

Beyond the Plateau: Leading the Church through Needed Change by Fr. Jonathan Ivanoff

We all know the story, or have heard versions of it. A new priest is assigned to a parish. Upon his arrival there, the priest discovers or discerns that the parish is in decline, or is struggling with serious issues of Church growth and health, and resolves to do something about it. He may be a priest with not only good ideas but inspiring vision, energy and talent, yet, at virtually every step of the way, he finds himself fighting resistance to even the concept of new ideas and different ways of doing things, ways that challenge conventional parish thinking and possibly even the very parishioners responsible for that thinking. After a while, especially with no backup or support from fellow clergy, including his own bishop, he gives up and goes on with parish life as it has been. And the declines only continue.

And this reminds me of an old maxim: “If you keep doing what you’re already doing, you’re going to keep getting what you’ve already got.”

Few obstacles present more of a challenge to Church growth than resistance to change. That people, in general, fear change is natural. Change has to do with the unknown, and people fear those things they do not know or do not understand. Fear of change is also a spiritual issue, since Christians are, by definition, a people that are evolving, becoming holy, changing from one degree of glory to the next [2 Corinthians 3:18]. Yet, the view of a changeless God is often projected onto a people that need to change, with the resulting view that we, the people of an unchanging Faith and unchanging God, don’t ourselves have to change. This is utter nonsense.

Change is a part of our Faith. Baptism involves change. Confession and repentance involve change. Receiving the Body and Blood of our Lord involves change. Living a Christ-like life involves change, and yet we do not seem to fear those forms of change. We may not like them—the changes necessary may indeed be painful—but we do not seem to fear them because we recognize the benefit to our own personal spiritual life. It is only when we start talking about the way our *corporate* life seems to be going that we express the doubts and fears usually associated with change. If we fear change, then we fear God, but this kind of fear is not godly; rather, we fear Him because, at the heart of our relationship with Him, we do not trust Him, and change, if we are to understand it correctly, is about trusting God to take us from one place of being to another.

Why do we fear change? There is a very good reason why we fear change within our parishes. Corporate change—the kind of change at the level of overall parish life that we are talking about here—necessarily mandates us to admit one very difficult, one very painful thing: that the way we have been doing things may not have been working, may not be good, may not be right, may

even have gotten us to the point of decline and poor Church health that we are now experiencing. It calls into question both personal and corporate judgment, administrative skills and leadership talents. It calls into question the supposedly well-thought out decisions we’ve made, decisions that may have been arrived at only after long discussions (or even heated arguments and exchanges), research and investigation.

People hate to admit they’re wrong. It’s hard enough for many people to do it in Confession, where anonymity can hide them; it’s even harder to do publicly when the parish is in decline and old methods, processes, ideas and the like are being examined and questioned. Nobody likes to look like they made a bad decision that has had, intentionally or not, disastrous consequences for corporate parish life.

However, as the Church universally—and as the autocephalous Church locally—we can no longer afford to keep our head in the sand and ignore the overall condition of our parishes on the North American continent. We have, over the last twenty years or so, been losing members at the rate of about ten percent per year. Membership roles at the parish, diocesan or national Church levels are in decline, and yet we do not seek to change the way we are doing things.

Remember: If we keep doing what we’re already doing, we’re going to keep getting what we’ve already got. We must constantly be aware of what we may be—or may not be—doing that is affecting our Church’s health and therefore growth. But if we are looking to change the way we do things, let’s remember that Christianity is fundamentally about change.

So what *can* be done? Here are a few suggestions.

- 1) “*Denial* is not just a river in Egypt.” If your parish is in decline, face up to it and admit it. Nothing is worse for parish health than the rejection of the very reality – not to mention consequences – of parish problems.
- 2) Be open to new ideas. Many well-meaning Orthodox Christians think that we Orthodox do not need advice, counsel or training from anybody or any group that is not Orthodox. However, many non-Orthodox groups have a wealth of experience that we can tap into, experiences that may mirror our own and thereby offer us examples, corollaries and analogies to our own problems.
- 3) Seek help from those who can offer it, and learn from those who can teach it. This can come from laity or clergy who can offer help, counsel and advice in the area of Church growth and parish revitalization, especially laity or clergy – or groups who specialize in this field – who can offer training, **Con’t Page 8**

A Papal Calendar? By Fr. Lawrence Farley

Christmas Day and the post-Christmas season usually bring with them a number of things not overwhelming helpful—Boxing Day stampedes, post-Christmas let down, unwelcome news when stepping on the bathroom scale, and polemical digs about those benighted people using the “papal calendar” instead of “the Church’s Traditional Calendar”—i.e. the Julian calendar. It can be rather confusing to those outside of Orthodoxy, especially when they have been told that Orthodox Christians celebrate Christmas on January 7, thirteen days later than Christians of the West. When I tell them that many Orthodox celebrate Christmas with other Christians on December 25 and that even those Orthodox who use the Julian calendar also celebrate Christmas on December 25 but just don’t get around to that date until January 7, their eyes tend to glaze over. I suspect they conclude that we are all a bit crazy, and the mysteries of the Orthodox calendar partake of the same mind-numbing incomprehensibility as our doctrine of the Trinity, so that for us three=one, and December 25=January 7. In fairness to them, it can be a bit confusing.

