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Our Journey Together as Orthodox Christians

# In Community

## TAKING ORTHODOXY TO AMERICA by Fr. Marc Dunaway

In 1987, when Metropolitan Philip received the Evangelical Orthodox communities into the Antiochian Archdiocese, he called Orthodoxy America's best kept secret and he urged us as new converts to do something about this. "Take Orthodoxy to America," he said. That simple charge has been a guiding principle for much of how St. John's has developed over the last twenty-seven years.

A big part of that work was to make the rich tradition of Orthodox worship, something that is truly the heart of Orthodox parish life, accessible to the people of our culture and our country. I can still remember how hopeful I was in 1976 when I first read Bishop Kallistos Ware's book The Orthodox Church, realizing this was the Christianity we wanted, only to be completely bewildered by my visit to a nearby Russian Church. I couldn't see how what I had read in this book was present in this strange swirl of foreign music, brass candle-stands, flickering lights, and the mysterious movements of the clergy hidden behind a wall of Icons. It was culture shock. Later, of course, I came to understand these surroundings and to appreciate their history and their beauty. Still, I knew that as we grew into the fullness of Orthodoxy we had to stay true to who we were as Americans. We could not simply imitate the customs of Orthodox Russia, Greece, or the Middle East. Fortunately we had many wise and good teachers from the Orthodox world that helped guide us in this journey.

I still believe today that Metropolitan Philip's charge to us to take Orthodoxy to America is as important as ever and is still a guiding principle of who we are at Saint John's. And in the all-important area of worship I believe the experience of our parish over twenty-seven years can offer several proven suggestions, a few of which I will briefly list below.

- The worship of the Church must clearly be a common, corporate act where everyone participates according to his role, whether as priest or deacon, reader or lay person, man or woman. This means we need to encourage congregational singing of all the main, regular hymns in every service. This is what those from the "West" expect when they "go to Church." They want to sing and there are plenty of beautiful Orthodox hymns that will make this possible.

- The prayers of the priest, especially those in the Divine Liturgy, need to be said aloud so that all can hear and knowledgeably give their assent with a meaningful "Amen." Happily, this same exhortation is also forcefully put forth in the recent book, The Heavenly Banquet by Fr. Emmanuel Hatzidakis, a priest from the Greek tradition.

- The Kiss of Peace (as a hand-shake or an embrace) in the Divine Liturgy should be exchanged among the people and not just by the concelebrating clergy at the altar. This is a custom stemming from biblical times and by falling into dis-use it may have weakened the participation of the people and undermined their identity as the people of God, united to one another in Christian love. We at St. John's have found that the brief bustle this may cause is not disruptive to the flow of Liturgy for the people, as long as the dialogue is kept to the liturgical greeting, "Christ is in our midst. He is and ever shall be."

- Very rarely should hymns be sung in a foreign language. Of course all Orthodox love to sing the Paschal hymn, "Christ is risen..." in various languages to celebrate the universality of this joy, but besides this and maybe an occasional "Kyrie eleison," using a foreign language is not useful for a parish of English-speaking converts. Singing in English needs to include even such hymns as that sung to the

Bishop, "Eis polla..." which is easily translated into "Many years..." (Of course for parishes made up of immigrants it goes without saying that the use of another language besides English may be necessary and good.)

- Service books that are clear should be provided to people who want them. There is no reason why we should keep people from following the order of our services. We can also make a reasonable effort to provide hymn sheets that contain the variable hymns for the day.

- The language of the Liturgy has to be the language of the people. This ancient Orthodox tradition is something Metropolitan Philip has preached many times. But it is high time we realize that the language of modern America is not Shakespearean English. It makes no sense to perpetuate "Thee's" and "Thou's" and archaic verb forms in our prayers. If we do, we will eventually end up in the same situation as the Russians and Greeks are in today with a liturgical language that

*Still, I knew that as we grew into the fullness of Orthodoxy we had to stay true to who we were as Americans.*

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“Because we went into the St. John’s Orthodox booth at the Alaska State Fair,” is usually the way the answer begins to the frequent question, “How did you find our church?” Of course, there is always more to the story, but the short answer always seems to raise some eyebrows. We joined St. John’s during Lent in 2013. I say “during” because it was a process begun with my reuniting with the Orthodox Church after many years of being away and concluded with my husband, Richard, becoming a catechumen and being baptized and chrismated on Pentecost Sunday. For us, it has been a long journey home.

