St. George
Beacon
St. George Orthodox Church, Prescott, AZ, Summer 2019

In the Midst of a Changing and Developing Community, How Ought We Relate to One Another?

Dear brothers and sisters,

Christ is risen!

At St. George's today, it's clear that we are experiencing growth, and the natural pains that come along with it.

We have, and will continue to have, new parishioners moving to the area from places like California, Colorado, and Nevada. Many of these parishioners have been faithful Orthodox believers for most, if not all, of their lives. Simultaneously - as we are committed to the commandment of our Lord that we *go into all the world and make disciples of all nations (Mt. 28:16-20)* - we also have, and will continue to have, adults and families entering into the Orthodox Church at our parish through the process of Catechesis, Baptism and Chrismation, culminating in the reception of Holy Communion.

There are people here with a lifetime of Orthodox experience in a particular context, and others with no experience at all.

There are people who are beginning their journey into the Orthodox faith from other churches that perhaps have a highly developed and formal liturgical life, such as Anglican, or Roman Catholic Christians. And there are people who are from backgrounds where it is normal to deliberately dress-down when coming to church, for husband and wife to settle into a seat with their morning coffee purchased at the church's cafe, the young kids having been dropped at a separate building for children's church, and the teens of the family at a youth event, with none of the elderly or retirees present, already having had a service more to their taste an hour before and gone home.

And, of course, there are those who come to us from no faith, or any experience of church at all.

Just put all of these folks in the Divine Liturgy together, and, already, unique challenges arise.

But these are not are the only challenges that we face.

There are a couple more that we could add that have more to do with the unique ethos and culture of our parish in comparison with others of our Greek Archdiocese, as well as parishes of other jurisdictions.

1. Our beloved parish, from its foundation, has been a multi-ethnic community that has never shied away from incorporating whatever is good and beautiful from various cultural expressions of the Orthodox faith. To those who come to us from long-established Orthodox communities many of these customs can appear strange, and may even be disconcerting.

2. Regarding children's education and their participation in Liturgy: For many of the long-established parishes in our Archdiocese, and indeed in other jurisdictions as well, the habit developed long ago, in imitation of Protestant Christian models of children's religious education, of scheduling Church School concurrently with the Divine Liturgy. This has made experiencing the noise and bustle of children during the Divine Liturgy a thing that, again, can be very disconcerting for many of our life-long Orthodox parishioners.

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St. George Orthodox Church
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There are distinct ways and means of approaching all of these challenges, and through education, hard work, and by God's grace we will make good progress over time. And there are very important reasons why we are committed to all of these things, despite the challenges presented.

We are absolutely committed to:

1. Opening our doors to bring in all of the nations *baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that the Lord has commanded us.*

2. Allowing our Orthodox faith to be expressed in multi-cultural ways.

3. Allowing our children to be present and full participants during Vespers, Orthros and Divine Liturgy.

Since we are committed in this way, it seems very important to talk about *how we ought to relate to one another in the midst of the challenges that these commitments present,* in the midst of what perhaps appears to many of us as an unprecedented situation.

We want to continue, and move forward in love and in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

Thankfully, we can find the principles about how we ought to relate to one another in many places in the Scriptures and the writings of the Church fathers.

Certainly, we would do well to review the *The Acts of the Apostles,* bringing to mind the tumultuous experiences of the earliest Christian communities as Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ sought to live in a New Covenant with each other, established in the Blood of the Lord Himself, all this in spite of their having being estranged from each other for millennia by both culture and religion.

But for now, let's look at one principle that was established by St. Benedict in his Rule regarding life in community. He writes:

"Let the younger honor their elders, and the elder love the younger."

So much is contained in these words.

Certainly, there is an honor for those who are our elders just in terms of physical age which is everywhere lauded and commanded in the scriptures. And we ought to demonstrate this honor to our elders always and everywhere. In relation to our elders we should be the first to listen rather than to speak. We can give up our seats, and give up our parking spaces, and park further away. We can do our best not to allow our children to become a distraction. We can give them first place in the line for food during fellowship. In all these ways and more, recognizing the good order established by God, that the younger should honor their elders.

