

# The Orthodox American

*Witnessing the Spirit, in the West*

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## Prosperity Theology and the Swindling of American Spiritual Seekers

For approximately the last century, there have been many opportunists seeking to prove the truism, "There's a sucker born every minute" (especially true when the "sucker" is also a seeker.) From Father Divine, living with his "angels" in the mansion "Heaven" to Oral Roberts shouting that God had told him to ask for \$1,000,000, to authors of "The Secret," and other New Age versions of the same idea, there always were hucksters willing to make a fat profit by telling people God wants them to be rich. Sadly, the only people who get rich from these various incarnations of prosperity theology are the aforementioned televangelists and authors of "pray your way to riches" books. For the innocent victims of these scams, there's nothing new in any of their "secrets." It's all just the same snake oil in different packages.

Getting rich by selling people lies is bad enough all by itself but, unfortunately, these schemes are more harmful than your ordinary overpriced rubbish. The really sad thing is that they prey not only on the most desperate and

destitute people but on sincere spiritual seekers; striving to know a Higher Truth and live more Divinely directed lives. Whether presented in the guise of Christian or a New Age "Positive Energy" philosophy, these ideas are pushed not merely as get-rich-quick schemes but as genuine spiritual paths to virtue, enlightenment and blessing. This (and though a priest, I say this from an interfaith perspective) is truly a heinous blasphemy.

One principle common to all religions (at least all those I've heard of and as an Interfaith seminary alumna I've heard of many little-known religions) is that of a Higher Power. Whether mono or polytheistic, and regardless of whether that Higher Power is personified or not, the concept of a Divine Creative Force and Source is universal. The prosperity theologies perpetuate the idea that "you" (meaning anyone who's reading or listening) "are God." The authors of "The Secret" even tell people that "The universe is your catalogue." Anyone who wants something enough (and has the requisite "positive energy" to activate the so-called "Law of Attraction") can have anything or any amount of money, just by stating that they want it. Conversely, anyone who doesn't have everything they want (and perfect health and lots of money) is to blame for their own misfortune. They have, according to the hucksters, simply been putting negative energy into the world by focusing on the things they lack and not believing hard enough that they "already have" all they desire. They say we can all "create our own reality," and there's no such thing as bad luck or unfairness. Everything good we have is to our own credit and everything bad in our lives is our own fault. Yeah. And if not enough people believe in fairies, Tinkerbell will die!

The reason these ideas are so harmful (as opposed to merely stupid) is because they lead to a false idea of the universe (sorry, but there is a Higher Power, you're not It and the universe is no one's "catalogue") and also to a lack of compassion. People who think illness and poverty are the "fault" of the ill and the poor

won't feel any sense of responsibility to alleviate that suffering. Some of them will even tell sick people, to their faces, that they have "brought it on themselves" (a particularly cruel manifestation of this pride.) This, too, is a perversion of spirituality. If the Divine Source is Love (this is another common thread in many if not all religions) then humans are made *from* love, *to* love, and to bring peace, hope, beauty and healing to the earth and all Her creatures. We are not here to simply get what we can for ourselves but to do what the Jews call "Tikkun Olam," a healing of the world. Christians also have Jesus' teaching that, "The Reign of God is within you and amongst you." In other words, Heaven is the world-to-come but it is also on earth, in the here-and-now. Our job (for those who strive to be followers of Jesus) is to make this manifest by our compassion and generosity, inspired by deep gratitude for all that we've been given. This gratitude, compassion and generosity springs from awareness that every good thing in our lives (health, wealth; loving relationships) is a pure gift of Divine love. We don't "deserve" a single thing, not because we're "bad" but because it's simply impossible for a creature to *merit* anything from the Creator. We don't "earn" our life's blessings any more than an infant "earns" Mother's milk. All that we have is poured out, in profligate generosity, from the Source of all that is.

