our closets today, to lift us from the world of Big-Box kitsch and drive-through plastic cutlery to a home environment—secure, content and orderly, in its cupboard perhaps a finely-crafted golden *bratina*, the shared cup of brotherly love and fidelity (figuratively at least, if not in reality). In plain words, we want an Orthodox domestic blueprint to follow, to give us strength to say “NO” to the power of mass advertising, to give us a reigning perspective over the distracting crowdedness, core-emptiness of the shopping mall. Plus we want it for our daughter, our godchild and the family that stands near us on Sundays. We want it in community.

In this regard, we are likely to be refreshed by *Domostroi*’s precepts that push back the hedonism of our society, such as “teach them by imposing limits” and “God’s work is restraining the flesh—caring for the poor and things eternal.” Even a quick read of the spiritual precepts in the book shake our souls with their truth, not the correctness of *pravda* but the deeper, inner *istina*—for there is a never-outdated softness of heart for the neighbour and for the poor, a non-humanistic love that acknowledges the imperfections, failings and idiosyncrasies of everyone, and in the same breath, the All-seeing presence and mystery of God in Holy Trinity, to Whom we present our worship in fear of Him, as our due. The book is strongly Trinitarian. It discusses zealous worship at midnight, as well as the keeping of a regular daily cycle, and it is understood that all fasts and feasts are honoured. It is easy to write off this work as representing an ideal, or just to see it as legalistic. But between the lines, there is relationship, a great amount of fear of God, and hence, wisdom. The book cannot be said to be empty of human feelings, rather sentiments and emotions are herded toward the larger good. Satisfaction in doing good, in seeing others content and filled, and having a conscience undefiled, seem to be the positives of *Domostroi* life. Some parts of it are believed to draw heavily on St Basil of Caesarea’s *Discourses on the Ascetical Life*.

We would agree that domestic order is useful. Modern psychiatrists acknowledge a strong positive correlation between good order and tranquility. With its emphasis on useful activity, not personal opinion and individual conjecture, the work allows us a glimpse into the soul of the simple-hearted. We feel we are touching on the liberation from self, as if the finer joints of the human soul are being divided asunder before our eyes.

So parts of *Domostroi* are good then, and yet it brings negative reaction? Why? It is not that we are unfamiliar with its world, as we have encountered the bare bones of *Domostroi* in the lives of saints such as St Juliana Lazarevskaya. Largely, our reaction comes not from curiosities such as pickled lemons, but from the stretching of our modern sensibilities on a rack of *Domostroi*’s precepts that deal with real life in all of its unsanitized fullness, sensibilities we ought to be careful about projecting unto lives in their day. We tend to be horrified when we encounter advice on marital relations or wife-rehab (beat her but love her), the disposal of rotten food (don’t shout about it!) and drunken guests (give them a quiet, safe spot to sleep it off). We meet the mistress of the house who is expected to embroider until she falls asleep over her work (but only after she had said her prayers first) and we get loads of wise advice, such as, if you get drunk, don’t fall asleep where you are, or someone will steal the pants off you, and careful where you sit in the kitchen, you’ll get blood on your clothes.

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We have to put aside our delicateness, our squeamishness and often, our modern complicatedness—the very things that prevent us, sometimes, from going out and doing hard things for God—in order even to read the book. In applying our 21<sup>st</sup> century judgments to it, we make a mental note that most of the advice is given in the form of admonitions to *a son*, nothing gender sensitive here. And finally, as if all of the precepts haven't offended us totally—there it is! the crowning insult hurled at our souls!—roasted beluga in brine! *They ate whale meat for the Dormition Fast?*

One premise before burning the book and calling the therapist—you will not see the whole tapestry if you pull out individual threads. If we struggle to gain organic perspective, we well might encounter the beautiful and the useful.

So what is *Domostroi*? It is a life joined in all of its parts, supporting order without undoing the mystery of life, a picture of a pre-industrialized time and place steeped in community rather than individualism (in our day, Ferdinand Tönnies' *gemeinschaft* not *gesellschaft*). Its true brocades are humility and love, interwoven with a peculiar earthiness that one finds in the soul of Russian spirituality reminiscent of St Sergius of Radonezh. It is loving, guiding, very spelled-out and firm—like a good Babushka, and like her, not allowing any excuses. “Do it, as you love your own soul,” “do not be intoxicated with alcohol but with your praise of God,” “eat and drink and be grateful.” Household holders are instructed to feed their animals with their own hand, to treat their milk cows gently in order to establish a relationship with their creatures. In everything, there is an expectation of God's help, and abundance is couched in phrases “as God gives.” Surplus production goes to the poor “for the good of your own soul” and their benefit.