As a little girl in Canton, Ohio my grandmother, Elena Maga Ghesu, took me to St. George Romanian Orthodox Church. I was baptized there when I was 22 days old by Father Damian. My great-aunt and uncle, Domnica and Ioan Maga, are my godparents. My maternal grandparents were immigrants from Romania and very involved in the life of the church in Canton. I am forever grateful for my grandmother’s faithfulness, prayers, and nurturing me in the Church. When I was eight or nine years old my father insisted on taking the family to a large Protestant Church and that started me on a path that took almost 60 years until I returned “home” to Orthodoxy.

We are so thankful for the Orthodox Church, for St. John’s Church, and for the wonderful community of the faithful here who have taken us in, given us a spiritual home, and are a blessing every day.

I attended Malone College, a Quaker school, in Canton, Ohio and there met Richard Bower, a young man from Hughesville, Pennsylvania, who was studying to be a Quaker minister. We found love and grew in faith together and were married in 1968. Richard went on to Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky in the early 1970’s. We had our hands full of adventures in those days—he with his studies and serving a Friends (Quaker) Church in southern Ohio, and me with two small children. After seminary, we went to serve the Friends Church in Alliance, Ohio. From there we went to Richmond, Virginia where Richard did graduate studies in New Testament at Union Theological Seminary and assisted in a Friends Church there. The next assignment was a Friends Church in Tecumseh, Michigan. Then we had one of those “crossroads” experiences in which we had to make some decisions about the direction our lives would take. Richard had prepared himself for a teaching ministry but it seemed that all those doors were closing. We decided that we would move to Colorado where we had supportive friends and go to “Plan B.”



**Richard and Patricia Bower**

We lived in Colorado for 10 years in the Denver area. Richard worked in warehousing for a couple of companies. Our children, John David and Amy, graduated from Wheat Ridge High School and both went on to Wheaton College. Then Richard took a position with American Woodmark Corporation, a cabinet manufacturer based in Winchester, Virginia. Our first assignment was in Orlando, Florida. I could hardly believe it. The day we moved from Colorado we had ice on the ground. That night I was swimming in the warm Florida waters! How could it get any better than that? The company was great and Richard’s career advanced quickly. We moved to Virginia for a year and then on to an assembly plant in Kingman, Arizona for three years and then back to Virginia where Richard eventually assumed the role of Vice President of Logistics and Supply Chain Services. He retired in 2010 after 20+ years of service. So what does all of this have to do with Alaska?

In 2001 our daughter, Amy, her husband, Dan, and their three daughters, Katya, Greta, and Jana, moved from Denver, Colorado to Palmer, Alaska. It was something they wanted to do because they did not feel Denver was the healthiest of environments to raise their family. Richard was thrilled to put it mildly. He had always wanted to live in Alaska from the time he was in high school. Of course, I knew about his “dream” but made sure that he understood the wedding vows of “whither thou goest...” to include everywhere EXCEPT Alaska. I was sure I could not take the cold, the dark, the bears, plus whatever else. Now our daughter had moved there! We made a trip or two every year to visit in Alaska. In 2011 we were at the State Fair and I saw the St. John’s booth. I went in and met (then) Deacon Matthew. I told him my story and how I missed the Orthodox Church. He gave me some literature, some excellent information about Ancient Faith Radio, and invited us to come visit St. John’s. And we did go visit the church a time or two in the fall of 2011. (Now, Father Matthew refers to me as “My Fair Lady” since we first met at the State Fair booth.) We remember meeting Father Harold. Ancient Faith Radio became my daily lifeline as I “reconnected” with my spiritual roots. In the spring of 2012 we decided to move to Alaska, even though it meant being farther away from John David, Vicki and our grandchildren Shayne, Karis, Marshall, Justice, Chase, and Ransom who live near Boston. While getting settled in Alaska, amid the frustration of attending Protestant services with our daughter, we listened to some inspiring Lenten lessons from Father Schmemmann on Ancient Faith Radio. My husband suggested I call St. John’s and see if they had the book. Maris (the church secretary) assured me they did, so we drove down to Eagle River that afternoon to get it. Father Marc also met us and reminded us that there were Lenten services that evening...and we have been here ever since! We are so thankful for the Orthodox Church, for St. John’s Church, and for the wonderful community of the faithful here who have taken us in, given us a spiritual home, and are a blessing to us every day. “You are the Body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Cor. 12:27).

