

# PROVIDE FOR CONTINUING CLERGY AND LAY EDUCATION



## MATERIAL IN PREPARATION FOR THE 16<sup>TH</sup> ALL-AMERICAN COUNCIL CONTINUING EDUCATION WORKING GROUP, SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

The purpose of this “Read-Ahead” is to provide participants in the All American Council (AAC) with the benefit of the initial thinking that has been done to date on this important issue in the life of the Church. It is meant as **STARTING POINT FOR YOUR OWN DISCUSSIONS AND DELIBERATIONS** and does not represent *official* Church positions. Please feel free to add to, modify, take away, correct, or challenge any of the ideas in here. It is through your collective inputs and the guidance of the Holy Spirit that we will be able to discern the best path forward in this area for the life of the Church during the next decade.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

To get a better initial understanding of some of the issues involved in Continuing Education, what has been done on this to date, and what still needs to be done; the Strategic Planning Committee formed a Working Group which consisted of:

Fr Ian Pac-Urar (Chair), Chairman, Dept of Religious Education, Romanian Episcopate  
Fr John Behr, Dean, St Vladimir's Seminary  
Fr Theodore Boback, Dean and Executive Director, Orthodox Military/ VA Chaplains  
Fr Sergius Halvorsen, Chair, Department of Pastoral life and Ministry  
Fr Nilus Lerro, Director of Student Affairs/Co-Curriculum, St Tikhon's Seminary  
Matushka Michelle Jannakos, St Mary Magdalene Church, Fenton, MI  
Matushka Alexandra Safchuk, Member, Department of Religious Education  
Matushka Valerie Zahirsky, Chair, Department of Religious Education  
Dr Harry Boosalis, Professor, St Tikhon's Seminary  
Protodeacon Peter Danilchick, liaison from the Strategic Planning Committee

## 2. SUMMARY OF THE WORKING GROUP'S PROPOSED STEPS FORWARD

This read-ahead provides further background and thoughts contributed by members of the working group in the three major areas highlighted in the Strategic Plan.

- Require and enable continuing clergy education
- Equip lay people for ministries
- Provide cross-cultural training for all

### **REQUIRE AND ENABLE CONTINUING CLERGY EDUCATION**

*“Require and enable continuing clergy education. Our clergy would benefit greatly from the opportunity for continued spiritual growth and renewal and the chance to extend their pastoral skills. Unless this continuing education is required, it may get deferred by the many urgent daily cares. Curricula, courses, and resources need to be developed or identified.”*

One of the top-level goals of the Strategic Plan is to “Intensify Continuing Education for Clergy and Laity.” In addition, three more goals explicitly list continuing clergy education as a major step in the pursuit of the Strategic Plan, and others allude to clergy education indirectly or implicitly. In effect, the Strategic Plan is shot through with references to the need for continuing education.

The “Weaknesses” section of the Strategic Plan states that the Church suffers from the lack of unified leadership, vision and follow-through. Our culture of stewardship is lacking, and, as a result, our ministries have suffered a major reduction in funding.

The need for a plan of continuing clergy and lay education is urgent. If this goal were not to be effectively accomplished, the consequences would be far-reaching and the success of the Strategic Plan itself would be jeopardized. However, on the positive side, properly constructed and applied continuing education can have a re-energizing impact, creating a dynamic force within our communities. Some examples of practical education for clergy could include ministering in a multi-cultural society, parish development, dealing with contemporary social issues, e.g., beginning and end of life, legal 'must knows' for a parish priest, and many more issues of vital importance to today's clergy (and laity).

This next section of our report specifically addresses Continuing Clergy Education.

### Present and Past Efforts

Present and past efforts regarding continuing education in the OCA are mostly ad hoc in nature and dependent upon the passion, will, and continuing dedication of individuals. For example, opportunities for self-education exist via books available from Orthodox and non-orthodox publishing houses for expanding one's own theological education. Retreats and conferences (e.g., Pastoral Life, ROEA "Confertreat") have been organized by individual parishes, dioceses, clergy associations, seminaries, et al; with attendance sometimes mandatory, but mostly not. There exists some networking among clergy to support one another in continuing education, sharing of pastoral issues and potential approaches to their resolution -- with some formalization in "Pastor to Pastor" newsletter but no follow-through of late. Extensive and formal training programs have been established and are being utilized for Orthodox military chaplains (will be discussed more extensively later on). Programs are also available for certification in clinical pastoral education, although not from within the Orthodox Church or sponsored by the Church.

