



Instructing your Spiritual Children for Salvation Through Faith in Christ Jesus: The Role of the Pastor in the Lives of Young People

St. Tikhon's Seminary 2016 Continuing Education Program

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State of the Culture

As Orthodox Christian clergy, we are responsible for the spiritual well-being of all those entrusted to our care. Since the time of Pentecost, this has been the primary mission of all Christ's disciples. It is indeed an awesome responsibility and one for which we ourselves will be held accountable. . While once society looked to the Church, or at least a generalized Christianity, for moral guidance we no longer live in a Christian culture. Some would even go so far as to say our present culture, consciously or unconsciously, is hostile to a Christian ethos. This is nowhere more evident than in the assault on our children, our youth, and young adults. Like no other generation before them, they are being indoctrinated in our schools, our institutions, and popular culture with destructive notions about marriage, family, and so-called gender equality issues. Their attention is captivated by social media, texting, and video games. Their minds and hearts are being formed by these elements, which are, in large part, dominated by secular or even overtly antichristian sentiment. The popular media ridicules

Christianity as superstition or naïve denial of the realities of life. Traditional Christianity especially is mocked as hypocritical moralizing that stands in the way of progress; it is on the wrong side of history, which will inevitably leave it and its morality in the dust heap. If our parishes do not respond in a pro-active manner, we face the distinct possibility that our young people will abandon their faith for the fads that are chic and popular.

So, what do we do?

First, do no harm. The phrase is popularly used in reference to the medical arts and is an appropriate starting place for us. If the Church is a hospital as Saint John Chrysostom declares, we the clergy are its physicians. Our first duty is to do no harm. There are many ways in which we can do harm to those, especially the young, who come to us for healing. Let me begin by pointing out the most obvious instances when we can do harm.

Priest as friend. Some think that in order to attract youth, clergy have to befriend their youth. They have to become buddies and they have to be liked. In order to achieve this, some clergy have tried to dress like the youth, talk like the youth, and worst of all, act like the youth! Yet, you are called to be their spiritual father in Christ! You can't have it both ways-if you are a friend, you can't be a father. If you're their father, you can't be their friend. Fatherhood in general is a much derided institution today. But this is precisely what you are called to be. We are grown men and must, like Saint Paul, "put aside childish things." I will speak more about this later in my talk. Furthermore, these attempts most often come off as inauthentic. Teens and young adults have a terrific sense of when someone is being phony. If we, as representatives of the Church, come off as being phony, then we run the risk of making the

whole Church, and therefore Christ Himself, seem phony. What worse harm could we do than making the Truth seem phony?

Priest as entertainer. Some think that in order to get the young to come to church you have to offer them all kinds of social activities such as dances, parties, and sports. If you compete for their presence on this level, you lose. They already have these things in an all too abundant supply in secular culture, and usually with better organization and quality. It's not only our youth who fall prey to the false gods of entertainment and distraction. Our adults are just as susceptible to this. Our culture exalts entertainment as a distraction and it's working remarkably well. If you don't believe me, watch our news programs. Take a look at some of the political campaigns. We've become a society that needs to be surrounded by constant noise and activity. This is a tool of the evil one to keep our minds away from the essential existential questions that have their answers only in Christ and His Church. It is our duty to be representatives of the hesychastic ascetical tradition with its focus on stillness, silence, and mindfulness. This is an experience that is authentic and grounded in the tradition of the Church from the time of Saint Anthony through Saint Gregory Palamas to modern saints like Saint Silouan and Saint Paisios.

Priest as guru. Priests are by ordination spiritual fathers but that does not mean they are spiritual elders with clairvoyant powers or infallible judgment. Pride was the primordial sin committed by Satan and has become his favorite tool in making others fall. Of all forms of pride spiritual delusion, or *prelest*, is the most dangerous. A good priest always knows his own spiritual limitations and defers to others who have by experience and spiritual maturity the ability to counsel and to advise. Of course, this is not an excuse to ignore your own spiritual

health. How can a priest who does not confess tell others to do so? If we are not faithful to a serious spiritual rule of prayer, how can we hold others to such a standard? If you are a physician of souls in the spiritual hospital that is the church, make sure your own house is in good order before treating others who come to you for healing.

