

Volume 1, Issue 2

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Our Journey Together as Orthodox Christians

# In Community

## FROM GRIEF TO JOY

By Father John W. Downing

**Nancy Lee and I traveled for the first time to St. John's** in November, 2000 to conduct a Marriage Enrichment Seminar. Little did I realize it was the beginning of a journey that would redirect my life and last a lifetime. Looking back, I see that the journey that brought me here had two dimensions. The first was the obvious, exterior dimension, visible to my friends and others. The other has been hidden, an active and sometimes stormy struggle, which has, for the most part, remained private. This is the story of that journey.

My wife, Nancy Lee died on October 19, 2002. She had been ill for the last five to

seven years of our thirty year marriage. It was hard to determine the beginning of her illness because of the nature of the disease. During the early stages, she lost her sense of direction. She could not remember how to get to her office or from one department to another. Then she lost her sense of humor – my old stories and jokes no longer brought her to laughter. She lost her radiant smile that could light up a room. She lost her positive attitude toward life. Then, her body became rigid and she lost even her ability to talk. As I remember this painful progression, I am still moved to tears.

By 1999 we knew that the “progressive supra nuclear



Father John & Nancy Lee

palsy” that was destroying her brain and her body would take her life sooner rather than later. My existence changed from that of a husband sharing a wonderful life with his beloved to that of a caregiver and, later, when she was hospitalized, to that of a “watchdog” overseeing

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## UPON THOSE IN THE TOMBS

By Barbara Parker

**My daily walk often takes me on a narrow path through the woods to St. John Cathedral.** Today I stand on the cathedral steps gazing across the snowy landscape toward the St. Sergius chapel, whose golden domes are reflecting the copper gleam of the setting sun. Closer to me, the alder and birch forest parts to reveal a clearing, our community cemetery. Snow-capped crosses of burnished red cedar or subtle hues of granite mark the graves; a small log shrine shelters a bench and colorful mosaic icon of the Theotokos. Framing the icon are the words from Psalm 116: “What shall I render to the Lord for all His bounty to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord.”

The feasts of Nativity and Theophany have passed. Here



in the far north it is a time of bitter cold sunny days and bright nights under a full moon or brilliant display of the northern lights. The days are lengthening and soon we will turn our hearts to the time of Lent, preparing for the joyous Pascha. The snow sparkles and crunches under my feet as I near the cemetery, remembering those who

rest there.

Reading the names on the crosses, I recall the young couple whose hopes are dashed when their baby is stillborn, “born into heaven”; a young father succumbs to a sudden heart attack, leaving a stricken family; my dear friends and my mother bravely face cancer treatments, then slowly weaken and accept death with joy; grandma or grandpa are overtaken by age and disease so that all our love and care can't keep them with us any longer. What challenges are yet to come as we each face our earthly end?

Back in the parish hall is a display of photos and stories of each of these departed ones. They are the faces of life, reminding us of the reality of loss as well as of our hope in Christ. We remember

*(Continued on page 6)*

## Community Cooks: Featuring Eloise Lamb



During the 1950's and 60's, Eloise Lamb and her husband Johnny raised a family of three boys and a girl in Anchorage where they hunted, fished and grew their own vegetables. Their usual fare was moose and salmon – chicken was a special treat. Eloise baked the family's bread, pies and cakes from scratch. In 1970, Eloise and Johnny moved to Yakutat in southeast Alaska where they fished commercially for five years on board their salmon troller, the "Blue Heron." Because of Johnny's poor

health, they bought a 30-acre farm in the Arkansas Ozarks where they lived for two years before moving to Toppenish, Washington. It was there that Eloise's son, Patrick, took her to visit a home church that was then making its way to Orthodoxy. When the group eventually united with the Antiochian Orthodox, Eloise knew that she had found her true Christian home. Realizing they needed to be closer to family because of Johnny's failing health, they returned to Eagle River in 1997. Johnny passed away in 2003 after living for 33 years with Parkinson's and Parkinson's Dementia. During those years, Eloise's life was a testament to the strong bonds of marriage as she coped with her husband's illness. She is a joyful presence in our parish and we miss her during the cold, dark winter months which she passes in the warmth of Arizona.