The other spiritual danger in the "create your own reality" concept is that, just as every misfortune in life is your own fault, every good thing in your life is completely to your own credit. Why be grateful if you simply "deserve" all of it for having a positive attitude? This too is a perversion of a universal spiritual principle: there can be no faith without gratitude.

Finally, prosperity and "create-your-own-reality" belief systems perpetuate the idea that everything in life is completely controllable and understandable. Hogwash! There will always be mysteries beyond the ken of even the wisest teacher of any faith. There will also always be a certain sense of Divine discontent, simply because we must grapple with the wildness and fearsomeness of a universe where wars, disasters and life-threatening illnesses are constants and bad things happen to good people. If the awareness of this wildness does not simply make us despair (or become atheists) it brings us face to face with the inescapable knowledge that there are things we can't understand in this life and many things that will always be beyond our control. Rabbi Kushner,

When Bad Things Happen to Good People writes that even in a Divinely created and directed universe, there are elements of randomness. Nature is wild, and humans (even those of us who live in cities) are part of the natural world. Our illnesses, mental and physical, may be likened to earthquakes and hurricanes. The Creator doesn't "make" natural disasters (not specific ones) but has made a universe where forces (the same forces that give life) exist that can cause those things to happen. Something like cancer or schizophrenia can be likened to an "earthquake" in the body, a part of the wildness of the natural world, which brings death as well as life to humans. It's okay to be simultaneously angry at our Creator and to cry out to Her for help. That, too, is natural. And one thing all faiths tell us is that, even as painful things (even horrific things) come, help will also come. We are sometimes in pain or in peril, but we are never alone in this wild universe.

My own hope is to use all the wealth of material and spiritual gifts entrusted to me, wisely and well, for the highest good. My tradition teaches that, if I do so, God will say, at the end of this earthly mission, "Well done, good and trusted servant." Because I'm grateful for all good gifts, being a "good and trusted servant" of that Source is my best hope. As we Christians say in our Baptismal (and confirmation and ordination) vows, "I will, with God's help."

The Rev. Mother Francesca Fortunato

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## **Round'n About**

*Notes from the Dioceses & Vicariates*

### **Western Great Lakes and the OCCA Pastoral Theology Institute**

Bishop David Kotajavari

#### **The Diocese**

The harsh winter has released its' hold. Travel to Auburn, Chicago, and Angola are now less of a white knuckle experience. I traded in my Hummer for a more economical mode of transportation and purchased a toll booth transponder, so I don't have to stand in hour and a half lines anymore. I will be in Angola to bless the sacred oils on Saturday, March 26<sup>th</sup> to resupply the vicars, priests, and deacons.

Fr. Yanchy Lacska reports that his son Andrew is progressing from serious head injuries sustained in an auto accident. Andrew

remains in our prayers. Nancy Toubl progresses in preparation for the diaconate. She is an energetic and giving individual already established in hospice care and counseling. She comes to us through Fr. Doug Smith. It is requested that Nancy's ordination take place during the synod. This is in discussion as the synod appears to already have many activities. Vicar Donn in Chicago is busy as usual and always is a pleasure to talk with him on the phone, although reception in his building is hampered by a maze of lead pipes in the ceilings and floors.

I am anxious to see the faces of the Indiana group, as they were missed greatly during the winter. They are very special people and I enjoy chatting with each and every one of them.

I wish to thank all the members of the Western Great Lakes clergy for their efforts and service and promise to continue to be of service to them.

#### **The Institute**

The staff and I have our first offering ready to go. TBA will be teaching an online class in introductory theology. I am hoping that this medium works well and we can iron out the wrinkles in this first course. Once done, it will be easier to offer the full catalog of courses. Many potential instructors have offered their support.

Staff and I have written the Safe Church Policy and strongly feel this is a step in the right direction to avoid potential problems in the future. An updated draft of the canons was forwarded to Metropolitan Peter. He indicated some work remains on the revision. I will continue on this project.