Now that I've told you what not to do, let's turn our attention to what we can and should do.

The need for personal spiritual struggle. This is not new. No doubt you heard it in the seminary and if you have a spiritual father, which I sincerely hope you do, he has told you that there is no substitute for spiritual struggle. As Orthodox Christians, our path is one of repentance. We must be purified before we are illumined and we must be illumined before we reach theosis. If you are not presently engaged in this spiritual struggle, this spiritual warfare, I have nothing to tell you because this is where it all begins. If you are not engaged in spiritual warfare-fasting, confessing your sins, keeping your prayer rule-I have nothing further to offer you. Ultimately, Christ Jesus is the One who will bring our youth home to the ark of salvation, the Orthodox Church. However, you mediate Christ. He has given you that responsibility so that in you others will see Christ. The only way this happens is if you are on the spiritual battlefield, personally engaged with the Enemy.

Spiritual Fatherhood. Saint Paul reminds the people of Corinth, *"I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you as my beloved children. For though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you have not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel."* (1Cor.4:15) Spiritual fatherhood is not about DNA or bloodlines. This type of fatherhood requires manly qualities such as strength, fortitude, conviction, and love. A good father protects his children, feeds them, clothes them, and instructs them. As spiritual fathers

we protect our children with the Gospel of Truth, we feed them with the sacred Mysteries, we clothe them with good works, and we instruct them with the teachings of the Holy Fathers. That is our mission. As spiritual fathers, we discern, instruct, admonish, and counsel in the name of Christ. Our spiritual fatherhood is a spiritual gift to promote the Gospel and kindle in others the inner flame of the Holy Spirit, purifying the passions, enlightening the mind and heart, so that with our spiritual eyes we are able to see God. When you know that a high school student is graduating, take an interest in his continued spiritual wellbeing. Find out what college he is going to, see if there's an OCF there, and provide him with the name and parish of the affiliated clergy. All too often, lack of information can lead to young people who have no idea that there are other Orthodox Christians around them. This can lead to a sense of being alone in the face of secularizing culture, and may fill the young person with a need to conform to the new group around him. Even if there's no OCF, try and see if there are any local parishes to which you can direct him. If there aren't, keep in touch with him yourself. If he has a sense that he has a Spiritual Father genuinely concerned with his well-being, then he will be much more likely to persevere.

Know the Fathers. If you are to be a good spiritual father, you must have an intimate knowledge of the Fathers of the Church. Make them a part of your daily spiritual reading. Highlight significant passages, copy them and paste them on your wall or in your prayer corner. Know them so well that you can impart their wisdom to your spiritual children. If you haven't already done so, here's a short list of material with which to start: [Abba Dorotheos' Practical Teaching on the Christian Life](#); [Saint Isaac the Syrian's Ascetical Homilies](#); or [Fifty Spiritual Homilies](#) by Saint Macarius. These are just a few examples of unparalleled guides to the

spiritual life. They will help you discern and advise properly. These books should be at your fingertips and their words on the tips of your tongues just as the Physicians' Desk Reference is found in every doctor's office.