To order a copy of our cookbook, *Welcome Home*, contact Maye Johnson email: [tommajej@mtaonline.net](mailto:tommajej@mtaonline.net) or call or fax 907-696-3326. Price is \$18 and includes shipping

### My Nancy's Minestrone Soup

1/4 c. butter or 1/3 c. olive oil  
1/2 lb green beans  
1 lg. onion, chopped  
2 carrots, sliced  
2 stalks celery, sliced  
2 red potatoes, cubed  
6 c. bouillon  
1/2 sm. cabbage, sliced thinly  
1 (16 oz.) can tomatoes  
2 med zucchini, sliced  
2 (16 oz.) cans red beans  
1 or 2 cloves minced garlic

In a large pot, brown onion, carrots, celery, green beans and potato in butter or olive oil. Add remaining ingredients and boil until all vegetables are tender. Garnish with Parmesan cheese.

*In Community* is published by: Mary Alice Cook, Barbara Dunaway, Maye Johnson, Sally Eckert, Harold Davis, Dan Kendall, Jennifer Gillquist. We welcome your comments. You may contact us at:

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## Outpost of the Kingdom

Commentary by Mary Alice Cook

Back in the sixties, one of the duties of my busy Baptist youth group was a Thursday night routine we called "Visitation." We gathered at the church, divided ourselves into groups of 3 or 4, received our prospect cards, and fanned out across town, inviting strangers to church. St. John's, I am told, has always relied primarily on word of mouth to attract visitors, and this strategy has worked pretty well. But it has been murmured on occasion that we are the "best kept secret in Eagle River." And that is surely a shame.

I thought of all this on a recent Sunday morning as I listened to Fr. Marc's homily on the day's gospel reading. All of us, he said, are like the blind man Jesus healed at Jericho. We are unable to see and desperately in need of God's help. But we are also like the crowd around the blind man – proud, arrogant and more interested in looking good to others than

in seeking God's help. I am, Fr. Marc told us, just like all of you. It was a simple, loving, healing sermon. His homily, the prayers rising with the incense, the ancient hymns, the many remembrances of the saints, and the crowning joy of the Eucharist – all of it lifted us from our end-of-the week crumpled heaps of discouragement and self-pity to set us once again in the right direction. Every person in Eagle River, I thought, should have the chance to be a part of Orthodox worship.

My family first learned about St. John's 14 years ago because we were in the right place at the right time. We visited because we trusted the person whose word we received. We left a Bible-believing Baptist church with a full slate of activities – including weekly visitation – to throw in our lot with a sect quite unfamiliar to mainstream American Christians. And we did this because we discovered a Church that told us, right

from the start, that the purpose of the Christian life is not meetings, committees and programs, but to "put on Christ." C.S. Lewis said in Mere Christianity that "...the Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became man for no other purpose."

I would be the last person to advocate more committees, more tasks, more scheduling. But somewhere between regular, planned cold-calling and the elusive, undependable word of mouth, we at St. John's must continue to look for opportunities to "draw men into Christ." If St. John's, and, by extension, the Orthodox Church, remains the best kept secret in Eagle River, then shame on us.

**Jonathon Livingston Seagull** by Richard Bach (1970) **The Little Prince** By Antoine de Saint Exupery (1943)  
A review by **Sally Eckert**

*These two books do not fall within the Orthodox—or necessarily even the Christian—genre; and I probably would not have read either without encouragement from Archimandrite Meletios Webber and Bishop Kallistos Ware. I am so thankful to them!*

**We move from the magical thinking of childhood into the reality of work and collaboration with God as we mature.**

*Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, is found on the new age or motivational shelves of the bookstore. Among Bach's metaphysical works, this one lends itself surprisingly to Orthodox perspective. One might say, somewhat algebraically, that  $x = \text{flying in Jonathan}$ . Other values may be substituted for  $x$ , and I suggest  $x = \text{the Christian pilgrimage}$ . Within this metaphor, the book can speak eloquently on deification and the communion of saints; mission; maximalism; and evangelism.

*The Little Prince*, is found on the children's shelves. A small prince who lives on a very small planet—so small that he can see numerous sunsets by walking toward the setting sun—visits other small planets with some disappointment. These first brief visits are unremarkable; but then, the little prince meets a fox, and everything changes! I won't say more because the book packs a surprising punch, and I don't want to spoil it by saying too much.