So should we react to its hard-to-take parts, such as the use of physical force against servants, spouses, and children? Let us keep perspective. Few of us stuff hares with turnips for our festive tables, or make soup from starlet spines. No one likely embroiders to the point of exhaustion, although the odd friend has fallen asleep over his computer, and one monk used to catch a few hours of sleep under his printing press from time to time while doing a run of a journal in the night. No current mother of the bride, in *Domostroi*-fashion, salts away the nuptial night-shirts, although chastity continues to be a sought virtue of the faithful. Let us recall that in Russia, even up to the time of St Tikhon of Zadonsk (French Revolution era) misdemeaning priests could be beaten or sent to monasteries for rehabilitation. The ideal is a peaceful home in which “a wife should not get angry at her husband about anything, nor a husband at his wife.”

We have to let sound reasoning prevail, to sift out what was for then, and what is for now. If we accept *Domostroi* to the letter, it is likely to engender a fall into the type of temptations and seductions that the canonization of concrete mores and manners of a particular era can

bring, as His Holiness, Alexei II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia pointed out recently in reference to the early 17<sup>th</sup> century (Pre-Petrine era). What's more, you'll never find the recipe for just how to cook that heron! To write off an era, or to attempt to re-create one are both imbalanced: the first negates the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church and persons of a time and place, while re-creating an era is to escape and to ghettoize beliefs so that The Way becomes distorted, contained and controlled.

*Domostroi* draws interesting lines around life in its day, ones we can study and reflect on. This kind of book can have an extrapolative usefulness. When we read Vladimir Monomakh's rich and timeless *Pouchenie (Admonition) to His Son*, we don't rush out looking for Pechenegs to battle or wild stallions to subdue with our own bare hands. When Monomakh says, “when on a trip recite the Jesus Prayer, it is a lot better than some of the thoughts a man can have riding along on his horse,” we sense we can translate “horse” into Toyota, and we translate “man” to woman, girl, old man as needed. Similarly, where we read in *Domostroi* that expenditure should not exceed income, we realize that Orthodoxy is touching our Mastercards. “I don't say, ‘don't drink at all’ but I say, ‘don't drink to the point of evil intoxication.’” “When you have guests, speak to each one, make each guest happy, be thoughtful.” “Admonish your servants not with blows or hard labour, but by keeping them, like children, rested, well-fed and clothed, in a warm house, and under good governance.” This is one of the best summations of the spirit of *Domostroi*: paternal, earthy with regard to physical needs, creating security and leaning toward peace, providing conditions in which prayer might grow.

*Domostroi* bothers us because it is not the history we want to know. I compare it to the early colour photographs of Sergei Mikhailovich Prokudin-Gorskii (1863-1944) found at the Library of Congress in Washington. They present a vivid portrait of an earlier day—the Russian Empire on the eve of World War I, with subjects including churches, monasteries of old Russia, railroads and factories, and the daily life of Russia's ethnic peoples. Available as a colour digital exhibit, we get to see history in a new light. Prokudin-Gorskii's photographs are intriguing, haunting, and can make us feel downright nervous.

We step into a “Kodak” 1908 scene of crooked fences and fields, so real we expect someone to shout, “Lunch time!” The sky and vegetation are ours, but there is not a car, power line, bus, or neon light. It is spooky quiet; no speed at all. A cholera epidemic seems imminent. We stand before an iconostasis with a home-grown collection of icons, and home-made crooked curtains. *And God was there? Perhaps even pleased with their lives despite such imperfection?* After all, their era did have its saints!

