The adult inquirer has begun the journey to Orthodox Christianity long before entering the doors of our parish. It may begin with a sense of emptiness or a feeling that there exists something more than they are finding in their current faith tradition. Inquirers may come to the Orthodox Church from a faith tradition that has disappointed them in some way. Increasingly, inquirers are coming to the Orthodox Church through intermarriage, a phenomenon seen by many as our greatest opportunity for outreach.

As the visible presence of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, each parish is called to witness to those within and those outside the community of believers. If we believe that in Orthodoxy we have the fullness of the Truth, then we have the great responsibility to share it with all people. Bringing people to Christ and strengthening their faith is a person-to-person process.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

In the early days of the Church, pagans became Christians not because of what they read in the Bible — there was no Bible to read. People became Christians because of what they experienced in the Christian community. People will come through the doors of our parish for a variety of reasons. Their first impression is critical to their decision to come back. Will we be ready for them? We need to ask ourselves, if ours was the only Orthodox Church a person ever visited, or if I were the only Orthodox Christian that a person ever met, would that person want to become Orthodox?

Outreach will require that we remind cradle

Orthodox of the missionary nature of the Church, teaching them to welcome inquirers and converts, and to see them as a positive addition to our parish and our faith. Those who choose to become Orthodox will grow to appreciate our historical and ancient Christian roots and will inspire others as they embrace the Orthodox Christian faith.

Because the Orthodox Christian worship experience is so unique — it fills the five senses — it may seem foreign to the inquirer. It is important that our parishes be ready for visitors. Remember that Zacchaeus was converted merely by Christ's acceptance of him. Reaching out to those who enter our doors with a sincere handshake, greeting and a welcoming smile could be the most important missionary work we do. Ushers, greeters and all parishioners should be reminded of the importance of reaching out and making our visitors welcome. Friendliness can have eternal implications.

CLOSED COMMUNION: AN OPPORTUNITY?

Inquirers innocently approaching the chalice awkwardness cause some embarrassment. This problem may be seen as an opportunity, if, prior to saying, "With the fear of God, with faith and with love draw near," a friendly word of instruction is offered. This could be phrased as follows, "We welcome all visitors and guests who are with us today. We remind you that in the Orthodox Christian Church, Holy Communion is offered only to baptized or chrismated (confirmed) Orthodox Christians. All visitors and guests are welcome to come forward at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy to receive the antidoron which is bread that has been blessed." At this time, the priest may invite those that are interested to attend Orthodox education/catechism classes at the church or to meet with him to discuss becoming full members of the Orthodox Christian Church. This information could also be included in the Sunday and mailed bulletin or newsletter.

RESPECT FOR OTHER FAITH TRADITIONS

In reaching out to inquirers, it is helpful to find those aspects of faith that we share. One Jewish inquirer meeting with the priest to find if she would be able to reconcile her faith with that of her Greek Orthodox fiancé was visibly moved when the priest turned to his bookshelf and took down a copy of the Tanakh (Sacred Writings of Judaism). She gradually came to accept that these sacred writings, which make up what we call the Old Testament, are the foundation upon which Christianity rests. Over a year later she was baptized into the Greek Orthodox Church.

In all discussions, we must show respect for the individual inquirers and their faith, culture and tradition. Though they may choose to become Orthodox Christians, their faith, culture and tradition are an integral part of who they are. They will also have family and friends who remain faithful to their previous traditions. We bring others to Orthodoxy, not by criticizing their faith tradition, but by respecting that which is good in it, and pointing out those aspects of faith that we share.

EDUCATION: PARISHIONERS AND INQUIRERS

A good priest once asked "Doesn't renewal have to come first before we can evangelize others? Don't we have to be infected with Christ before we can be contagious?" This is why education is the key to bringing others to Orthodoxy — education of faithful Orthodox and education of

the inquirer. Most Orthodox faithful preparing to intermarry are unable to explain aspects of the faith to their prospective spouse. Because those who were raised in the Orthodox Church are so familiar with the Traditions of the Church, it is often difficult to explain them.

This requires basic educational materials, well-crafted sermons, Orthodoxy classes and more, leading to a more personal participation in worship, a more personal faith and ongoing development toward theosis. Many of the actions we take to reach out to inactive Orthodox Christians and inquirers are also effective in revitalizing the faith of our active Orthodox.

MENTORING NON-ORTHODOX INQUIRERS

Fr. Charles Joanides of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese Department of Interfaith Marriage suggests that one method we can employ in our churches to welcome and integrate inquirers is to develop a mentoring program to help the non-Orthodox become more comfortable with "...religious traditions, cultural the idiosyncrasies and social life of our communities." Fr. Charles describes mentors as resource persons who assume the responsibility of providing information to the non-Orthodox partner regarding any number of different questions and concerns of a religious, cultural or social nature.

"You Shall be my Witnesses" (Acts 1:8)

Forty days after His Resurrection, at the time of His Ascension, Jesus gathered His disciples with Him and promised that they would soon receive the Holy Spirit. He called upon them to be His witnesses. This same calling is directed to each one of us. The front lines of Jesus' army today are faithful men and women who live ordinary lives in the world, attending school, making a living, raising families, participating in the daily life of our society.

"...and the Lord added to their number daily..." Acts 2:47 (NIV)

In Acts 2 we read, "The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." If we do the work of ministry, reflecting the light and the love of Christ, others will come. God will place you in situations to share your faith. As He called upon His disciples on the day of His Ascension, He has also called upon each one of us to be His witnesses "...in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

INTERFAITH WEB SITE www.Interfaith.goarch.org

OUTREACH & EVANGELISM WEB SITE www.Outreach.goarch.org

BOOKS BY CHARLES JOANIDES PHD, LMFT

Ministering to Intermarried Couples
Attending to Your Marriage
When You Intermarry

OUTREACH & EVANGELISM:

Some Practical Steps
Department of Outreach & Evangelism



THE ADULT CATECHUMEN

Practical Ideas for Parish Ministry



Icon by the hand of Athanasios Clark

Fr. James W. Kordaris