In sorting the thing out, it is important not to let triumphalist rhetoric detach us from the sober facts of history. For example, contrary to what some fervent advocates of the Julian calendar sometimes say, the Council of Nicea did not in fact mandate the use of the Old Calendar, or in fact any particular civil calendar. Though it does not show up in the 20 extant canons of that Council, most historians nonetheless assert that the Council did however mandate something regarding the computation of Pascha so that all the Church could fast and feast together. The history of the Council is complex and those wanting to learn more about its intricacies may [read about them](#) on the OCA web site.

Briefly, the Church eventually decided that Pascha would be held on the Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox. That of course left the astronomical heavy lifting of determining exactly *when* the spring equinox fell to others. Such technicalities and the question of which civil calendar the Church used were not broached by the Council Fathers. The Church calendar was a grid, something to be placed over the civil calendar of the day to tell Christians when to celebrate certain feasts. It would say, for example, that Christmas must be celebrated on December 25, that Theophany must be celebrated on January 6, and that Transfiguration must be celebrated on August 6. The question about exactly *when* December 25, January 6, and August 6 fell were matters for the astronomers producing civil calendars, not for non-astronomical bishops leading their flocks in worship.

Con’t Page 9

Leading Church Con’t

mentoring and coaching in leading change in the Orthodox parish.

4) Be patient. When you start the process of change, don’t expect a quick fix. If your parish is in decline, it probably has taken a while to get to the point that has motivated the change. It will take a while to reverse that decline (be prepared for a five to seven year period) and start growing your parish again.

5) Trust your priest. The Grace of the Holy Spirit has been given to your priest in a very particular way. He has the *charism* to lead your church. Pray for him, and trust him that he may have some answers to some of the parish’s problems, even if they are not the kind of answers you wanted to hear.

6) Trust the laypersons in your parish who are called to this ministry. Evangelism is a gift of the Holy Spirit that is not given just to the clergy. There may be laymen and laywomen in your parish who have this gift and who know what needs to be done to get the message of Orthodox Christianity out.

The Orthodox Christian Clergy Association of Greater Chicago presents

The 9th Annual Pan-Orthodox

Sanctity of Life Sunday

Prayer Service and Presentation



*Come join in prayer that the Lord would
guide us all to keep life sacred,
followed by remarks by*

His Grace Bishop PAUL
of Chicago and the Midwest (OCA)

Sunday, January 22, 2017 — 6 pm

Sts. Peter and Paul Orthodox Church

6980 County Line Road Burr Ridge, IL 60527



Papal Calendar Con't

In the centuries following, it was apparent to all that the civil calendar upon which the Church's calendar was based was astronomically out of whack and becoming more out of whack with the passing of time and needed to be corrected and made more astronomically accurate. The job, of course, was one for the universities, and their help was solicited by the Roman Catholic Church in the 16th century. A suggestion for correction was made by the University of Salamanca in 1515, which was not acted upon. In 1577 certain mathematicians were asked to weigh in. Others also weighed in, including one Christopher Clavius, who argued the technicalities in a door-stopper of a book stretching to 800 pages. The Pope of the day, Gregory XIII, thought this was the way to go, and mandated the new corrected calendar and system for use in the Roman Church in 1582.

Of course this had no legal weight outside the Roman Church, and it was up to countries to use or not use the new more accurate calendar according to their secular wishes. Eventually though, everyone in Europe and beyond decided that accuracy, even if originating within the Roman Church, was preferable to inaccuracy, and so country after country signed on and began using the calendar for as their civil calendar. Not surprisingly the Catholic countries signed on

first, with Spain, Portugal, France, Italy and the Catholic Low Countries adopting it in 1582. Bohemia signed on two years later in 1584. Prussia signed on in 1610, and the Protestant Low Countries came around in 1700. Protestant Britain adopted it in 1752, followed the next year by Sweden and Finland. Japan adopted it in 1873, and Egypt in 1875. China and Albania signed on in 1912, the USSR in 1918, followed by Greece in 1923 and Turkey in 1926. Of course using the corrected calendar as their civil calendar did not mean also adopting it as a religious one, and Russia (for example) continued to use the old Julian calendar for its Church feasts. Such a bi-calendrical usage introduced a kind of liturgical schizophrenia into life, so that one might place one's order for Christmas chocolate on December 25 and not actually get around to celebrating and eating the chocolate until *the Church's* December 25, which was January 7. The simple question, "What day is it today?" could no longer be answered until one had some context and knew whether the questioner referred to the day as reckoned on the street or in the Church.