#### **Lastly**

May the blessings of the Holy Trinity be upon all of you. May the hand of God guide you in all you do. I pray for all of you and our humble church. Peace be with you. **+ David**

### **New York and the Atlantic Coast**

#### **Bishop Elizabeth Walker:**

Our winter activities were quiet, being largely occupied with planning Abp Alfred's funeral, the upcoming ordination of our seminarian, John Yoegel, to the diaconate, in early June, and of course the OCCA Jubilee Synod.

The clergy have been busy and here are just a couple of the highlights. Fr Barry Lillis had

a very fine and sensitive commentary on chemical dependency published in the Niagara Gazette, and will be interviewed on a Niagara Falls radio station shortly. Fr. Giles Spoonhour continues his ministry with incarcerated women, and with the Interfaith Temple and the New Seminary. Mother Francesca Fortunato is nearly finished with her master's degree, and continues her work as a Dean for the New Seminary. Fr. Roger Vaughn is developing an alternative Western Rite liturgy for trial use, to be submitted to the Liturgy Committee in due course. Fr. Mike Moss continues his ministry with a local Charismatic Episcopal parish.

We look forward to greeting all our family-in-the-faith this June at the General Synod. **+Elizabeth**

### **Northeast Indiana Vicariate**

#### **Vicar John+ Newbauer**

Things have settled a little here in Fort Wayne and surrounding communities for OCCA. As you have probably heard, we have decided to sell Crosswood Centre and to work with our small communities in Fort Wayne and Angola, which seem to be holding their own very well. We have two parties interested in Crosswood Centre but neither of them have yet come up with money so we wait. However, we have found some who were interested in living at the Centre while we find potential buyers and the income has helped with the expenses. Brother Richard and Stella found a home near Angola and will begin their move this spring sometime.

Due the closing of Crosswood Centre eventually, we will move Fr. Skip's ashes along with those of his parents to our chapel in Angola on the eve of Palm Sunday, Lazarus Saturday, in the Orthodox Calendar with an evening Service of Palms with the blessing of the chrism by Bishop David followed by a meal at the home of one of our benefactors. Anyone wishing to attend please let me know so I can send you directions. This will begin our Holy Week schedule. On Holy Thursday, our communities in Fort Wayne and Angola will gather at Crosswood Centre and celebrate a Seder Meal incorporating our Eucharistic Celebration of the Last Supper. This has become a tradition and many look forward to participating. I don't think it's just because of the four ritual glasses of wine and wonderful food – although it always seems to help. The evening provides for a relaxed way to recount the exodus from Egypt and the relationship between freedom from slavery in

Egypt and the fulfillment of our reconciliation through the passion, death and resurrection of our Lord. Peace to all, **John+ Newbauer**  
Vicar of Northeast Indiana

## **California and Nevada**

### **Bishop James Gleeson:**

Bishop Gleeson continues his long weekly commute from his home in Lake County to teach at Foothill College, but recent cuts in the school's budget may see +James fully retire.

Bishop Jerry Hegarty is deeply saddened by the loss of +Al, an old friend and long term co-worker in OCCA. +Jerry continues well contented in his quiet retirement with his much loved cat, Babette.

Rev Father Richard Parker also retired, is still watchfully reading and making comments in the OCCA chat room. Rev Mother Laura Emerson is engaged in full time care for a family member. Rev Mother Anne French is following up treatment for skin melanoma, but continues in her ministry as a deacon performing baptisms and an impending marriage.

Rev Father Ralph Curtis works with UCC pastors supporting a public school program promoting diversity and anti-bullying and preparing the Easter Communion service in the San Jose Correctional Institutions. **+James**

### **OCCA Contact Information**

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## **Peter's Two Pence Worth**

### **ARCHDIOCESAN ARCHIVE**

Did you know that OCCA has an archive? Yes, we do. A collection of old materials is stored in a four-drawer file cabinet currently at the Crosswood Centre in Auburn, but after the Centre is sold, it will migrate to Fort

Wayne and storage. Most is rather old and printed on paper or newsprint, which deteriorate over time (think of paperbacks which yellow and become brittle with age). Since our archbishops have focused on keeping the wheels turning here and now, the archives aren't cataloged or preserved with longevity in mind.