**Dick Eckert: Memory Eternal** by Mary Alice Cook

Many of us at St. John’s knew Richard Eckert as a faithful church member who came up with a model for the geodesic dome design of the Cathedral, and as a genial lawyer who told entertaining stories about his many Alaskan adventures. Most of us did not know that he was an outstanding athlete who entered college with a full football scholarship, or that he had to give up sports after a car accident during his first year. Neither did we know that besides a law degree, Dick also earned degrees in Civil Engineering and Business Finance, and that he paid for law school by working summers in Alaska, building roads and bridges. Dick loved Alaska, and after law school he moved his family north to take a job with an Anchorage bank. He also maintained a private law practice, and spent a couple of years mining in the mid-80’s. Dick’s association with St. John’s also began in the 1980’s, after his first marriage had failed, and he and his new wife, Sally, were going through a rough patch of their own. Sally reconnected with her friends, Gordon and Judi Hoyt, who were members of Maranatha North in Eagle River. Judi was excited about the group’s journey to Orthodoxy, and after visiting, Sally decided to move in to the Big House and “wait and see what God would do.” Eventually, God brought Dick to the fledgling church in Eagle River, and reunited him with his wife. When Fr. Harold started talking about a new church building, Dick, ever the engineer, proposed a geodesic design, which would be both practical and economically efficient. He bought a book on geodesic math and went to work on a balsa wood model, which was then enthusiastically endorsed by the church members and leaders. The building crew decided to purchase a dome kit, and then tie in the extensions to complete the design of the cross as it exists in the finished construction. Dick loved the people at St. John’s and, in Sally’s words, “the worship breathed life and joy and meaning into his life. He was deeply grateful to be able to contribute to the church design and to learn of God’s mercy and grace here.” He passed away on August 29, 2013, and as Sally contemplates the monument that will mark his grave, she thinks of a passage of scripture that reflects the new direction his life took here: “*The Kingdom of Heaven is within you.*” May his memory be eternal.



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## ORDINATIONS AT SAINT JOHN ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL SEPTEMBER 7 & 8, 2013



Deacon Matthew Howell was ordained Father Matthew on September 7. He now serves as priest in Wasilla, AK at Saint Herman's parish.



Sb. Deacon John Phelps was ordained to the Holy Diaconate by Archbishop JOSEPH on September 7.



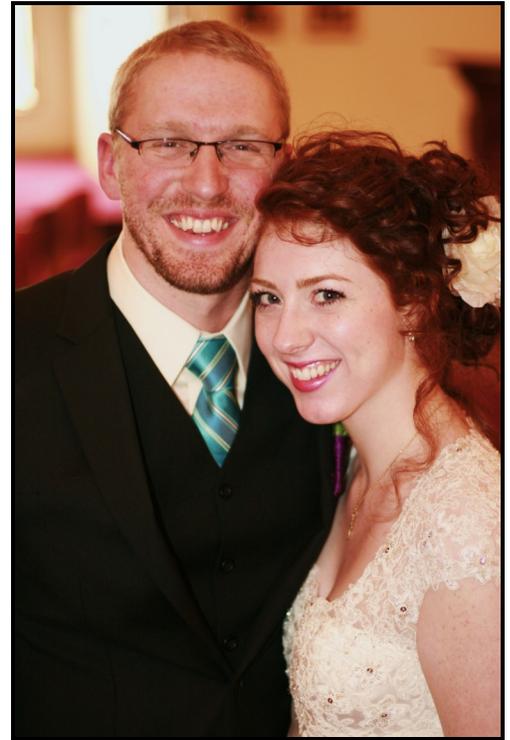
Deacon John Rogers (in gold vestment) beams after being ordained as Father John. He is pictured here with his father, Fr. Gregory Rogers, and his mother Kh. Pam, along with his wife Kh. Christine and brother, Father Phillip Rogers (on far right) and Archbishop JOSEPH in the center.