In summary, clergy education efforts have been pursued in many forms, over time and in a variety of contexts. However, a sense of overall coordination, purpose and continuity is lacking. The effects of this lack can be seen in (1) growing threats to the Church and (2) our weakness in rising to the opportunities we encounter.

### Threats to the Church

The Strategic Plan shows that the Church is threatened on one hand by increasing secularism and on the other hand by "a narrow sense of Orthodox fundamentalism," resulting in the loss of an authentic Orthodox voice. This deterioration is evident despite the theological preparation provided by our seminaries. Clearly, a purposeful, coordinated and well-supported strategy of continuing education is vital to reversing this threatening trend.

A continuing education plan will address the threat of "business as usual," by forcing clergy to reassess and refocus their own work in the Lord's vineyard. The problems of fragmentation and isolation can be ameliorated by regular and purposeful contact and interaction among the shepherds of the Church. Ongoing review, acknowledgement and

repentance can become practices that are anticipated with joy and hope, ultimately building new norms of Church leadership,

### Strengths for Continuing Clergy Education

The Orthodox Church in America has several strengths that make a Continuing Education plan desirable and give it a high likelihood of success. The fullness of the faith has been a bedrock feature of the OCA since its beginnings. Our focus on outreach to the people of North America gives the OCA a unique ability to be the Church for all peoples, regardless of their origins. The principle of conciliarity, while frustrating for a few, can ensure the broadest possible base of support for and participation in a Church wide continuing education program.

### Opportunities for Mission and Evangelization

The Strategic Plan recognizes that the field of persons seeking meaning and spirituality is broad and diverse. Disaffected Christians, Orthodox immigrants, and those experimenting with exotic forms of spiritualism present a wide gamut of challenges and require a similarly wide gamut of knowledge and skills. Over a period of decades these challenges, skills and knowledge requirements continue to evolve and reinvent themselves. Only continuing education can equip clergy to meet these ever-changing demands and take advantage of new and unfamiliar opportunities.

The presence of highly skilled new clergy and laypersons means that the Church has the resources – and the technology -- today to provide continuing education in highly effective ways. What remains is to marshal those resources in purposeful, powerful ways.

Finally the Strategic Plan notes that we have an “historic opportunity to achieve Orthodox unity in North America.” Our challenges are shared by other Orthodox jurisdictions in North America. The continuing education plan of the OCA should be carried out in concert with continuing education efforts in other jurisdictions, so that resources, personnel and technology may be used in the most efficient and effective ways.

### Possible Initiatives

Obtain a clear mandate from the Holy Synod to determine both long-term and transition goals to require and enable their clergy’s continuing education. Assess desirable pastoral characteristics, e.g., what makes a “Good Pastor”. Assess educational and support needs of clergy during the “clergy life cycle”. Include funding for continuing education in clergy compensation. Work to remove a culture of fear that often inhibits clergy from recognizing and expressing their own weaknesses and needs for continuing education and growth.

Create and fund an Office of Continuing Education reporting to the Holy Synod. Develop programs for continuing education on both academic and practical pastoral ministry levels. Examine and evaluate existing and past local efforts as possible models for Church wide programs. Develop new programs in response to research on pastoral characteristics and clergy needs, above. Work with seminaries on continuing education programs, especially distance education, made more feasible today via more sophisticated technology. Take the initiative in working with member Churches of the Episcopal Assembly for cost-effective sharing of resources.

### The Special Role of Chaplains

The experience of present and retired military chaplains in the area of pastoral ministry and continuing education should be drawn upon. The Orthodox Military Chaplain is an Orthodox Priest in uniform serving in the Armed Forces of the United States of America. The Veterans Affairs Medical Center Chaplain serves in the Department of Veterans Affairs in a medical center. They are active members of the respective chaplaincy and share a common core of professional responsibilities for personal counseling, administrative duties, pastoral visitations, cultural activities, humanitarian projects, moral leadership and appropriate collateral duty assignments.

In addition to fulfilling the disciplines, dogmas, doctrines of faith and other canonical directives of all Orthodox Priests, they comply with the administrative requirements of the ecclesiastical endorsing agency. They exercise their priestly mission in three ways: to those of the Orthodox Faith, to those of other faiths and to those who have no religious affiliation.