We hope to inaugurate a long term conservation project. Old materials on paper can be stored with acid-free boxes and files so the deterioration is slowed significantly. We also need a way to store items of historic value. For example, we have a fiddleback chasuble, made in Chicago, which Archbishop Alfred told me was used by +Villatte. The evidence tracing the vestment to Villatte isn't strong. Alfred was told that by George Augustine Hyde, and there is no paper trail to authenticate. But the garment is of the right age and its origin in Chicago suggests positively that it may be of historic value to us. Textiles, like paper, are delicate and need conservation. Museums store textiles flat, and when displayed they are lined with a material that supports the garment about every inch or so. Old garments are rarely, if ever, worn, for the simple act of doing so stresses the fabric and individual threads. Think of old copes you have seen, where the fasteners at the neck have pulled the fabric apart.

Then there are a few other items. I have Archbishop Brian's Pangaea here, but unfortunately his rings have disappeared. Since metal items are always removed prior to cremation, it is likely that they were given to Isabel Carsten, and she, in turn, gave them to a friend of Skip. Such is the way that objects of value can slip away with the best of intentions of maintaining the person's memory.

### **IS IT A BOUTIQUE OR CO-OP?**

It is time for spring cleaning, and have we got a deal for you! At the Jubilee Synod, we will have a booth dedicated to ecclesiastical supplies, gently used and available for new owners to treasure. All of us have items in our ecclesiastical closets which we no longer want or need--perhaps five chasubles of the same color, or a garment bought that doesn't suit you now. The vestment exchange is an opportunity to donate unwanted items. A tax form will be provided if desired. These items may be just what someone needed.

The vestment exchange is going to be more than clothing or textiles. Yes, we'll have clerical shirts, albs, copes, dalmatics, chasubles, but also items used in worship, candles, candle

stands, incense (everybody accumulates more incense than they can use?), sacristy equipment no longer needed. Reusable tabernacles (we have a Holy Thursday reservation tabernacle here in Auburn, for example that somebody can use), chalices, ciboria, patens, monstrances (I'm thinking there is probably at least one of those out there).

Burses (remember those fabric pockets for the antimens/corporal--I use one for my antimens and blessing cross), crucifixes, pectoral crosses, rings, mitres and, headgear of various kinds, icons, statues, medallions, banners, hanging lamps, beeswax candles for individual use. If you are a creative type who makes liturgical items, sell them at the Synod.

Schedule a time to look through your closet, pack the items no longer needed or used, and donate them to the Beach Grove exchange. You may find something there that you do need. We ask is that items be clean. Metal, glass, and so on should be clean and polished (to look their best). Apparel should be dry cleaned with the dry cleaning tag attached.

Finally, if you're a garage sale junkie, this is the opportunity to volunteer to supervise and coordinate the booth. There is no pre-synod work involved, and more than one person will be welcomed to this important task. Contact Mother Maria if you want to be the vestment exchange yenta.

### **AN ANTIMENS DESIGN FOR OCCA**

Across the country at least three people are designing new antimens with a classic look, but the lettering will be in English, and be designed specifically for our membership. Hopefully, the designs will be ready for the creators to present them at the Synod.

Archbishop Al used a design printed in black ink on linen and affixed a relic to each antimens (which is why his should *never* be laundered, as the glue dissolves and the relic lost). Archbishop Brian bought antimens in bulk, printed on silk or linen, and occasionally in splendid full color. These were exhausted early in 2009.

Orthodox church goods stores no longer sell antimens at a reasonable price, and in some only the expensive, color models are available. So we're relying on the creativity and entrepreneurial spirit of our membership to create our own!

### **PASCHAL CANDLES**

Here in Northeastern Indiana, we have worked with several styles of Paschal candles. In Angola, the parish has the huge candle Al sent when the parish in Indianapolis closed. It has a custom-made stand. We tried different sorts of candles. Once we used artist-decorated eight-inch pillars and another we used a standard 1/5" x 12" candlestick.