Liturgize. A parish that liturgizes once a week is not going to hold sway in this culture. If you can offer the Divine Liturgy once or twice a week besides Sunday, great. If you can do it every day, even better. We need to make the Liturgy the center of our people's lives, both young and old. When parishioners begin to recall days and weeks according to the liturgical calendar more often than a secular calendar we know we are making progress. If you can't liturgize more than Sunday, offer an akathist to Saints Joachim and Anna for the welfare of the parish youth. Do something, but make it liturgical. Permit me to offer the perspective of Saint John of Kronstadt, himself a parish priest in a busy church with many responsibilities and difficulties. *"I try to be a sincere pastor, not only in words, but also in deeds — in life. Consequently, I watch myself closely, after my spiritual world, over my inner workings. I even keep a diary, where I put down my deviations from God's Law, test myself and try to reform. I am busy the whole day, from morning until late night. I perform my pastoral calling not only in Kronstadt; it often requires me to travel to different parts of Russia. Each day I am beset with pleas, so that at times it becomes painful to me and I do not wish to do it, but I do, I try to satisfy all petitioners. No matter where I might be, and especially in Kronstadt, I myself daily perform the Liturgy and that sincerely, with all my heart — earnestly and devoutly offer the holy, bloodless sacrifice to God. for my sins and those of all Orthodox Christians. Worshippers see and feel my earnest, devout serving and themselves become imbued with holy emotions and pray earnestly. At every Sunday Liturgy I preach the living Word of God. My inner life, my soul, is represented in my sermons; I mercilessly*

chastise human sins, vices and passions, reveal the errors of sectarians and schismatics. Thanks be to God — I myself can see the fruits of my pastoral labors.

Encourage the young people to participate in the liturgical life of the parish. Ask the young men to help at the altar, or to do the Epistle readings for Sundays and feasts. Encourage the young women to help with the singing and chanting. If your parish has special practices for the women in Holy week, such as decorating the tomb, make sure that the older women bring their daughters and granddaughters to help. Cultivate a sense that the youth are contributing to the liturgical life.

Lead. I've already spent some time talking about the importance of leading by example. But there is more to leadership than that. You have to be bold. Start challenging priorities. Is the soccer practice or band practice really more important than Vespers or an akathist? It will be more important by default if you don't challenge that assumption. I know people who schedule their work and the family responsibilities around church services. Can we ask our parishioners to do that? Why not? If we don't ask them to seek first the Kingdom of God, what can we expect from them? Undoubtedly, it is more difficult to be an Orthodox Christian in these times. But that isn't an excuse to abandon the effort and let the popular culture dominate our people. We have to be willing to exert effort to take back lost ground. In Russian jurisdictions, attendance at Night Vigil on Saturday is expected if one is to commune on Sunday. Can we make some effort to re-claim Saturdays as a day of preparation to meet the Lord? Can we make an effort to instruct our parishioners, including our youth, about the preparatory prayers for Holy Communion? Can we talk about the fasting cycles and encourage this ascetical practice in our sermons? I think we can. I think we should.

Know your Resources. OCF and other ministry programs have engaged our youth and they are a tremendous blessing. Are you involved in any of these programs? Do you know about them? As spiritual fathers, we are responsible for the well-being of our youth, even after graduation. Do you know what programs, resources, spiritual centers, or monasteries are in your area? Do you have a relationship with these organizations? If you are blessed to have a monastery within driving distance, have you considered sponsoring a youth trip to the monastery and having them engage in conversation with one of the monks? Fathers are vigilant protectors of their children. This requires proactivity and knowledge. If you're in a remote area, have you considered inviting Orthodox speakers to your parish?

Here are some examples of Orthodox programs centered around youth. Not all of these will be available to everyone here, but they provide an example of the sort of programs that are out there, and could perhaps be emulated.

The Antiochian Village Camp.

The Antiochian Village Camp is a summer camping program based in the Antiochian Village complex outside of Ligonier Pennsylvania. The camp is open to children between the ages of nine and seventeen, with the oldest children often enrolling as "counselors-in-training", in the hopes of returning the next year to supervise the new class of children. Since 1980 the Antiochian Village Camp has provided a spiritually safe environment for children to learn, play, and build friendships, all under the supervision of earnest, caring young adults and pious, respectful clergy. Aside from the activities that the children have, there is also a primary focus on Christian education and a robust daily liturgical life. Vespers and Matins are served daily in the Saint Ignatius Church on the camp grounds, and Liturgy is served for Sundays and feast

days. Children also learn the importance of receiving the sacraments, especially Confession and the Eucharist, and proper respect for the saints, such whose icons and relics are available for veneration. While the value of the camp for the teenaged campers cannot be overstated, the Antiochian Village Camp is also an invaluable resource for the young adult counselors. In the same way that the Liturgical life and Christian education are reinforced for the children, the counselors similarly benefit. Other such camps exist, including the St. Andrew's Camp in Jewell, New York and the Saint Tikhon's Camp right here at St. Tikhon's.