The photo of the Orthodox Church at Borodino, the expanse of fields, the grave of Maria Tuchkova seems too real compared to the lady whose life in the beautifully

bound *Holy Women of Russia* sits on my desk. History comes too close for comfort, endangering our world. We don't want our mental images crashed by the reality that these photographs present. Likewise with *Domostroi*—we don't mind learning that swan giblets were served at the Nativity Feast, or reading the recipe for "turnips as prepared in Constantinople," but we begin to get uncomfortable when we hear of physical force (and not that it was just a "Russian" thing at that time in history either), of women expected to daily consult their men-folk in regard to household management, of thieving and spitting servants, whom you were expected to scold, or whose ears you were expected to box—for their good and for the good of others. We pull at the threads of the tapestry, rejecting, accepting, and shaping according to our own ways, instead of drawing from the whole presentation. While not denying personhood, *Domostroi*, an eastern book in the West, shows itself a

monitor of our hyper-sensitivity towards anything that challenges individualism.

So what should we do with *Domostroi*? It would make an interesting and lively read for an Orthodox Book Club. It presents a lot of curious sociology, such as why chipmunks were eaten in the fall and why it was the liver of a *white* ram that one served with pepper and saffron. Reading it in Russian, its language is soft, paternal, caring, like that of a great-grandfather concerned that you fence your garden to keep out the deer. A little is lost in the English translation, but not much. It highlights a need for works that would reveal the making of an Orthodox household, beyond cultural differences to its essence, its believing heart and good, warm human love. For me, reading *Domostroi* was a lesson in watching for clues in order that I might understand, and in avoiding labelling, and very much an opportunity to appreciate the expression of God's work through time.

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A possible fund-raising opportunity for parishes

## Ottawa priest publishes self-help book

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Fr Symeon Rodger, MDiv, PhD, assigned to Annunciation Cathedral in Ottawa, has published *The 5 Pillars of Life: Reclaiming Ownership of Your Mind, Body and Future—How Ancient Traditions Can Give You Back Tranquility, Control, Health, Love and Security* (Ottawa: Core Systems Press, 2005, 493 pp.)

Fr Symeon has very generously offered to share the profits from this book with any parishes which would like to distribute it as a fund-raiser. He can be reached at 1-800-648-1546 or at: [www.rocksolidchristianlife.com](http://www.rocksolidchristianlife.com)

Below we print excerpts from a major review done of this book by Archpriest John Jillions, DMin, PhD. Readers may read the complete review at: [www.cjoc.ca](http://www.cjoc.ca)

"This is one of those rare books that can . . . be called 'ground-breaking' . . . The claim is often made that Orthodoxy is "holistic," that it is a "way of life" and embraces every aspect of our day-to-day existence. But you will search in vain for a contemporary book that actually teaches you how to put this holistic tradition into practice. Fr Symeon Rodger has filled this gap. . . . [Yet] the book is not addressed primarily to an Orthodox readership at all. He writes for anyone who wants to re-shape their lives—health, relationships, sexuality, finances and inner world—but is trapped in the dead-ends of western secular culture. And this will include many who actively participate in church but are unable to connect this experience with the rest of their daily lives. Rather than throwing the entire tradition at the bewildered reader, Fr Symeon guides readers step-by-step and week-by-week. The book is written in . . . [a] very engaging and accessible 'self-help' style . . .

"One of the frustrations that led to the writing of this book was that millions of spiritual seekers 'out there' are

largely ignored by the Orthodox press. Most of these people have never heard of Orthodoxy and have given up hope of finding meaningful direction for their lives in Christianity. Eastern religions, on the other hand, have grown rapidly in popularity and are widely viewed as the truly spiritual faiths. Fr Symeon demonstrates that the ancient traditions of life-transformation—Christian, Buddhist and Taoist especially—have a remarkable agreement about what works, what doesn't, and the predictable temptations and trials along the way. This wider scope makes the book ideal for anyone seeking to lead a more intentional life, but it also serves as a back-door to introduce seekers to a tradition of Christianity that can indeed prove to be spiritually beneficial in real life. In this sense the book is 'pre-evangelism.' It breaks up the ground for sowing the seeds of the Gospel at some later stage . . .

"He assumes that most people looking at . . . their lives are disappointed and frustrated. The ancient traditions he describes have a centuries-old record of making real change possible, and he promises readers that if they follow the book's program their lives will be dramatically transformed for the better . . . [This] program . . . is outlined step-by-step and week-by-week . . .