One may see reincarnation in both books, but need not perceive them so. Consider how we Christians must pick up our crosses daily and follow Jesus. Theologians have even suggested that this present life consists of a succession of exercises in dying and rising to prepare us for passing through biological death into life (unless we should happen to see the Second Coming). As Bishop Kallistos Ware has taught in lectures on death and resurrection, we encounter many painful challenges and disappointments in life, and each may seem at the time like a kind of death, followed by resurrection. We move from the magical thinking of childhood into the reality of work and collaboration with God as we mature. We journey through the difficult teen years into adulthood; from hopeful preparation for employment into rejection, and back to preparation again. We suffer rejection in love, and some must negotiate the painful grieving process of divorce. From mid-life, we journey into declining health and old age; and so on. We ever walk through the valley of the shadow.... and we are retarded from growth and fulfillment if we reject any of these *crosses* along the way. We must pass through them if we are to become genuine persons. In her wisdom, the Church teaches us to cross ourselves because this helps us find God's transfiguring presence with us in our pilgrimage through these events. *The Little Prince* showcases the heart and love. The heart is the very center of the human person—located in the bosom, but not the organ that pumps blood. It is a chamber to encounter, with physical eyes closed, the heavenly iconostasis; to speak our prayers softly into God's ear, to commune in silence. In the Eastern view, salvation involves the *reintegration of the mind and the heart*—which is also, incidentally, the discovery of the path to the Kingdom of Heaven.

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## **Who is God? Who am I? Who are You? Introduction to Basic Christian Psychology**

by Dee Pennock, Early Church Publications, St. Tikhon's Press; South Canaan, Pennsylvania; 1973.

A review by **Deacon Dan Gray**

It would be natural to assume that after going through this little primer on Basic Christian Psychology for three years with our residents at the St. James House, a person might want to put it down and move on. But we all know that assuming is usually bad, and this little book is very, very good. Dee Pennock does an amazing job of shedding light upon Christian psychology and does so on solid Orthodox ground.

The three short questions contained in the title of this book lead quickly to deep and discerning writing about our common, often clouded psychological qualities. According to a conversation that the author had with Fr.

**Dee Pennock does an amazing job of shedding light upon Christian psychology and does so on solid Orthodox ground.**

Marc Dunaway, she wrote this book out of the desire to explain the basic workings of our minds to a church youth group, but was frustrated with the lack of available and concise Orthodox writing about basic psychology. In this reviewer's opinion, that gap has been splendidly filled. To discover that the Scripture, Church Fathers and Saints had a lot to say about the deep inner workings of our minds regarding God, ourselves, and others was a wonderful thing.

The author wastes few words in getting right to business in this easy-to-underestimate book of only 160 pages. In the very first chapter she asks, "How much do you really know about yourself?" After just twelve pages you may well be ready to say, "Not as much as I thought!" Nevertheless, the author provides, in the following nine short chapters, everything needed to gain a rich, deep and holistic understanding of God, oneself, and others. You will encounter familiar words like "pride" and "vanity" but the depth and insight that the author provides into these twin passions that lead to separation from God and self-delusion will arm the reader for real spiritual growth. While readers may consider the 70's-style illustrations dated, the lively text comes across as relevant to today's challenging world and a fresh antidote to current convoluted, media-saturated popular psychology offerings.





her care. My work as a priest/therapist and hospice chaplain had allowed me to observe many “end of life” experiences and given me an awareness of the deterioration that occurs with some diseases. Thus, I was as prepared as one can be for the traumatic changes I observed in Nancy Lee. But I was, in so many other ways, also completely unprepared.

I was not aware, at first, of grief. My recognition of it grew gradually. The first clue was depression. My feelings, alternately of despair, loss, regret and grief overwhelmed me at times. Having spent over thirty years as a therapist, I knew I needed help, so I found a “grief counselor” and went to work to develop a process to cope with the changes in my life. It was during this time that a good friend, Samia Habib, gave me a wonderful book by Fr. Anthony Coniaris, *Daily Vitamins for Hurting Hearts*. I read it once before Nancy died and have read it twice more since. I could not have survived without these Godly words – between this book and the Psalms, I found my daily spiritual anchor.