The Saint Constantine School

The Saint Constantine School of Houston, Texas is a Classical Education program affiliated with the Antiochian Archdiocese. The school seeks to provide a sound, comprehensive, classically-based education in line with Christian principles: the same sort of education that was advocated by Basil the Great and other Greek Fathers. The program is organized into blocks of classes by year, and begins equipping children, from a young age, to read the great philosophers and theologians in both in translation and in the original languages. From the earliest level Christian education is incorporated with the secular subjects so as to demonstrate the harmony of the Christian Tradition with the greater Western Tradition as a whole. The children are instructed in the cycle of the Church calendar and the lives of the saints, and the liturgical life is encouraged; every day begins with morning prayer and the school hopes to be able to soon have monthly weekday liturgies. Through its programs the school lays out the deep connection between Christianity and the traditional culture of the Western world.

The Center for Orthodox Thought and Culture at Eastern University

This Orthodox program at Eastern University in Wayne, PA, a suburb of Philadelphia on its “mainline” is the child of a number of Orthodox clergy and academics who saw the need for far more options than were available for the great needs of our Orthodox students entering college. The Center’s mission is to provide to the Orthodox students on campus and in the area a life in Christ focused on the Church calendar and the lives of the saints; to provide an academic curriculum for those interested in a richer understanding of Orthodoxy and Orthodox culture; and to provide for the wider community a place where they can learn more about the Faith and how better to live and worship as Orthodox Christians.

To the first point, the Center seeks to work with the local clergy and EU’s existing OCF in providing for Orthodox students and local Orthodox a regular schedule of services, with a service of Vespers at least once a week, and to expand this in the future to include weekday feasts, etc. The Center believes that we as humans are first worshiping beings, and that this should be the focus of all of life, even while we seek to glorify God with our minds in the academic environment of a university.

The program already has a minor in Orthodox Thought and Culture in place, built currently around eight courses (Byzantine Empire, Russian History, Middle Eastern History, History of Arab Christianity, Orthodox History and Theology, The Desert Fathers, Russian Literature, and Modern Greek Literature in Translation), and they hope to be adding more options for our students in the very near future. They are also seeking to have exchanges with colleges and universities in Eastern Europe and the Middle East such as St. Tikhon’s University in Moscow,

and they also have reading groups that meet to read and discuss Orthodox texts on the interior life led by Dr. Timothy Becker, a former student of Dr. Edith Humphrey and Fr. John McGukin.

This coming year, even though they have done almost no formal advertising, they hope to have 8 - 10 new students on campus joining the 8 - 10 who are already there, and they are hoping the future will provide even more.

Orthodox Christian Fellowship

One of the most widespread and useful programs for Orthodox College students is the Orthodox Christian Fellowship, an organization of Orthodox students from all different jurisdictions with chapters at universities across the country. Most OCF chapters are student-run with clergy advisors, and have social, educational, service, and liturgical functions. The OCF provides a place for new Orthodox College students to make connections with their fellow Orthodox young people, giving them a sense of connection to the Church that they might otherwise lose. Many OCF groups attend services together for Sundays and feasts, and work together in order to facilitate transportation for those who might not have a means to go themselves. Many also are involved with charitable causes, whether in the city where the university is located or on the state or national level, instilling a sense of Christian love and charity in the youth.

The title of this talk is a daunting one “**Instructing your Spiritual Children for Salvation Through Faith in Christ Jesus: The Role of the Pastor in the Lives of Young People.**” However, doing it is even more so. In his Epistle, Saint James exhorts us, “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.” If we desire the salvation of our children, our

spiritual children, we must be doers of the Word. Their salvation depends upon it, as does our own! May God bless you!