Both the Military and VA Chaplain receive training in their particular areas. Most if not all Orthodox Military Chaplains have received training in suicide prevention, moral leadership training, personal/values clarification, stress management, marriage enrichment, chaplain orientation, crisis incident response, and critical incident stress management.

Some of the chaplains receive specialized training in areas including: ethics, marriage and family life, alcohol and drug counseling, fund management, administration, training development, training and curriculum development, total quality management, facility management, security management, interpersonal relationship development, leadership development, organizational effectiveness and development, marriage and family life training and counseling, clinical pastoral education, hospital ministry, confinement ministry, volunteerism, multicultural training, VA Chaplains might attend training that equip them to perform specific tasks and or to fill certain positions such as PTSD, palliative care, substance abuse; etc

An important step in drawing upon the experience of present and retired military chaplains would be to develop a data base of the training qualifications the Orthodox Military Chaplain and Orthodox VA Chaplain have and provide a link of this information

to the various departments and offices as the need for certain skills and resources are identified. In certain subject areas, the Chaplain can be part of a train the trainer program.

At the same time, continuing to network and to work on joint conferences and workshops with the Institutional Chaplain Department; and the other departments and offices of the OCA will be essential.

Chaplains can lead workshops on how the parish can respond to the needs of military families as the service member is deployed, what to expect when the service member returns to the community of faith and how to respond as well as to the non military priests in helping them understand the effects of war on the human person and what responsibility they have as healers to those affected.

### **EQUIP LAY PEOPLE FOR MINISTRIES**

*“Equip lay people for ministries. The Church is full of untapped talent, just waiting to be called to do the work of Christ. We need to recognize that talent, define the job and provide the training for the job, and then empower the individual to go and do the job.”*

Lay involvement is crucial in each of the identified strengths in the Strategic Plan, i.e., being actively involved in outreach is necessary for it to be successful and in maintaining the authentic conciliarity of the Church. On the other hand, a possible cause of several of the weaknesses is the absence of lay leadership and participation. This lack of lay participation could be the result of fear, insufficient education or clergy leadership that is unwilling and/or unable to share in ministerial functions

An organized network could be developed which can discern and distribute needed preparatory material, resources, tools and information linking skilled and able lay people with those who might use those skills and resources. Coordination of this network could be facilitated by staff with a national church administrator who sits on the Department of Christian Witness and Humanitarian Aid (DCW&HA) and reports to the Holy Synod. The work previously done by the DCW&HA would need to be reviewed, particularly the extensive Lay Ministries Resource Handbook, to determine what can be updated and reformatted. Authors and others would be queried to take another look at their contributions and update them as necessary and provide new resources and tools by those working “in the field”.

On the Diocesan level, Diocesan Lay Ministry Boards (DLMB) could be created in each Diocese consisting of the local bishop, 3 clergy from different areas of the diocese, 6 lay persons from different disciplines and the coordinator from the DCW&HA who meet regularly by teleconference, does its work through email and has a face-to-face meeting at Diocesan Assemblies. The DLMB would then network with all diocesan parishes and departments to determine the needs and concerns in the diocese, disseminate information and coordinate skills and needs.

It might be useful and possible to develop a Business Directory of Orthodox Professionals who might be able to provide assistance and guidance in areas of expertise, i.e., bioethics, financial planning, developing local community charitable outreach programs, etc.

It is also very important to note that empowering the laity overlaps many other goals of other sections of the Strategic Plan Draft. Education is also a central component of these goals. Parish life, youth work, evangelization and addressing contemporary issues are just a few of the examples of this overlap. Involving prepared and educated lay people would be a key for any of these goals to be achieved. Thus it will be necessary to carefully coordinate lay ministries in all aspects of the overall Strategic Plan.

### **PROVIDE CROSS-CULTURAL TRAINING FOR ALL**

*“Provide cross-cultural training for all, clergy and laity alike. We live in a land and times of many cultures and many problems specific to our time and our place: not just ethnic, but young and old, poor and rich. Before we can effectively minister to them, we need to understand them ‘where they are’ and be sympathetic and responsive to their issues and problems, just as our early missionaries did with the native Alaskans.”*

#### **Past and Present Efforts**

While the Orthodox Church is strongly committed to bringing the faith to all in North America, we are only at the earliest stages of doing so for certain portions of the population, e.g., Hispanics and African-Americans. Hope is offered, however, by the work of Archbishop Dmitri and the Mexican Exarchate regarding the Hispanic population (Spanish-language liturgical service texts are available) and Fr Moses Berry in Missouri regarding African-Americans. Cultural differences also exist with integration of ethnic dioceses, e.g., Romanian, Albanian, Bulgarian, et al. Some of these are being actively addressed, particularly within the Romanian Episcopate.