I have forgotten exactly when Nancy’s illness meant the loss of her job. I do remember that we lost over half our income as a result. I had to not only continue working but also take on even more clients to keep us financially solvent. These were long, lonely, fatiguing – physically and emotionally – days for me, as they were, of course, for Nancy too. She knew very well what was happening to her; all she could do was submit. Others cared for her during the day and I took the night shift. She began to lose her balance and fall. She fell frequently. She often fell backward while I stood beside her, holding her hand. We made at least three nighttime trips to the emergency room; one such trip resulted in 40 stitches in her arm. It was after one of these falls that the decision was made to hospitalize her to ensure her safety. At that point, my life changed yet again.

I had to learn to live alone – to eat, sleep, drive, and spend time at home alone. But I knew I was not really alone. I was

aware of God’s presence most of the time. During my therapy sessions, I spoke about feeling lonely, sad, disappointed and hurt. But I became aware that I did not feel angry about anything that had happened to me. I remember telling my therapist that I did not choose to be angry. I did not want to waste my energy on anger, for it required a lot of energy just to grieve.

Then, I had to accept another change. Nancy fell asleep in the Lord and added to my list of feelings was that of emptiness. So much time and energy had been devoted to her physical care and now, that was all finished. Not knowing what to do with myself, I worked even longer hours and that helped, for a while. All day I stayed busy and could tuck thoughts of Nancy in the back of my mind. Then, at the end of the day, I went to the cemetery and sobbed beside her grave.

Everything around me reminded me of Nancy. Then I remembered that trip to Eagle River and a conversation with Fr. Marc Dunaway about returning for rest and recovery after Nancy died. With a phone call it was agreed that I would visit in January 2003 for a month. While in Alaska, I was aware of feeling released from depression but also of sadness at being separated from Nancy. We had not been “joined at the hip” as some believed but, spiritually and emotionally, we had been inseparable. Before my return to California, Fr. Marc and I discussed my coming back to Eagle River for a two-year period of recovery. Bp. Joseph concurred with our plan.

Breaking up housekeeping was harder than I imagined it would be. I gave many things to my children and sold the rest. I packed and shipped the books. I said goodbye to friends, clients and co-workers, to my children, to Nancy’s parents

***My grief has not vanished, but it no longer overwhelms me.  
It is not my enemy. It has transformed me.***

and to our St. Michael’s family in Whittier, with whom we shared fourteen happy years. I put my dog Teddy in the car and headed for Alaska. Nancy loved road trips and every passing mile reminded me of how the two of us enjoyed stopping to savor a new vista.

Arriving in Eagle River on June 22, I knew I had turned to yet another page in my life. I still felt pain, loss and grief but I also experienced peace and relaxation. There was calmness in my life among new friends and new work. Living alone has become a positive experience. Being with young adults at the St. James House, serving as their chaplain and taking meals with them several times each week, has taught me much. The most unexpected of my new experiences has been the pleasure of learning the Eastern rite of worship. I was unfamiliar with the plethora of Eastern saints and services, prayers and hymns, Troparia and Kontakia. Neither was I aware that so much Eastern worship happens in the dark (a more frequent circumstance in the Alaskan winter!)

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My grief has not vanished, but it no longer overwhelms me. It is not my enemy. It has transformed me. To kick against suffering is only to make it worse. I have found His peace in great abundance through worship, prayer and quiet meditation. The two dimensions of my struggle have joined and I no longer experience a feeling of separation within myself. My friends, old and new, have been major sources of emotional and spiritual strength and I thank all of you for your love and care.

I am not “over” my grief at the loss of Nancy, nor do I want to be. I pray for her every day, at every Liturgy, and hope she is aware of my prayers and of my love for her. At those times

when I particularly miss her, I spray a bit of her perfume into the air and, for a moment, she seems very close. I can smile now, too, because I see a light on my road, a new vision of joy. In this vision, Nancy is no longer by my side. She is forever in my heart.