However, if we look more closely at the rest of St. Benedict's writing in this particular passage, we also find a reminder that, as the Wisdom of Solomon says: *understanding is gray hair for men, and a blameless life is ripe old age…that…though a righteous man die early, yet he fulfilled long years.*

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Upcoming Dates

- June 9: Parish Meeting
- June 16: Pentecost
- June 19: Parish Council Meeting
- June 24: Apostles Fast Begins
- July 17: Parish Council Meeting
- August 1: Dormition Fast Begins
- August 15: Dormition of the Theotokos
- August 21: Parish Council Meeting

Hence, he writes:

"...in no place whatever let *age* [that is, the age reckoned merely from one's birth] determine the order [of the brethren in the monastery] or be a disadvantage; because Samuel and Daniel when mere boys judged the priests (cf 1 Sam 3; Dan 13:44-62). Excepting those, therefore, whom, as we have said, the Abbot from higher motives hath advanced, or, for certain reasons, hath lowered, ***let all the rest take their place as they are converted:*** *thus, for instance, let him who came into the monastery at the second hour of the day, know that he is younger than he who came at the first hour, whatever his [physical] age or [worldly] dignity may be."* [Italics mine]

The Church, like the monastery, is a school of repentance, the elders and teachers of the community are not necessarily those who are physically older. Neither are the leaders necessarily those who possess great dignity in the world.

In the Church the elders that are chiefly honored are those who have walked the path of repentance, humility and love for a long time, those who have long struggled to turn their whole life towards the Kingdom of God. This is a path on which one gains more and more wisdom and experience over time. Tragically, there are many of those raised in the Church that have perhaps never set foot on this path, in some cases because of the mistaken idea that there is no need, that somehow salvation is a birthright. Doubly tragic is an attitude that may appear amongst some converts that once they have been Chrismated the struggle has ended and they are now fit to stand in judgment over those raised in the church, as though there is nothing more for them to learn, or any need for their further conversion.

It is a fact that those of us who are advanced in years may encounter a young man that has far advanced us in faith and purity of heart. But can we imagine such a young man dishonoring us? Certainly not!

And if we have advanced passively to great age through the inexorable passage of time, or actively gained the gray hair of wisdom and repentance at a young age, either way, what are we if we are bereft of love?

I, personally, have been greatly edified on occasion, by some amongst us, who are mostly engaged in a daily basis in completely secular pursuits. I accounted them, on those occasions, as my elders in the faith. What could I give them but honor, and my acceptance of their fatherly love?

Indeed, perhaps we ought to let go of any sense of our position as elder or younger, except where it has been clearly given to us, not of our own will or by the accidents of age, but by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps we ought to recognize that the younger may become our elder in a single moment, just as we see in the quote from St. Benedict above, that sometimes the Abbot raises a newer monk to a higher status from "higher motives", in other words, by divine inspiration.

Let us, then, show honor and love to all in all that we do and say, while *humbling ourselves before the Almighty hand of God, that he may exalt us in due time*....(I Peter 5:1-8) This is the way we ought to relate to one another in the midst of a changing and developing community.

With much love in our risen Lord,

Fr. Jeffrey

5/14/2019

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The 2019 Evangelism Season

It is the tradition of our church to focus on evangelism during the period from Pentecost to the beginning of the Nativity fast. That is not to say that we don't evangelize the rest of the year, but that this “Evangelism Season” is a specific time of outward focus towards our local community.

Evangelism Icon

Every year our parish purchases a new icon of a missionary saint. This year we are especially blessed to have an icon painted by Fr. Jeffrey. He has offered to make an icon of St Nicholas of Japan that will be available to venerate on Pentecost.

Community Events

We will continue to be present at two of our local dog themed events, Woofstock and Dogtoberfest, to provide pet blessings and create awareness of our church.

