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ON THE MEND: Please keep the following parishioners and others in your prayers for recovery from their illnesses and injuries: Metropolitan Constantine, Patriarch Pavle, Archimandrite Raphael, Father Peter Natishan, Father Gerald Olszewski, Father Jakiw Norton, Father Dragan Filipović, Father Elias Katras, Father Stevo Rocknage, Father Paul Stoll, Father Igor Soroka, Father Deacon Joseph Bulkanowa, Ollie Pendylshok, Walt & Evelyn Burlack, Joshua Agosto and his family, Harley Katarina Rahuba, Joe Karas, Mike and Hilda Holupka, Eva Malesnick, Helen Likar, Angela Wesolosky, Stella Peanoske, Joe Nezolyk, Nick Behun, Terry Reinhart, Bernie O'Masta, Grace Holupka, Virginia Bryan, Joseph Sliwinsky, Maria Balo, Linda Mechtly, Mary Mochnick, Mary Pekich, Mildred Manolovich, Evelyn Misko, Amy, Nigel Daniel, & Daniel Pocura, Jeanne Boehing, Alex Drobot, Rachelle, Jane Golofski, Doug Diller, Harry Krewsun, Sandy Gamble, Glen Lucas Burlack, Bernie Vangrin, Mary Alice Babcock, Dorie Kunkle, Andrea, & Melissa [Betty O'Masta's relatives], Mary Evelyn King, Stella Cherepko, Sam Wadrose, Khoruia Joanne Abdalah, Cameron [a boy in Matt's class], Faith—a 3-year-old girl with rheumatoid arthritis, Isabella Olivia Lindgren—a 10-month old with a brain tumor, Dillon, Ethel Thomas, Donna, Jeff, Nick Malec [Maxine's brother], Bill, Erin, Jimmy Fennel [6th Grader], Jim Markovich, Jeff Walewski [thyroid cancer], Carol [Lotinski] Rose, Michael Miller, Dave May, Peter Paul & Louise May Sprock, Grace & Owen Ostrasky, Claudia [Horvath] Gradicheck, Alberta, Margaret Mueller, Gary Zurasky, Michael Horvath, Tony Notaro, Patti Sinecki, David Genshi, Pete Special, Rita Very & family, Sue Segeleon, Mike Gallagher, Mildred Walters, Michael Miller, Betsy Mallison, Mike Pelchar [Liz's brother], Jim Logue—throat cancer, Michael, Amy, Luke Brunermer—broken arm, Liz Stumpf, Aubrie—3-month-old with Cystic Fibrosis, Kathy Ciranni, Ester Tylavsky, Ed Jamison, Sam Wamsun, and Daria Masur. **ARNOLD:** Stefania Lucci, Kay Tomson, Ann Ostaffy, Steve Sakal, Elisabeth Arasin, and Homer Paul Kline. We pray that God will grant them all a speedy recovery.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO OUR JUNE BABIES: Andrea Weiser on the 3rd and Luke Brunermer on the 13th. May God grant them both Many Happy, Healthy, and Blessed Years!

SAINT JOHN-ABBOT OF MONAGRIA, SAINT ALONIUS OF SCETE IN EGYPT, SAINTS MARY AND MARTHA-SISTERS
OF LAZARUS, SAINTS ELEAZAR & NAZARIUS-WONDERWORKERS OF OLONETS

Tone 2

Romans 5:1-10

Matthew 6:22-33

*Litany in Blessed Memory of All Deceased Fathers, Grandfathers, etc.—Fr. Bob
Parastas in Blessed Memory of Catherine Yakim--Ollie*

BULLETIN INSERT FOR 03 JUNE 2007

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST—SUNDAY OF ALL SAINTS, HOLY EQUALS TO THE
APOSTLES CONSTANTINE & HELEN, HOLY PRINCE CONSTANTINE & CHILDREN SAINTS
MICHAEL & THEODORE-WONDERWORKERS OF MUROM, SAINT CASSIAN THE GREEK-
WONDERWORKER OF UGLICH, SAINT AGAPITUS-ABBOT OF MARKUSHEV, SAINT
HOSPICIUS OF TRIER, THE MEETING OF THE “VLADIMIR” ICON OF THE THEOTOKOS

TROPARION—TONE 4

As with fine porphyry and royal purple,
Thy Church has been adorned with Thy Martyrs blood
Shed throughout the world
She cries to Thee, O Christ God: send down Thy bounties on Thy people,
Grant peace to Thy habitation, and great mercy to our souls.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and
unto ages of ages. Amen.

KONTAKION—TONE 8

The universe offers The the God-bearing martyrs
As the first fruits of creation, O Lord and Creator.
Through the Theotokos and their prayers establish Thy Church in peace.

PROKEIMENON—TONE 4

READER: Pray and make your vows before the Lord our God!
PEOPLE: **Pray and make your vows before the Lord our God!**
READER: In Judah God is known; His name is great in Israel!
PEOPLE: **Pray and make your vows before the Lord our God!**
READER: God is wonderful in His saints, the God of Israel.
PEOPLE: **Pray and make your vows before the Lord our God!**
READER: Pray and make your vows...
PEOPLE: **Before the Lord our God!**

ALLELUIA VERSES—TONE 4

The righteous called, and the Lord heard them.

Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivers them out of them all.

COMMUNION HYMNS

Praise the Lord from the heavens! Praise Him in the highest!

Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous! Praise befits the just.

Vicar's Surprise

A rich man went to his vicar and said, "I want you and your wife to take a three-month trip to the Holy Land at my expense. When you come back, I'll have a surprise for you".

The vicar accepted the offer, and he and his wife went off to the Middle East.

Three months later they returned home and were met by the wealthy parishioner, who told them that while they were gone, he had had a new church built. "It's the finest building money can buy, vicar," said the man. "No expense was spared."

And he was right. It was a magnificent edifice both outside and in.

But there was one striking difference. There was only one pew, and it was at the very back.

"A church with only one pew?" asked the vicar.

"You just wait until Sunday," the rich man said.

When the time came for the Sunday service, the early arrivals entered the church, filed onto the one pew and sat down. When the pew was full, a switch clicked silently, a circuit closed, the gears meshed, a belt moved and, automatically, the rear pew began to move forward. When it reached the front of the church, it came to a stop. At the same time, another empty pew came up from below at the back and more people sat down. And so it continued, pews filling and moving forwards until finally the church was full, from front to back.

"Wonderful!" said the vicar, "Marvelous!"

The service began, and the vicar started to preach his sermon. He launched into his text and, when 12 o'clock came, he was still going strong, with no end in sight. Suddenly a bell rang, and a trap door in the floor behind the pulpit dropped open.

"Wonderful!" said the congregation, "Marvelous!"

A BRIEF SKETCH OF THE HISTORY OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA

Orthodoxy came to North America when Russian whaling ships frequented the Arctic Ocean and Bering Sea in the mid-to-late 18th century. At some point, there was a request for a priest to serve the sailors and to bury those who died either en-route to Alaska, or in the whaling camps on the offshore islands. About 1788, it was decided by the Czar to send a priest to set up a permanent church to serve the camps. This was completely funded by the Czar personally, but the clergy came from the Russian Orthodox Church.

Over the years, the church expanded to the west and east coasts, where significant concentrations of Orthodox settled--both immigrant and business/government entities. As the local priests saw Orthodox and Greek Catholic people without clergy serving them, the request went back to Russia to support these folks as well. Greek, Serbian, Syrian, Lebanese, Bulgarian, Romanian, Lemko/Galician, and other ethnic settlements were able to bring over clergy from the "old country" who spoke their language and who knew their customs. The churches grew and expanded, but the source of the financial support was primarily from the Czar. If a church needed an iconostasis [icon screen], a request was made to the local bishop, who forwarded it to the archbishop. If this was approved, it went to the Czar, who returned the financing to build it. This is quite an oversimplification, but you get the idea.

This all went fairly smoothly until the Godless Bolshevik Revolution occurred in 1917. The money supply dried up with the demise of the Czar and his family. Each parish was now forced to fend for itself, creating quite a mess that continues in some form to this day. The Greeks contacted Greece, the Serbs Serbia, the Lebanese Damascus, the Syrians Antioch, etc., for aid and clergy. Each of these ethnic groups then grew to the point where they wanted their own bishops to be the ones making decisions for them, so bishops were either sent from overseas or candidates from the US

sent overseas to be educated and consecrated. *[I should note that one of the early 20th century bishops, Raphael Hawaweeny, came from the Middle East and was a bishop in the Russian Orthodox Church here prior to the Revolution. He was fairly recently canonized by the Orthodox Church in America, the successor to the Metropolia of the Russian Orthodox Church in America, which evolved during the 1920's to fill the now Czar-less vacuum. Bishop Raphael is now Saint Raphael of Brooklyn, and he is buried on the grounds of Antiochian Village Camp north of Ligonier in Westmoreland County!]*

Anywho, the bottom line now is that each ethnic group has an episcopacy which functions independently of the others. This is a totally unique and unheard of situation in Orthodoxy—an *eigenvalue*, as it were. One church per country—the "national" Orthodox Church is the rule everywhere except here. There are many clergy who are very frustrated with the current structure here, but there needs to be a unification for all the right reasons, not one church hierarchy taking over because: they were here first, they have the most people, they have the most money, etc. These will destroy any hope for true Orthodox unity in this country.

At the local level, the laity is very good at interacting, many of the clergy are also very good, and some bishops are very good--but others resist the "loss of identity" that they see with unity. If they truly looked back to the history of Orthodoxy in North America, they would see that ethnic groups had their own clergy and even bishops, but all were in a single Orthodox jurisdiction.

This is where we stand in 2007. We pray for this unity at every service, but must remember that unity and a return to the Orthodox norm will be realized in God's time, not our own timeline!

THANK YOU to everyone who brought out their vehicles to church last Sunday to be blessed. The weather held up—the sun was shining and each of us got a little wet from the Holy Water during the blessing service after Divine Liturgy.