I must confess that I find any non-standard Paschal Candles unsatisfying. As a liturgist and presider, I need the symbol of Christ the Light to be substantial and command a presence in the worship space. As well intentioned pillars and smaller candles are, they are not the best choice for the symbol of light and life.

I strongly recommend that each OCCA worship space have a Paschal Candle, appropriate follower for the top and a base for the candle size. On the west coast, Cotter is a reliable church supply provider. In the Midwest, the Chicago firms of Morrow & Sons, or Watra Church Supply have candles in stock. While decorated candles can be very expensive, a plain candle costs about \$40.

### **THE MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION**

In Al's last days and since his passing, the question asked more than any other is, "What about Squeaky?" Alfred's venerable pet, a Maine Coon who ruled his household since a wee kitten, is known to most of us. She was Al's watchcat, supervising his every move, and following him around the house to keep an eye on him. When visitors came to call (Al loved to entertain), she inspected each person (perhaps as trained by the FBI or Homeland Security), and then took a guardian position near Al's chair. During his last illness, she was always sleeping on Al's bed, but now nearer to his head. She made sure her body touched his so he would know she was there. When he fell, she went to Dan Bair, who was in the next room, and summoned him to Alfred's side, rather insistently I understand. Happily, Squeaky has adopted Dan Bair, and now lives at his home.

### **THANK YOU**

Being the orchestra leader of this far-flung church has been a wonderful, privileged blessing for me. Each day, I discover new and exciting things about our membership, a dynamic and gifted group. I encourage you to remember in daily prayer and conversations with

God all your companions in ministry. And I promise that you are remembered in my own daily prayers, remembered with joy (even on difficult days). And I thank you from my heart of hearts for all that you are, and do. May the Loving Lord bless you richly during Triduum and the Paschal season. **+Peter**

### **BOOK REVIEW:**

The Hidden History of Women's Ordination, Female Clergy in the Medieval West, Gary Macy, Oxford University Press, 2008.

This slender volume, half of which is devoted to endnotes and bibliography, is an impressive study by the John Nobili Professor of Theology in the Dept of Religious Studies at Santa Clara University, who had the distinction of being publicly rebuked by name by a Roman Cardinal for a previous article on women's medieval ministries. In this book, Macy focused on the medieval ordinations of women, those from 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century. The era of the earlier church, so Macy stated, was already well documented, thoroughly researched and indisputable.

As he showed, there are no shortage of documents that speak of women being ordained, but the hidden aspect, which he so directly challenged is the widespread historical double standard in interpretation of texts so that ordination of men is immediately assumed to be the full sacramental altar service role in the modern sense, while any mention of the ordination of women is dismissed as merely a benediction, symbolic, or ceremonial.

In examining the ordination question, Macy first had to distinguish the modern theological definition, which developed in the West from the 12<sup>th</sup> through the 17<sup>th</sup> century, as it differed from the medieval view of ordination. The medieval definition was derived from the basic term, 'ordo', an order or a service function to the community, and was not a personal charisma and was, like the title of church secretary, laid aside when the person left the job. This view is similar to the Orthodox view of ordination, that the person is called to an ordo, a role in the community. Macy maintained that the medieval view of ordo pertained to the many types of service in the communities, whether parish, diocese, monastery or abbey and generally were made without stipulation of gender. As with the church secretary, whose job often expands according to the needs of the congregation, a medieval ordo could incidentally include service at the altar as needed by the

community. In this view, the widely documented ordinations of women meant that women were indeed celebrating liturgy at the behest of their congregations throughout the West until the Gregorian reforms.