Direct Mailing

We will be running 4 ads starting in July in our local Money in the Mail. Each ad will focus on informing the public about Orthodoxy and its progression from the early church to it’s modern day expression in our parish.

Local Prayer Mailing

We will continue to give special care to those who live within a half mile radius from our church. Every year we send out mailings to our neighbors asking them to submit prayer requests. We pray for those requests specifically through the Dormition fast and then through the rest of the Evangelism Season.

Evangelism Akathist

During the Evangelism Season there will be an Evangelism Akathist once a month. This akathist provides you the opportunity to bring the names of your loved ones who you would like to join the Orthodox faith and as a community we will pray for them by name.

Social Media

We will continue to promote our church and the Orthodox Faith through various social media channels. We do this through posting quotes from Church Fathers, videos and articles about the faith, live streaming portions of our services and Father’s sermons, and targeted ad campaigns.

Prayer Cards

Two sets of prayer cards will be made available with our prayer for evangelism written on one side. On the other side is a space for you to write the names of people you would like to join the Orthodox faith. The 2nd set will have names of people in our community who have expressed interest in the faith through social media.

Welcome Packets and a Free Book

We will continue to print our welcome packets that aid visitors in becoming familiar with the faith. In the welcome packet is an offer of a free book about the faith. Please consider donating $15 for the cost of a book. We are close to running out.

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Go into
all the world and
preach the gospel
to every creature
~Mark 16:15

Greeter Program

Over three years we have developed a well oiled system of greeting our guests. There is always room for improvement and we are getting better year by year, however, there is a shortage of greeters. Please consider volunteering to be a greeter.

Results

Due to our efforts the past three years, half of our current catechumen class is made up of people that are here directly from these efforts.

Current Need

To kickstart our efforts we were given a grant for three years. That grant has expired. Our council has decided to continue our efforts and designated a line item in our budget of $5000 for evangelism. To maintain our efforts we are about $1000 short of our needs. Please consider donating to help continue this effort that is bringing our local community to the Orthodox faith.

~Kenny Scott

The Sisterhood of St. George Orthodox Church

"Christ Has Risen"! In anticipation of Pentecost, I am reminded of how blessed we are and have been.

A little over a year ago I was given the awesome responsibility of leading the Sisterhood. Along the way, I was touched by so many fabulous women of whom I have worked with and are the backbone of our parish.

They give of their time… no matter how much is required. They give of their talents in ways that enrich and allow us to soar and grow not only as a church family, but for the betterment of our community. They care for one another by being there when we need a hand up, or a lifting of our spirits… or even a kind word and a meaningful hug. To all of you, a simple "thank you" seems so insufficient, but it is given from the heart. A special thank you to Kally Key for the wonderful work she is doing on the PASS meal every month. Her dedication over the years has been tremendous and the ladies of our parish have done a fabulous job of providing a great meal every month for this very worthy cause.

Our goals are to continue to grow. Every single woman in this community is a member of our Sisterhood, but we need ALL of you to participate. On certain Sundays during fellowship hour, there will be posters and flyers for updates on upcoming events and programs, such as a "get to know our neighbors" party during the summer to discuss the Sisterhood along with future events and more parish involvement.

We need to get to know you better, not just with a simple hello or hug on Sunday. We need your thoughts, your comments, and your suggestions. We need you to become a hands-on member. To our young mothers, we need to know how we can help you so that you are free to participate more. To our older and wiser women, we need the wisdom and knowledge you have experienced throughout the years to help us grow in the right direction.

As women, we are the glue that keeps our parish together. So, it is time for us all to reach out, make an effort, and experience the thrill of being together, working together, loving one another…. TOGETHER.

Each and every one of you has enriched my heart and soul in more ways than I can express. God bless you all. Here is looking forward to bigger and better things to come…. All we ask is for you to join us.

~Ellen Winn

2018 ~ 2019