*Fr. John Downing served 14 years as priest at St. Michael's (Western rite) in Whittier, California. Fr. John is currently assistant pastor at St. John's. In Feb. 2005, Fr. John conducted a very successful Marriage Enrichment Seminar at St. Michael's Orthodox Church in Van Nuys, California*



**Would you be interested in teaching in Alaska?**

**St. John's Orthodox Christian School**, (K-6), located in a vibrant church community in Eagle River, is recruiting for the 2005-06 school year. Are you a college graduate, looking for an adventure with a purpose? Are you a retired teacher, interested in employment that provides a chance for service? Please contact us to find out more:

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**Eagle River Institute: Looking Back**, *A Personal Perspective by Robin Armstrong*

Attendees at the August, 2004 Eagle River Institute were fortunate to hear a challenging series of talks brought by Archimandrite Meletios Webber and Jim Forest. Fr. Mel encouraged us to move from brain-centered faith to a heart-encounter with a Person. In our hearts, he explained, we find the place of communion with God. To be in this place requires training oneself to enter into quiet listening and inner stillness. It is active surrender. “Descent. You will find life in your heart. There you must live.” (St. Theophan the Recluse, quoted by Fr. Mel) He used words like these from the Church fathers, old and new, including quotes from Bp. Kallistos Ware, as support for his teaching. His talks were difficult and compelling – difficult because our cultural mind-set is based on rationality. The Western way of life is technological and objective. We are forced by our civilization to live in a world of ideas and things. The mind, like the ranks of machines in our world, seems to run at top speed, analyzing and problem solving, even with matters of the faith. The problem with all this is the weakening of personal relationships, of authentic encounter. Entering into one’s heart, and stillness, feels almost unnatural. Fr. Mel spoke directly to this dilemma, reminding us that not all cultures are, or have been, based on rationality. The Jesus prayer, for example, is a blessed way to “practice the presence of God,” as the classic book by Brother Laurence encourages. Jim Forest echoed this theme when he declared that “Prayer refers to all we do to turn our hearts to God.” As we are still before God, listening to His voice, may we find deeper communion with Him – and our true selves. The Eagle River Institute has, for 10 years, offered steadfast Orthodox Christian teaching, by scholars and theologians from around the world. All who attend feel a renewal in their spiritual faith.

**Eagle River Institute**  
of Orthodox Christian Studies

**“Liturgy and Life”**  
with

**Rev. Dr. Alkiviadis Calivas**  
and **Rev. Dan Suci**  
**August 1-5, 2005**

sponsored by

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## UPON THOSE IN THE TOMBS

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Father Stephen Lourie blesses the resting places of the departed at Pascha.

ber them on the anniversaries of their passing with prayers and, at designated times, with an offering of memorial wheat.

The first person to be buried here was Agi Lund, a dear woman who lost her battle with cancer in 1983. We were on our journey to Orthodoxy, embracing community life, so it seemed right to bury her in our midst; to remember and honor her in death. We used the services of a local mortuary and the family purchased a conventional coffin. Land was available and no laws hindered it, so a cemetery was established.

In the intervening years, members of the cathedral community have come to play a more active role in the process that surrounds death and dying. As Grammy Phyl, the matriarch of the Webster family, fell ill, the local Hospice group oversaw her care, teaching and supporting us as we pitched in to minister to her needs. So it was that I found myself at her side, gently swabbing her lips, feeding her and telling her how my children had enjoyed her cookies and willingness to play cards with them when they dropped by her home.

Weeks passed and the call came that Grammy Phyl had passed away. Incense hung in the air when I arrived at the house. The priests were praying the Trisagion prayers for the departed and the family was at her bedside. Later, a group of willing women, myself included, gently prepared her body for

burial by bathing, anointing with fragrant oil and dressing her, all the while singing hymns and reading Psalms in turn. Nothing in my middle class American background had prepared me for this task, yet it seemed right to join in a practical act of love with my grieving sisters. Phyl was then laid in a hand-crafted wooden coffin made by men of the community.

On a chilly day in February, a procession bearing her coffin trudged the quarter mile from her home to the cathedral. There she was honored with an all-night vigil of continuous Psalm

*"For today as from a bridal chamber,  
Christ has shown forth from the tomb,  
And filled the women with joy saying:  
Proclaim the glad tidings to the Apostles!"*

-from Paschal Matins

reading, much like the Holy Friday Vigil, followed by the funeral Liturgy and the final procession to the cemetery. Her loving cathedral family, from children to elders, filed by and tossed dirt and flowers into the frosty grave. Finally we all gathered in the parish hall for a meal and remembrances.

