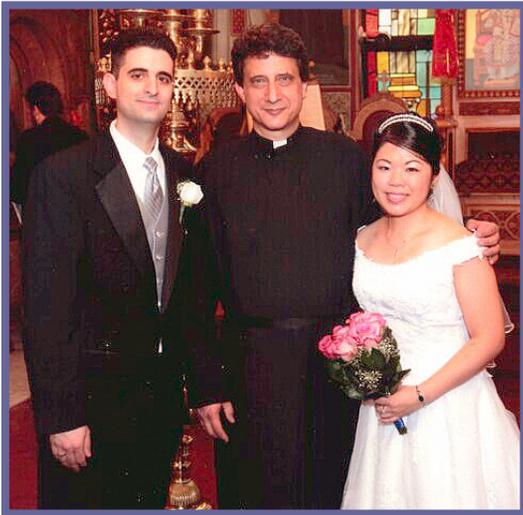


community aware of this new ministry and helps the committee to identify and recruit interested individuals to serve as mentors. Once these steps are completed, the pastor and the committee together can begin the recruitment process, seeking the best suited individuals for this ministry.



Conclusion

The challenges that non-Orthodox encounter in their effort to integrate into our churches are numerous and well documented. Information from the Interfaith Research Project, as well as conversations with thousands of intermarried couples suggest that it is not easy for non-Orthodox partners to integrate into our communities. If this situation is not addressed, then we are missing a vital opportunity for outreach and evangelism.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

INTERFAITH WEB SITE

www.Interfaith.goarch.org

OUTREACH & EVANGELISM WEB SITE

www.Outreach.goarch.org

PUBLICATIONS

When You Intermarry

By Charles Joanides PhD, LMFT

Ministering to Intermarried Couples

By Charles Joanides PhD, LMFT

Attending to Your Marriage

By Charles Joanides PhD, LMFT

OUTREACH & EVANGELISM:

Some Practical Steps

Department of Outreach & Evangelism



Developing a Parish MENTORING PROGRAM for Intermarried Couples



Icon by the hand of Athanasios Clark

Rev. Fr. Charles Joanides, Ph.D., LMFT

When I converted to the Orthodox Church, I was helped by two people who took me in hand and helped me integrate into the Church and the community. In a few years, I was completely integrated into both. I don't know what I would have done without them. They are my best friends. I urge you to emphasize my experience in one of your columns to help converts become integrated.

~An E-mail respondent~

Like the individual quoted above, most non-Orthodox report some level of culture shock when they first encounter their Greek Orthodox partner's faith tradition. The resulting confusion and uneasy feelings often make the non-Orthodox partner feel like an "outsider" and "a second class citizen."

In keeping with the respectful and welcoming pastoral approach of our Lord, and without compromising our beliefs, we are called to do all we can to make the non-Orthodox partner feel welcome, respected and comfortable in our churches. When we embrace such an approach, we are more likely to keep the non-Orthodox partner actively engaged in our community's religious and social life. This also makes it more likely that these couples will consider baptizing and raising their children in the Orthodox Church, becoming a single-church couple and family.

One method we can employ in our churches to facilitate these positive outcomes is to develop a **mentoring program** designed to help the non-Orthodox partner become more comfortable with the religious traditions, cultural idiosyncrasies and social life of our communities.

What is a Mentor?

In our efforts to define what is meant when we use the term *mentor*, we point to the well-established role of the godparent. One of the many responsibilities assumed by the godparent is that of a resource person who helps an individual prepare for baptism and continues to guide the newly baptized person's growth in personal understanding of the Orthodox Christian faith as well as various religious and cultural traditions. Godparents also serve as role models and support their godchild's efforts to integrate into the faith tradition. The role of godparent also creates additional social connections between the baptized person, their family and the community at large.

Mentors, like godparents, fulfill these important functions. Like godparents, mentors are resource persons who assume the responsibility of providing information to the non-Orthodox regarding any number of different questions and concerns. For example, many non-Orthodox partners are often unclear as to the reasons why they are not permitted to receive Holy Communion. In the same way, questions relating to icons, infant baptism and married priests are very common. A well-informed mentor can provide answers to these and other questions and concerns.

Mentors might also answer questions related to non-religious concerns: *Am I welcome to help at the festival? Do you have to be Greek Orthodox to help in the bookstore? Who do I see if I'm interested in donating some of my time and talents toward the maintenance and upkeep of the facility?*

A parish mentoring program ensures that non-Orthodox partners have a parishioner available to them who can provide information and help them to connect with others in the community. A mentor can reduce initial culture shock, and increase feelings of welcome and belonging.

Developing a Mentoring Program

The development of a parish mentoring program is quite simple. The following guidelines have proved successful in other communities.

1. The program should be presented and explained at a parish council meeting. The success of the program is dependent upon the cooperation of parish leadership with the members of the congregation.
2. Once the parish council understands the necessity of a parish mentoring program, a committee should be formed with the pastor's assistance and guidance, in order to lay out a plan of implementation. Specifically, this initial process will define the qualities of a good mentor. For example, a suitable mentor might be intermarried, and knowledgeable in the Orthodox Christian faith. It is also helpful if the mentor is a familiar and well-respected member of the community.
3. When the committee has developed a *mentor profile*, it can be publicized in the Church's newsletter/bulletin. This strategy has two benefits. It makes the