Katy Arvidson (seated) spent all winter coaching Meghan Dougherty, Sydney Medders and Ariana Stallman to prepare them for the Bible Bowl. They won first in the region and second in the nationals! Archbishop JOSEPH congratulated them and gave them each a gift.



Peter Lynch and Annmarie Burnell married May 19. Peter's brother, Fr. Zachariah, concelebrated.



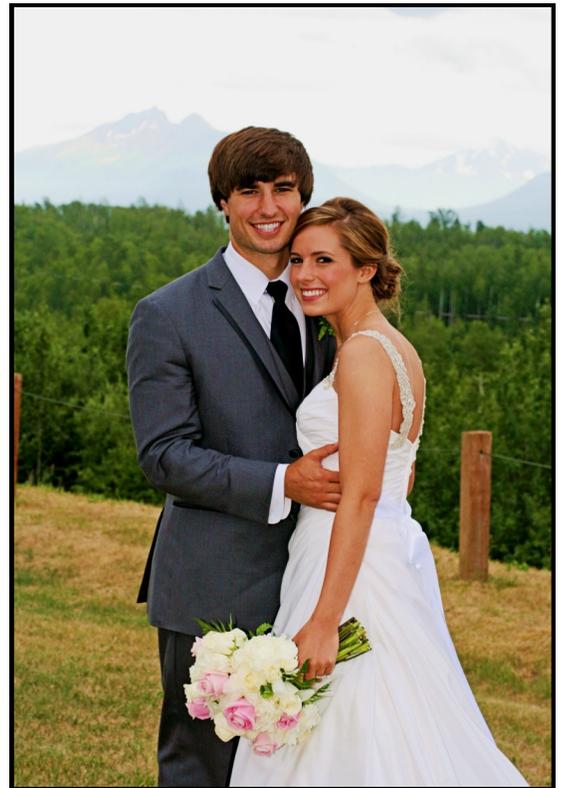
On June 2, Alexius Clodfelter and Delaney Scott were married.



Sarah Temple married Kevin Baker on June 16.

## MANY BLESSED WEDDINGS IN 2013

(Photos of Clodfelter, Baker and Rolf weddings taken by **JulianaAdele Photography.**)



On June 30 Matthew Rolf and Lindsey Dyal were married.

## There and Back Again by Mary Alice Cook

On a Friday night in the fall of 2012, my husband Bill and I sat silently in a local restaurant amid a noisy crowd. After almost forty winters in Alaska, I was tired of what often seemed like an endless season of frigid semi-darkness, of staring for too long at a dull, brown and white landscape. But it was not only my physical environment that oppressed me: a year of unsuccessful job hunting had battered my self-confidence. I was at a very low point that night, and I said to myself: *This is not the life I was meant to live*. Little did I know then how right – and at the same time how wrong – those words were.

Almost exactly four years before that Friday evening, I had decided to pursue a long-held goal of a graduate degree. As a writer and lover of research, I determined that an advanced degree in history would be useful and interesting. Our local university did not offer such a degree, but a school near Lufkin, my home town in East Texas, did. So, with Bill's blessing, I moved there and spent the next two years happily studying, working part-time at a small museum, and reconnecting with the place and people that had formed me.

After graduation in 2011, I returned to Alaska, armed with new skills and enthusiasm, and began the job hunt. A year later, after finding only part-time, temporary work, I was discouraged and, in a moment of frustration, impulsively applied for the vacant director's position at the small museum in my hometown, where I had interned during grad school. Much to my shock, I was offered the job. Accepting it meant moving again, and this time permanently. After days of soul searching, and with my family's encouragement, I accepted. My reasoning seemed sound: the pay was good, the climate was appealing, the opportunity was exciting, and, besides, my life in Eagle River appeared to be going nowhere. If I refused this golden opportunity, I would despise myself for a coward, prevented by fear from accepting a once in a lifetime challenge.