Whether we agree with Macy's thesis or not, the sheer amount of historical material presented attesting to women in ordained roles is enlightening and the open bias exposed in interpretation of the material is scandalous. What is most persuasive in Macy's book is that the meaning of ordination underwent profound changes in the era after the 12<sup>th</sup> Century and what was ordination prior to that time is certainly not what is expounded by western theologians today

### **Footnotes in History**

In the basilica of Ss. Praxedis and Prudentiana on a high arch there is a glass tesserae mosaic of four women, on a shimmering golden background of the heavenly shekhinah. Two are identified as the saints to whom the church is dedicated and between them stands the Theotokos. On the left, the fourth woman has her hair veiled within a square nimbus. Her inscription reads:

*'Theodora Episcopa,'* Bishop Theodora, in a 9<sup>th</sup> Century basilica rebuilding of earlier church, near Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome.

### **Opinions and Viewpoints**

#### **A Dime for your thoughts ...**

Very recently, out of the spiritual ether, I received a phone call from a bishop of an ethnic church, asking me to consider pastoring a parish he wished to establish where I live, namely Toledo<sup>1</sup>. He found my name on the internet, but was not the bishop who contacted many of the OCCA clergy by email. Oddly enough, the previous Sunday my wife and I visited a parish near us of the PNCC, searching for a small community where we might worship weekly. The contacting bishop was not from the PNCC, but did speak at length about his church and the people's request for a priest.

The next day an OCCA bishop called, and I told him briefly about the other's call, all within three days!

Later the non-OCCA bishop again called, this time to discuss Apostolic Succession and specifically the ordination of women. He asked who ordained me and whether this

ordaining bishop (+Skip) had ordained women prior to ordaining me. When told yes, he stated that Apostolic Succession had been broken and that he could not therefore accept my OCCA ordination<sup>2</sup>. On the whole question of incardination, he said it was necessary to renounce OCCA, and go through the steps of sub-deaconate, deaconate, prior to priesthood in his church. He was uninterested in the historical fact of women deacons in the early Church, but rather argued a static, unchangeable "deposit" of faith<sup>3</sup>.

I write to alert other OCCA clergy who may be approached, but also the conversation did raise questions for me. I don't doubt the conviction of the bishop, but there were some pauses for me.

One was that when first introduced to OCCA, even at my age I recall a focus on an established lineage of patriarchs, back through Villatte to Ceylon to Antioch to Peter, printed in "This we Believe". Without dismissing the validity of this list, more recently, our beloved +Skip said that it was the integrity of what was passed and taught that really made Apostolic Succession. Both views are probably correct, as not all Roman popes were "Pillars" of the faith in practice, so likewise a list of OCCA primates may well include Shavian skeletons wearing miters.

During the debate on the ordination of women<sup>5</sup>, I was not with OCCA, but am fully supportive of OCCA's position. It is part of the reason that I remain with OCCA. However just for historical interest, what were the arguments pro and con? After all, this is part of our history, and I see no point that our reasons for the decision on this milestone should be hidden in our archives. I hope this stimulates discussion, especially in a generational viewpoint. We have ordained a number of women in two decades. What is their understanding of such terms as Apostolic Succession, Orthodox, and Catholic, eastern and western<sup>4</sup>? Have the meanings and understandings changed from one generation to the next<sup>6</sup>? Especially at the grass-roots level rather than the cut and dried yes/no response of an erudite theological guru, who I am not. Such absolutes tend to cut any discussion short. What do you think? Rev Kevin Kierney

#### Some points for discussion of the topic:

<sup>1</sup>In 09/09, Benedict of Rome acted to create a province to receive Anglicans opposed to the ordination of gays and women. Is this ecclesiastic

'poaching'? Is it acceptable as a sign of respect or appropriate ecumenism?

<sup>2</sup>Does ordination of any person believed by others to be canonically ineligible terminate the Apostolic Succession? As in the case of the secret ordinations of Roman Catholic women the participating bishops face all matter of disciplinary action by their superiors, if discovered, but has anyone spoken of a loss of Apostolic Succession?

<sup>3</sup>What explanation best speaks to the concerns of Orthodox brethren about this issue, illustrating that the canons on eligibility for the priesthood, particularly those on gender, are disciplinary and subject to change at the need of the Church and distinct in character from those of the 'deposit of faith' such as the Creeds?