Those who insist that the Orthodox Church must use the Julian calendar as the basis for the Church feasts are unfazed by this. They point out that there are advantages in using the Julian calendar despite its acknowledged inaccuracies and the confusion it can bring. Foremost among them is the fact that using the Julian calendar stresses the difference between Orthodoxy and the rest of the Christian world—in other words, that the calendar becomes a symbolic bulwark against an ecumenism which would dissolve Orthodoxy's purity and make it just another Christian denomination with no more claim to be the true Church than anyone else. That is true, and its value should not be dismissed out of hand. But it should be also acknowledged that one can retain Orthodoxy's historic claim to be the true Church and resist a false and corrosive ecumenism while still using the new corrected calendar. It is nonsense to describe the new calendar as "the papal calendar" simply because it originated in the Roman Church, as if using the corrected calendar somehow allies one with the papists. Staunch Scottish Calvinists have been using that calendar for some time now and there is zero evidence that using it has made them more papal and less Calvinist, Presbyterian, or dour than they were before. Describing the corrected calendar as "the papal calendar" is like describing German beer as "Lutheran beer" because Germany is filled with Lutherans, or describing the kilt as a "Presbyterian vestment" because Scotland is filled with Presbyterians. The calendar is used by Protestant Scotland, Shintoist Japan, Muslim Turkey and atheistic China. The issue is not, and never has been, the provenance of the calendar, but its intrinsic merits and accuracy. The corrected calendar is not "papal" in the sense that the Tridentine Mass is papal—i.e. that it is the badge of those pledging loyalty to the bishop of Rome. Describing it as "papal" is neither sensible nor helpful. ***Con't Page 10***

Papal Calendar Con't

One of course admits that it would be a good thing if the entire Orthodox world were using the same calendar. But this argument cuts both ways, and is as much an argument for those using the Julian calendar to adopt the new corrected one as vice-versa. It is true that most of the Orthodox world uses the Julian calendar, but that is simply because one of its autocephalous members (Russia) is so large. Such things cannot be decided simply by counting heads.

At the present time it seems as if the Orthodox world will have to survive with the use of two calendars, so that it keeps its solar feasts such as Christmas at different times. (The Paschal cycle with its dates for the Lenten fast and Pascha and Pentecost are pretty much the same throughout the Orthodox world.) We can easily survive such diversity with the exercise of a little good will. And surely, such good will is a large part of what Christmas is all about.

ORTHODOX ICONS AIDS TO OUR SALVATION

Learn how Icons inspire and help us worship the Lord. Fr. Jonathan Bannon will show us how an icon is much more than the image we see. He will give us the tools to enter the icon so that we can lay aside the cares of this world and focus on the next through prayer.

Saturday, January 28 - 10:00am
St Basil Greek Orthodox Church
733 S Ashland Ave., Chicago, IL
Free Admission
See Bulletin Board for Flier.

RUSYN NEW YEAR POTLUCK LUNCH

Saturday, January 14
Doors open: Noon - Lunch: 1:00pm
Archangel Michael Orthodox Church Hall
8301 South LeClaire Ave, Burbank, IL 60459
RSVP to 708-895-3074

Bring your favorite Rusyn Dishes
Special guest: Maryann Sivak (President of the Carpatho-Rusyn Society)

All are welcomed!
See Bulletin Board for Flier!

ST. PETER & PAUL "O" CLUB ANNUAL COMMUNITY POTLUCK & CHRISTMAS PARTY

When: Saturday January 21

I will take place in Church Hall following the Great Vespers which will be @ 3:00pm

Please join us for a potluck meal, games, a raffle, & lots of family Fun!

EVERYONE IS WELCOME!

Contact Sevasti Bergstrom (Sevasti@aol.com) for details.

FIRST ANNUAL POLISH-AMERICAN SMORGASBORD FEAST

When: Sunday, January 29, 2017

Where: Sawa's Old Warsaw Restaurant, 9200 W. Cermak Road., Broadview, IL

Noon: Cocktails (cash bar)

1:00 pm: Dinner

Tickets: \$25 (now to 1/24/17). After 1/24/17: \$30.

See Karen Muzyka (708-924-1933) for tickets.

This event is open to all the surrounding sister parishes. Cash or checks payable to *St. Panteleimon Orthodox Church*. Checks can be mailed to:

Karen Muzyka
7253 White Ash Drive, Justice, IL 60458

MENU:

Carved Roast Beef	Chicken Noodle Soup
Ham off the bone	Mushroom Soup
Broasted Chicken	
Roast Duck	Best Salad Bar in Town
Sliced Roast Pork	Potato Salad
Smoked Polish Sausage	Three-Bean Salad
Fresh Polish Sausage	Macaroni Salad
	Beet Salad
Sauerkraut	Apple Blintzes
Boiled Potatoes	Cheese Blintzes
Potato Pancakes	Fresh Paczki
Cabbage Pierogies	Cherry Kolaczki
Stuffed Cabbage	Apricot Kolaczki
Potato Dumplings	Cheesecake
Mashed Potatoes	Various Cakes
Green Beans	Make your own Sundaes