" . . . the book is anything but an intellectual, 'all in the head' approach. The program is built around practical exercises that tackle every aspect of one's life and will take at least one year to complete (for the very keen), though Fr Symeon says there is enough material for 21 months of training. He admits that this is not the 30-day wonder program so common in the self-help world. In fact, the first month is largely spent just assessing your current life and making time and space to begin the work of transformation.

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“[But] . . . does *everyone* need or have time for such a systematic program? What of the ‘little way,’ of going to church, saying prayers, remembering God? What of the liturgical immersion that has produced saints? Must one be so focused all the time that one can’t simply rest in, enjoy, learn from and be transformed by the presence of God in church? It was this essential Orthodox experience of life built around the church’s liturgical rhythm that shaped Orthodox Christians for generations. Fr Symeon contends that this no longer works when Orthodoxy is uprooted from the organic cultures which produced it. Yes, there are many challenges and it is a sad fact that experience often leads people to abandon any hope of encountering God through their church life. But I’m not pessimistic. I still see people who are transformed by repeated encounter with God in church. This *unsystematic* approach has also produced results and saints throughout Christian history . . . .

“[Also] . . . there is a danger with making things *too* clear. The book rightly seeks to give strong guidance to counter the woolly thinking and confusion that abound in spiritual matters these days, but this often leads to black and white either/or statements that go to the other extreme . . . .

“[This] . . . either/or thinking is most apparent in his views on the West. Here Fr Symeon is too hard and too categorical . . . . In my opinion this is the book’s major blind spot. Fr Symeon is willing to see positive approaches in Buddhism and Taoism, but are there no authentic traditions of genuine transformation and encounter with God to be found in western Christianity? This tradition too, after all, has produced people who experience love and are genuinely loving . . . .

“Finally, I would like to address the criticism leveled by some at the book’s handling of non-Orthodox sources. First, it must be said that while Fr Symeon uses many Buddhist and Taoist sources, more than half of the references are taken from the Orthodox tradition . . . .

“There is clearly a traditional (and even traditionalist) slant here, so it is all the more ironic that the book has been criticized by some for being at best too accommodating to other ancient traditions, and at worst a dangerous syncretistic mish-mash. In my opinion, this is an egregious misreading of

the book. Fr Symeon is careful and discerning in his use of Far Eastern religious traditions and limits it precisely to those areas of spiritual practice that share common ground with Orthodox experience. This is a well-founded approach . . . .

“What is at issue here is how the Orthodox view any religious tradition outside its borders. And on this point . . . there are wide differences among the Orthodox themselves. These differences in outlook will largely determine how an Orthodox reader will react to *The 5 Pillars of Life*. Some insist that Orthodoxy totally replaces any other form of religion, and anything outside is simply demonic, masquerading as an angel of light. Others accept that there is some limited possibility of divine encounter outside Orthodoxy, but for salvation Christ must be explicitly named. Still others believe that God can work through other religions, and wherever anyone experiences and expresses love, truth, goodness, beauty, it is the Logos, the Word of God whom they encounter, whether they know it or not . . . .

“Fr Symeon insists that all religious traditions—including Orthodoxy—need to be evaluated by the results they produce, not by ideology. Has practice of a religious tradition consistently and over a period of centuries produced people who experience and genuinely express love? Then it is ‘authentic,’ even if, from an Orthodox point of view, it is not 100% of the fullness revealed in Christ. Fr Symeon makes it abundantly clear that while he uses and respects these other authentic traditions, he is a priest and has chosen to live as an Eastern Orthodox Christian. But one of the great strengths of the book is that it is ultimately respectful of each person’s freedom to choose; Fr Symeon trusts that God is at work in the wide world beyond the Orthodox cocoon and beyond our control. Is it the whole Gospel? No, but neither was our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount. Eventually, by God’s mysterious grace, those in whom the seed is planted may find their way to the Church, the “fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Eph 1:23). But in the meantime, we can be grateful that Fr Symeon is doing the work of planting and nurturing the seeds.

“There should be no surprise that a daring book like this will stir up controversy within the Orthodox world. Fr Symeon is attempting to do something that hasn’t been done before, and that fact alone is likely to draw fire. If it is a meaningful storm then this is good for the life of the church.”



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