<sup>4</sup>Two views of Apostolic Succession are suggested here, are they interactive and complementary? Are there other valid interpretations for the descent of authority and faith from the apostolic age to our generation?

<sup>5</sup>A small jurisdiction bishop once stated in this regard that it would require another Ecumenical Council to change the canons, but is that accurate? Did it require an Ecumenical Council to re-evaluate an ethical question of justice and equality? Does it require a Council to condemn slavery as unjust and contrary to Christian doctrine?

<sup>6</sup>Is the 'generational debate' erosion of the deposit of faith or can it be regarded as another way of saying the continuing presence of the Holy Spirit prods us towards spiritual maturity from adolescence?

Editors

## Working in the Vineyard

### Reflections

It is a Tuesday morning—4:15 AM to be exact. I am the charge nurse here on the psychiatric unit of the Naval Medical Center, San Diego. I have nine patients currently—most are active duty Marines and Sailors, one is a dependent son of 20 years of age. ALL are in a considerable amount of pain, mostly psychological. Some have been here for a few days; others have been here for months. All, except the dependent son have been to the war zone at least once. Of these, none came back "normal." Some see things and hear things that others cannot see or hear. Some dive under their beds if a loud sound goes off in the unit, fearing that it is a grenade or an IED. Even the dependent son is damaged...he is accused of vehicular manslaughter, killing another person while he was under the influence of THC. He is

anticipating discharge tomorrow, but to where? His family has abandoned him, so he moved in with his sister and her boyfriend. He cannot return there because the sister no longer wants him there.

The phone rang some time ago. I still remember the caller he told me that his name was Johnny, that he had been hospitalized here about a year ago. He remembered me, and even said that he admired me. Johnny had just checked into a hotel in Texas with a gun and some heroin. We spoke for about one hour, but I was unable to trace his call. Near the end of the conversation, he told me that it was over, that he was convinced that I was sending people to his hotel, and that he was going to “end it” with a sock. He tied a knot in the sock and shoved it into his airway. The next sound I heard was his gasping for air before the line went dead. I felt useless, and my soul was troubled. I am convinced that Johnny had just ended his life, and there was nothing else that I could do for him. I felt terrible.

After some consideration, and several tears, I concluded that all I could do for Johnny now is pray for him—and that gave me a lot of comfort. I like to think that Johnny did not die alone, that, perhaps, something I said gave him SOME comfort. But for now, I just continue to pray for him, trying to realize the pain that he had been going through.

Until I started this job nearly 4 years ago, I wondered what exactly my ministry was. I was not serving the Liturgy on a regular basis. I did not have a church or even a chapel. Many days, I spent being angry at others, as if I were some way better than they were. I now realize that I do have a ministry—it is a hospital ministry. I care for the “damaged Soldiers and Marines and their children.” I am able to pray with and for them. When I make my rounds hourly throughout the unit, I am to be aware of their sleep and to ensure that they are breathing. But it gives me more than enough time to pray for them. I approach the door of each patients’ room and say a personal prayer for each one. So I DO have a ministry, and I DO have a church. The name of my church is Naval Medical Center San Diego, One North.

**Basil+ Donadio**

## **A Small Mexican Chapel**

Our Metropolitan suggested that I write a brief article about our Chapel ministry in Mexico, so I’m pleased to share these thoughts on the topic.

My partner, Honorio and I, are some 55 miles north-east of Mexico City in southern Hidalgo. We have lived here since 1996, having previously purchased a small parcel of land and built a very humble dwelling.

After several years in Acayuca, Hidalgo, I experienced God’s call to begin a new Christian ministry in our little town. I talked with my abbot, the Rt. Rev. Burtch of the now-defunct Order of the Servants of Christ, Victoria, British Columbia and after meeting with our neighbors, found that there was interest in a ministry of public liturgical worship and witness, outside the predominant religious institution, than previously thought. After a further discernment and consultation with +John-Anthony and our Order, I was ordained in Saanich, British Columbia in December of 2002 by +John-Anthony.