So on a frigid morning in January, 2013, I was packed and on my way to the airport, still feeling a mixture of courage and fear, certainty and doubt. The story I told to most of the people I was leaving behind was that I had accepted a temporary position in Texas, for about six months. Secretly, Bill and I agreed that after six months, we would reevaluate. And so I flew, like a homing bird, back to the small town where I was raised, hopeful that everything would work out, but choosing to ignore one crucial fact: I was moving to a place where the closest Orthodox church is a two-hour drive away.

For three months, I tried to convince myself that the move had been a good one, and some things *were* good: the reconnection with family, the warm sunny days, and the satisfaction of working hard in a challenging job. Other circumstances weren't so good: the job demanded administrative skill, rather than the research and writing skills I had acquired. Bill visited regularly, but there were also long periods of separation. Eventually, he decided that he did not want to abandon his satisfying practice in Eagle River, as it would mean returning to fields of law he stopped practicing years ago. But the worst thing of all was that despite my good intentions, I seldom attended an Orthodox church. I hated the lonely Sunday drive, and even when I did go, I sensed the difficulty, if not impossibility, of finding my place in a church community in which I spent only a couple of

hours a week.

Well-meaning people often asked me, "Have you found a church yet?" Sometimes I would launch into a full-scale explanation of why "finding a church" in Lufkin was impossible for me, but more often, I avoided answering. It became easier to just tag along with my sister to her little Baptist church, but after a couple of Sundays, the folks there, including my sister, began to wonder if I was ready to "move my letter" and join them.

I was comforted by prayer in my little icon corner, and listening to Ancient Faith Radio, but as time passed, I began to feel spiritually unmoored; I was drifting farther and farther away from fellow Orthodox believers and from the sacraments of the Church. The prospect of permanent separation from my St. John's community – which had once seemed possible – became unbearable. I persevered in the job, honoring my pledge to give it six months. On July 1, I handed in my resignation, and a month later, I was back in my home on Monastery Drive, contemplating the lessons I had learned.

Years ago, when Bill and I were dealing with the changes our family encountered when we became Orthodox, Fr. Marc told us that change is good; it always involves an opportunity for growth. One year ago, I had to say yes to change, because I needed to find out where it would lead me. And it led me full circle, back to a place that is still sometimes cold and dark, but often warm and bright. For better or worse, it is here that I will continue to work out my salvation. That thought I had in the restaurant a year ago was correct, although I interpreted it wrongly at the time. The frustrated, unsatisfied sense that I was not in the place I was supposed to be, not doing the things I was supposed to do, really *wasn't* the life I was meant to live. The life that God means for me to live is one in which I accept, with gratitude, both exciting challenges and ordinary routine, and in which change can be good, provided it is made with reliance on His mercy and grace.



Mary Alice with son Adam, husband Bill and son Travis.

## Taking Orthodoxy to America *(Continued from page 1)*

is incomprehensible to the common people. We need our Church services to be in a dignified and beautiful English that is also understandable to Americans today.

- Feast day liturgies need to be done at a time when working people can attend. This means either Vespers Liturgies held in the early evening on the Eve of a Feast or else on some occasions an evening Liturgy on the Day of the Feast itself. Rigidly insisting that weekday Liturgies be done in the mid-morning while most people have to work is a sure way to deprive sincere Christians of an essential part in the liturgical life of the Church.
- The Iconostasis of the Church needs to be open enough to give a view of the Altar and to let the people feel that they are co-celebrants of the Liturgy with the priest and not passive spectators to something performed for them by the clergy.
- A super-size Icon of the Mother of God in the apse of the Church is certainly a beautiful liturgical statement about how she is a picture of the praying Church, but it will bring confusion to most people in America, particularly the great number who come from Protestant backgrounds. There are other legitimate Icons that can be put in this location, such as the Mystical Supper or the Ascension, and we would be wise to draw from these, if we do not want some people to walk into the Church and walk right out even before they hear an explanation.

In addition to these few liturgical suggestions our experience would also show the following practices to be important.