The greatest cross-cultural gap occurs with young people, who are immersed in a cultural milieu which in many ways is antithetical to Christianity. Attempts to bridge have been made through OCF, Project Real Break, the old Concern magazine, but an organized approach has not yet been undertaken.

Considerable resources are available on the subject of cross-cultural training, especially in the international corporate world, for increased effectiveness (and avoidance of failure) on the part of expatriate business men and women. In our own Church, Fr Michael Oleksa in Alaska has done significant research into cross-cultural differences, e.g., Another Culture, Another World. In addition, the strong theological resources of the Church should be utilized to analyze the cross-cultural differences present in North America, to determine what hinders the transmission of the Gospel message, and what can be done to overcome this.

#### **Possible Initiatives**

A general and introductory cross-cultural training workshop could be developed, perhaps adapted from several utilized by multi-national corporations for expatriate training. A symposium could be sponsored by an Orthodox Seminary on the general topic of Cross-Cultural Training, with guest speakers with experience and knowledge. A small group could be put together who would be dedicated to develop a cross-cultural training workshop. The training workshop could be rolled-out first at seminaries, then in youth and evangelization groups.

“Pioneer” efforts could be encouraged at understanding and ministering to different cultures (e.g., youth, Hispanics, African-Americans, elderly) -- with observations and learning plowed back into the cross-cultural training program. Program developers could work with existing pioneers, e.g., OCF, Mexico, Fr Berry, Fr Perdomo, et al. Necessary infrastructure would need to be developed ( e.g., literature, translations, guides to cross-cultural understanding) in cooperation with the above development group

### 3. AND NOW IT IS YOUR TURN TO INPUT!

The preceding sections have given you some initial thoughts from the Working Group on continuing education for clergy and laity. Now it will be your turn to help revise, modify, refine this goal and the top level steps to actualizing it. During the AAC you will participate in two three-hour Breakout Sessions focused on this Goal. Breakout Session I will focus on what the Church as a whole (parish, deanery, diocese, Church-wide all together) should do. Breakout Session II will focus on the specific programs/projects you and your colleagues in the room, networked together could do to advance this goal.

During Breakout Session I, you and your colleagues will be asked :

- What are the most critical things that need to be done by the Church as a whole to achieve this goal?
- To list up to four specific initiatives for achieving the goal.

During the second Breakout Session, you and your colleagues will focus on specific action steps (concrete projects or programs) that you and your colleagues, connected together in networks, can do to actualize the objectives identified in Breakout Session I. Specifically you will be asked to:

- List up to three specific programs and/or projects that we in this group should commit ourselves to. You will be asked to consider the answers with the context of “What *could* we do with the Lord’s help? What is “impossible with men but *possible with God*”?”
- For each program/project list the specifics of the program/project, i.e. what it will achieve, how will it be achieved, and what people need to be involved.

In preparing for these discussions, you might want to consider the questions below and to solicit input from your priest and the people in your parish as well as from other parishioners and clergy that you know, as well as your own Diocesan Bishop. Space has been left here for you to jot down your comments and bring them to the AAC for your personal reference during the discussions.

- How effective do you think the current continuing educational opportunities are in the Church for both clergy and laity?
  
- If you are clergy, what would you like to have offered in the way of continuing education for your laity? What do they need the most that they aren't getting now? Are there any difficulties hindering getting additional education?
  
- If you are laity, what would you like to have offered in the way of continuing education for your clergy? What do they need the most that they aren't getting now? Are there any difficulties hindering getting additional education?
  
- Do you think that outreach ministries are necessary? Which in particular are ones that you think are important? Which outreach ministries would you personally be interested in participating in, or in helping to organize? What help, guidance, and information would you need from others? What is hindering getting these outreach ministries underway?
  
- What types of cross-cultural issues interest or impact you or your parish? Would you like to initiate a mission to people of a different cultural environment and

background? What tools or training would you need or like to have to better minister to them?