In January of 2003 we celebrated our first Eucharist in the back room of our house on the Feast of the Epiphany (hence the name, la Capilla de la Epifanía).

Our vision statement remains, as follows:

*By God’s calling and grace, The Chapel of the Epiphany will:*

*Respond faithfully to the Lord Jesus and to His Gospel of grace.*

*Be a center of discipleship in love and hospitality where all kinds of people celebrate their lives and grow in the knowledge and love of God in the security of His unchanging love and boundless mercy and grace.*

*Become an all-inclusive Christian community made up of all whom the Lord shall call, without exception or distinction, and thus counter the exclusion and alienation that many experience.*

*Celebrate, by means of the sacraments that our Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit have given the Church, all the positive transitions that occur in people’s lives.*

*The first work of the Chapel is prayer and worship. The grace that pours forth from the Throne and from the Lamb is its life. By the grace of God and the life that we live by faith in Christ we will:*

*Witness to the world around us of what we know of the love and grace of God by our actions, attitudes and words.*

*Cooperate with other local Christians, to the end that everyone may come within the reach of our Lord Jesus’ saving embrace, and that the needs of the surrounding community*

may be addressed in the spirit of love and giving.

*Trust the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, to direct our efforts toward the fulfillment of the Father's purposes for our common life together in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

*And may God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, ever refresh and challenge us with His vision and will for us and for all of humankind.*

The vision statement in Spanish was included in the Mass booklets during the first several months.

The attendance grew so that attendance was in the 70s for our first Pascha and Pentecost Sundays. So we decided to build a small chapel on our property, but later that year, the local predominant church authorities threatened to excommunicate everyone involved with our Chapel ministry, so attendance dropped substantially.

My partner Honorio and I began work on a chapel building on our property to hold services. The first Eucharist was celebrated in the chapel on 2 February, 2004. Honorio did nearly all arrangements for construction and contributed the largest share from his personal funds.

Our original intention was to celebrate all of the more important feasts and saints days, however, as time passed, the economy declined here as in most places, so everyone must work daily just to survive. As a result, now we celebrate very few special days other than Sundays.

After three years, our Chapel group had become a genuine community in the sense that we look out for each other and are attentive to each other's needs. At the same time, there are cultural bounds to this because the family is still seen as the mainstay against the outside world so that people do not generally extend a sense of community beyond the extended family. This is true in the larger society as well, for example people do not volunteer or seek to help outsiders. The big task is always to look after your own, and let others do the same.

Proclaiming the Gospel of caring for others, beingwelcoming and inclusive no matter who they are, being our brother's keeper, and of being loving, generous with oneself and one's time, energy and other resources is accepted, but it is always seen in a personal, family-based view, never in terms of a larger community. So, our broader vision remains to build the Reign of

God bit by bit in the world by own living its precepts and being transformed from glory into glory as the likeness of Christ.

Attendance at Sunday Eucharist hovers around twenty to thirty without much growth. Surely the Mormons, Pentecostals, Seventh-Day Adventists and others are running circles around us in terms of attracting people with their missionaries and staff, resources, and so on. What we have is a desire to be faithful followers of Christ in the light of the Apostolic Faith.

Many people become more, then less, then more again, involved in the life of our Chapel community. I believe it is important to keep a stable presence, even when the prospects for the future of the ministry look iffy. Honestly, sometimes I wonder why I do this. Wouldn't it just be easier to simply stop, and to say to this small handful of my neighbors that we will not hold services anymore? But then, I live among these good people, my fellows, and I know that if I did that that most of them probably would have no place in any Christian community.

I can honestly say that I have learned not to put much stock in the numbers. Numerical success is not a criterion for us as we learn to trust and follow; rather, faithfulness is the gold-standard of discipleship.

We are together. It is indeed a high privilege to be a servant of my fellows in the Reign of God. **William+ Payne**

### *The Orthodox American*

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