Death mobilizes the St. John's community in a unique way. Some are called to cook and clean for the family, others to wield picks and shovels opening a grave. Singers prepare the funeral services; writers compose obituaries, memorial booklets and eulogies. Artists gather displays for the memorial meal; children make colorful cards and grave decorations. Close ones comfort and minister to the needs of the bereaved.

Woodworkers fashion lovingly crafted coffins to enclose the bodies of their friends, sometimes working together all night to finish. A group of volunteers oversees and maintains the cemetery, its grounds and records.

I consider myself blessed to have witnessed the joyous miracle of birth as well as the journey of dying. We each come into the world as a unique temple of the Holy Spirit and we are called to our heavenly home, each in our own way. There is no road map or guide book save the Orthodox way of love and communion, infused by the Light of Christ. In that Light our remembrance of the departed comes into focus at Pascha. For our community, the afternoon vespers of Holy Pascha culminates in a procession to the cemetery with the Resurrection banner held high. Children, parents, friends and neighbors decorate the graves with freshly cut flowers and unite to sing, "Christ is risen from the dead trampling down death by death and upon those in the tombs bestowing life."

At Pascha this year, the snow will be melting in Alaska, green grass appearing, birch tree buds swelling to create a pale green haze. This wintry landscape will be springing back to life, reminding us of the hope that we, too, die to live again in Christ.

*Suggested reading:*

***Bodily Resurrection***, by Sisters of the Orthodox Monastery of the Transfiguration, Conciliar Press, 1997.



Procession to the Cathedral with the departed.

## EVERYONE'S HOME

by Deacon Dan Gray



*There are some trips one can never anticipate, especially those begun in the anxious hubris of youth. Most of us prefer the direct route from one place to another, but when you think back to some of your best journeys, there are times when both the wandering and the arriving made the trip a much more memorable one. This story is about one of those trips.*

Like many young people I sometimes used my freedom after high school for consumptive and promiscuous living. Still, the small voice remained inside and finally, I surrendered my will and passed the map of my life back into God's hands. The fight over who would hold the map, however, continued as I tried to improve on the path God had chosen to bring me home. With the help of the Navy, I found myself in northwest Florida, where churches are named for streets instead of saints. Stewart Street Baptist Church was my first landing spot. I don't even recall how I wandered into that particular church except that it was on the way to Naval Air Station Whiting Field from

"find myself." What I did find in Hawaii was a life-long travel companion and heartmate named Theresa. We regressed into Roman Catholicism to get married with the support of our families, but I still played tug-of-war with God and kept wandering.

During the next fifteen years, we explored as many churches as duty stations - the Nazarenes in Ewa Beach, Hawaii, Vineyard Christian Fellowship in Virginia Beach, Catholics in Monterey, and Lutherans in Venezuela. Our final posting, to Alaska in 1994, led us for a time into the Assemblies of God. There, we were told by Pastor Jack to "embrace the spirit of the first-century church." We, and Pastor Jack, had no idea where that would soon lead us. It was through a providential meeting with an old friend that things were finally to change. We had met Brad Barnes in Florida in 1985, before he turned in his wings and entered an Episcopal seminary to pursue the Truth. In his

the patience with which our conversion was considered. While we read and prayed, our pastor, Fr. Marc, lovingly and wisely slowed the pace of our church-hopping to give our hearts time to quiet and listen to God. The final step in our wandering was to move into the physical community surrounding the Church. There is a special atmosphere here; we wanted to breathe it in, get to know the people and hear the bells ring from the church each day, reminding us of who we are and why we are here.

Recently, I was asked to relate the short version of my search to fellow students at the Antiochian Village in Pennsylvania. I told them that my journey to Orthodoxy was like a sailor searching for a special bar in a small port town. The bars were close to one another and the fog made it difficult to see clearly. I finally found my way to the one I was seeking, but it took a long time and I bumped into a lot of other things along the way. While my taste for adventure is still keen, my search for the Truth is over. Thank God! We have been in the Church for nearly ten years and living in the community since 1996. This life has been full of wonderful and challenging people and experiences. It has not been easy for Theresa and me or for our children. We knew all along that the search for truth is an "opposed" journey, since the evil one knows our weaknesses. But it helps that we at St. John's share this journey, as do all Orthodox Christians, and other seekers as well - even if they don't yet know it - all over the world.

