

Cultivating a Heart for Church *continued from front cover*


Each situation and parish is different. I believe that we must take stock and make a plan. Should one program not work, then we must regroup, rethink our goal, and try again.

If we can encourage our people to grasp the essence of Isaiah’s vision—that God wants to heal us and send us to share His love—they may begin to understand the importance of their faith. Remember that some people walked away from Christ Himself. I don’t think we can do any better than He did, but I believe it’s worth trying.

May our gracious God and Savior Jesus Christ continue to bless our humble efforts in the building of His Kingdom. Glory to Jesus Christ. Glory forever.

Fr. James Waltenberger, Associate Priest
St. Thomas Eastern Orthodox Church, Fairlawn, Ohio

If you wish to contribute a reflection to the next issue of Priest to Priest, please email rloumiotis@iocc.org

 **INTERNATIONAL ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHARITIES**
110 West Road
Suite 360
Baltimore, Maryland 21204 • USA



Share your Lenten recipes!

Email outreach@iocc.org to have your recipe considered for our Lenten series.

 **IOCC®**

Tackle hunger.
iocc.org/souperbowl





SUPER BOWL OF CARING

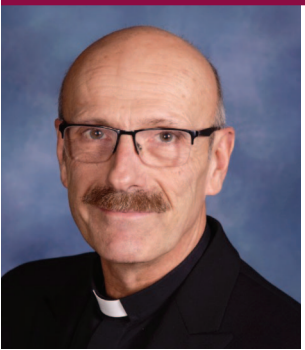
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2024



PRIEST *to* PRIEST

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION FOR ORTHODOX CLERGY

2024 Issue 1



Cultivating a Heart for Church

A Reflection by Fr. James Waltenberger

“For the heart of this people has become insensitive.... They have closed their eyes lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and return, and I should heal them.” (Isaiah 6:10)

The problem of people leaving the Church is not new; however, today’s fast-paced culture and increased secularization appear to me to be a battle with two fronts. And this problem is not unique to our Orthodox faith.

We’ve all seen people leave the Church for various reasons. Death is one we can’t prevent, but there are others. Parents change jobs. Someone has a disagreement with the priest. They may have been insulted or had their feelings hurt. Teenagers graduate high school, go to college, and may or may not remember their heritage in the faith. Many simply lose interest, or life’s cares take up more and more time. Some who grew up in the faith marry outside it; others live too far away to do more than attend Sunday Liturgy. If children are involved in sports, they may have practice on Sundays, and Church becomes a secondary activity, rather than of primary importance.



Are we like the frog in a pot of water, with the temperature rising so gradually we don’t notice?

What can we, as clergy, do? There are no easy answers, and no one-size-fits-all solutions. But we must try. First, I think we need to guard our own family and marriage; this is of utmost importance. Just as an ill person cannot care for another ill person, as ministers we need to be healthy both spiritually and physically so we can care for our flocks.

Second, we need to be vigilant against secular and amoral influences creeping into the life of the Church. We must educate the faithful, both cradle Orthodox and converts, and we can encourage our parishioners to model faith and worship in the home, complete with icons, prayers, music—vital when families are often in Church only two hours each week.

Finally, serving our local communities will give the Church a stronger presence, whatever that may look like: say, an open house, food bank, or clothing drive. This kind of service—something that IOCC is committed to fostering in our parishes—brings a tangible dimension to our faith. Organizing a group to volunteer with an IOCC Action Team, for instance, or involving youth in an IOCC kit drive is another opportunity to demonstrate that our faith is alive and hands on.

continued on back cover

INTERNATIONAL ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHARITIES

Headquarters: 110 West Road, Suite 360 • Baltimore, MD 21204 USA
Tel: 410.243.9820 • Fax: 410.243.9824 • E-mail: relief@iocc.org • Website: iocc.org

MEETING NEEDS WORLDWIDE

Whether in response to conflict, disaster, and other emergencies or as part of long-term support that helps communities thrive, IOCC is meeting basic human needs around the world—serving in the spirit of Christ's love.

**Learn more
and join us.**



iocc.org