- Every parish should have a deacon or two and the idea of multiple clergy in a large parish needs to become a standard vision. This is one important way we can energize the lay people to use their own gifts and accomplish all the work of the Church that needs done.
- Converts should not be required to change their names when they are baptized, chrismated or ordained. Of course, every Orthodox Christian should have a patron saint, but here in a new, Orthodox land, we need to sanctify new names just as happened in other lands in times past. Orthodoxy is the universal Church, embracing all cultures and all people, including their names.
- Orthodox clergy should not routinely dress strangely in public, meaning cassocks and the traditional hats. The ancient Epistle to Diognetus says early Christians were distinguished by their piety not their dress. Someday we need attire for American Orthodox clergy that does not stand out as strange or confuse us with Roman Catholic clergy.

There are, no doubt, many other things that can be done as we truly try to take Orthodoxy to America. The Orthodox Church is a living, breathing organism that has always changed and adapted certain things over the centuries. If it cannot change, it might suggest it had become fossilized, something none of us believe and certainly none of us would tolerate. As C.S. Lewis said about bringing Christianity to the modern world, "We don't want to change the girl, we just want to give her a new dress." I realize that in offering these suggestions a few may find them objectionable as they prefer older customs from another culture, but for the sake of my own kinsmen, my own countrymen and all my non-Orthodox friends, I believe we can-

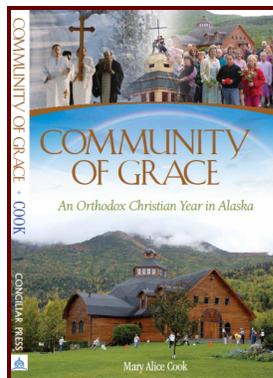
not hide the light of Orthodox Christianity under any kind of a bushel and that it is our duty to let this light shine in our land unobscured.



Fr. Marc Dunaway and two of his sons, Christopher and Benjamin, had lunch with Metropolitan PHILIP during Bright Week—May 2013

### New

Contributions to St. John Orthodox Cathedral can now be made on the Church website ([stjohnalaska.org](http://stjohnalaska.org)) using Visa or MasterCard. This is a very important new feature of our website and will make it easier for many people to tithe and make other contributions. You can get to the donation page by clicking on "Make a Donation" from the list on the left side of the Cathedral web page. This will allow you to select from various "categories" such as Tithe, St. John School Donations, even Family Night Dinners. Please take a look at the new feature and call the church office at 907-696-2002 if you have any questions.



**Community of Grace** is a book written by Mary Alice Cook about the community of St. John in Eagle River, Alaska

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## *Saint Christina*

*By Mary Ann Northey*

Saint Christina lived in the third century, so details of her life are scattered and conflicting to the point that some call legendary, but all the accounts allow a general report that is similar to Saint Barbara's in many respects. Christina was a young girl of around 11 when her father, a general in Tyre (Phoenicia), became concerned about how many desired his young and attractive daughter and put her away in a tower or enclosed place where he wanted her to pray to his pagan gods and become a priestess to them. While alone there with her servants and these idols, she started wondering about the beautiful creation she could see from her balcony. How were the heavens created? She became convinced of a Creator and prayed to Him with tears to reveal Himself. An angel appeared to her and instructed her in the truth of Christ and the Trinity. The angel revealed to her that she was a bride of Christ who would suffer for Him. Christina smashed all the gold and silver idols in her quarters which she now knew to be worthless, and threw them from the balcony so they could be used by the poor to buy food. Her father was enraged when this came to his attention and he demanded an account from Christina of her actions. As he began to hit her she remained silent, but when he ordered her servants killed she confessed her belief in the one true God. Her father had her imprisoned and scheduled for trial. Christina was steadfast and firm in her confession of faith. The accounts of her tortures include beating, roasting, grilling and drowning over a period of time while angels would come at night and restore her to wellness. Many hundreds of citizens were converted through these trials. Her father finally decided she would be executed the next day, but he died that night. The next



governor, Dion, continued this cruel torture until he also died unexpectedly, while many more flocked to this saint. The next governor, Julian, also continued the tortures until the number of her supporters became so great, he had her pierced through with swords, sending her at last to her Bridegroom. Julian died the same day.

An uncle took Saint Christina's body and had it buried in a chapel made for her in Bolsena, central Italy. Saint Christina the Great Martyr is celebrated on July 24. She is a saint of both East and West.