*Dn. Dan and Theresa Gray are in their third year of overseeing the St. James House program. Dan was ordained Deacon on December 26, 2004 at Saint John Orthodox Cathedral.*

***There is a special atmosphere here; we wanted to breathe it in, get to know the people and hear the bells ring from the church each day, reminding us of who we are and why we are here.***

Milton, Florida, the little two traffic light town that lived with the drone of Navy aircraft overhead from dawn to midnight year round. Pastor Jerry made it clear that each of us must commit his own life to Christ and not bank his salvation hopes on the dim memory of baptism by misguided parents in an "apostate" church. I was baptized twice, in the same year, as any spoken doubts about one's salvation are not lightly entertained in a pre-millennial, fundamental, Bible-believing, independent church like Pastor Jerry's.

My wandering continued with my naval service. California brought Calvary Chapel and a lot of praise and worship experience. My first assignment to Hawaii found me at the Barbers Point base chapel leading a teenage youth group. I also frequented the surfing-till-sunset "church" at times to

reading of church history, he came across the Orthodox Church and soon studied himself right out of seminary and into Orthodox Christianity! Brad had picked up *Becoming Orthodox* by Father Peter Gillquist and he phoned us to say that what he read was amazing and that we HAD to go and visit one of the "convert" Orthodox churches featured in the book. We agreed to take a look. This led us, one November evening, up Monastery Road in Eagle River to our first Great Vespers service. About 11 seconds after entering the church service, Theresa was ready to convert to Orthodoxy and end our search for Truth. Rome-o-phobe that I was, it took me a few weeks to come around but the sense of timelessness I experienced in that first service was supremely satisfying. One of the most impressive things about St. John's was

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## **SAINT INNOCENT, TRUE APOSTLE TO AMERICA**

*By Maye Johnson*

**By 1824**, twenty-three years before the acquisition of Alaska by the United States, the native people of Alaska had begun to hear about Christianity through the *promyshlenniki* (Russian fur traders). They were ready to hear more when 27-year old Fr. John Veniaminov – born John Popov in Irkutsk, Russia - arrived in Unalaska in July of that year. Fr. John traveled to Alaska in response to his Bishop's plea for a priest willing to go and minister to the native people of Alaska. The journey from Irkutsk to Unalaska took fourteen months. Fr. John settled his mother, his brother, his wife Elizabeth and his young son Innocent into a native-style *barabara* (a semi-subterranean hut) and began gathering supplies to build his own home, a church and furniture. He also set about learning from the natives their language, customs, beliefs and traditions. Only then did he start teaching them about Christianity, weaving their stories into the ancient Biblical texts. In time, he developed a written language for them and taught them to read and write. He was able to translate the Gospel of Matthew into (Unangan) Aleut, along with writing other materials for the teaching of the natives. While caring for his flock on Unalaska he traveled by ship, *bidarka* (kayak), reindeer and dog sled, going from one island to another in the Aleutian chain, preaching and studying the language and customs.

Fr. John's intense curiosity about the world around him led to his renown as a clock maker, carpenter, explorer, anthro-

pologist, natural scientist, educator, pastor and theologian. He is considered one of the most remarkable Alaskans of all time, a luminous star in the sometimes dark history of the Russian-American colony.

After ten years in Unalaska, Fr. John relocated to New Archangel (Sitka) – the capital of Russian America – where he spent the next five years among the Tlingit Indians learning their language and customs and again translating the Gospel and Liturgy into the local language. In 1838, he returned to Russia to plead for help in his mission work and, during his absence, his wife died, leaving two sons and four daughters. Metropolitan Philaret saw to the children's care and in November of 1840, Fr. John became the monk, Innocent. He returned to his flock as Bishop and his diocese included the Pacific rim of Asia, Canada, Alaska, and, eventually, the lower 48 states. After ten more years of traveling, teaching, establishing missions and encouraging ordination of the local men, he returned to Russia and was elevated to Metropolitan of Moscow in 1867. He fell asleep peacefully at age 82, on Holy Saturday, March 31, 1879, and was glorified by the Russian Orthodox Church in 1977. His labors, craftsmanship and faithfulness are evident today in many Alaskan villages. He laid a firm foundation for Orthodoxy in the New World and was a true apostle to America. He is commemorated in the Orthodox Church on October 6, the anniversary of his canonization.

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