We MUST remember that God has given us everything on the earth, we ask Him to bless them for our use and to watch over and protect us while we travel. We SHOULD start each and every journey with a short prayer, asking for His blessing and His protection while we travel.

A STORY WITHOUT A TITLE

by Anton Chekhov

IN the fifth century, just as now, the sun rose every morning and every evening retired to rest. In the morning, when the first rays kissed the dew, the earth revived, the air was filled with the sounds of rapture and hope; while in the evening the same earth subsided into silence and plunged into gloomy darkness. One day was like another, one night like another. From time to time a storm-cloud raced up and there was the angry rumble of thunder, or a negligent star fell out of the sky, or a pale monk ran to tell the brotherhood that not far from the monastery he had seen a tiger—and that was all, and then each day was like the next.

The monks worked and prayed, and their Father Superior played on the organ, made Latin verses, and wrote music. The wonderful old man possessed an extraordinary gift. He played on the organ with such art that even the oldest monks, whose hearing had grown somewhat dull towards the end of their lives, could not restrain their tears when the sounds of the organ floated from his cell. When he spoke of anything, even of the most ordinary things -- for instance of the trees, of the wild beasts, or of the sea—they could not listen to him without a smile or tears, and it seemed that the same chords vibrated in his soul as in the organ. If he were moved to anger or abandoned himself to intense joy, or began speaking of something terrible or grand, then a passionate inspiration took possession of him, tears came into his flashing eyes, his face flushed, and his voice thundered, and as the monks listened to him they felt that their souls were spell-bound by his inspiration; at such marvelous, splendid moments his power over them was boundless, and if he had bidden his elders fling themselves into the sea, they would all, every one of them, have hastened to carry out his wishes.

His music, his voice, his poetry in which he glorified God, the heavens and the earth, were a continual source of joy to the monks. It sometimes happened that through the monotony of their lives they grew weary of the trees, the flowers, the spring, the autumn, their ears were tired of the sound of the sea, and the song of the birds seemed tedious to them, but the talents of their Father Superior were as necessary to them as their daily bread.

Dozens of years passed by, and every day was like every other day, every night was like every other night. Except the birds and the wild beasts, not one soul appeared near the monastery. The nearest human habitation was far away, and to reach it from the monastery, or to reach the monastery from it, meant a journey of over seventy miles across the desert. Only men who despised life, who had renounced it, and who came to the monastery as to the grave, ventured to cross the desert.

What was the amazement of the monks, therefore, when one night there knocked at their gate a man who turned out to be from the town, and the most ordinary sinner who loved life. Before saying his prayers and asking for the Father Superior's blessing, this man asked for wine and food. To the question how he had come from the town into the desert, he answered by a long story of hunting; he had gone out hunting, had drunk too much, and lost his way. To the suggestion that he should enter the monastery and save his soul, he replied with a smile: "I am not a fit companion for you!"

When he had eaten and drunk he looked at the monks who were serving him, shook his head reproachfully, and said:

"You don't do anything, you monks. You are good for nothing but eating and drinking. Is that the way to save one's soul? Only think, while you sit here in peace, eat and drink and dream of beatitude, your neighbors are perishing and going to hell. You should see what is going on in the town! Some are dying of hunger, others, not knowing what to do with their gold, sink into profligacy and perish like flies stuck in honey. There is no faith, no truth in men. Whose task is it to save them? Whose work is it to preach to them? It is not for me, drunk from morning till night as I am. Can a meek spirit, a loving heart, and faith in God have been given you for you to sit here within four walls doing nothing?"

The townsman's drunken words were insolent and unseemly, but they had a strange effect upon the Father Superior. The old man exchanged glances with his monks, turned pale, and said:

"My brothers, he speaks the truth, you know. Indeed, poor people in their weakness and lack of understanding are perishing in vice and infidelity, while we do not move, as though it did not concern us. Why should I not go and remind them of the Christ whom they have forgotten?"

The townsman's words had carried the old man away. The next day he took his staff, said farewell to the brotherhood, and set off for the town. And the monks were left without music, and without his speeches and verses. They spent a month drearily, then a second, but the old man did not come back. At last after three months had passed the familiar tap of his staff was heard. The monks flew to meet him and showered questions upon him, but instead of being delighted to see them he wept bitterly and did not utter a word. The monks noticed that he looked greatly aged and had grown thinner; his face looked exhausted and wore an expression of profound sadness, and when he wept he had the air of a man who has been outraged.

The monks fell to weeping too, and began with sympathy asking him why he was weeping, why his face was so gloomy, but he locked himself in his cell without uttering a word. For seven days he sat in his cell, eating and drinking nothing, weeping and not playing on his organ. To knocking at his door and to the entreaties of the monks to come out and share his grief with them he replied with unbroken silence.

At last he came out. Gathering all the monks around him, with a tear-stained face and with an expression of grief and indignation, he began telling them of what had befallen him during those three months. His voice was calm and his eyes were smiling while he described his journey from the monastery to the town. On the road, he told them, the birds sang to him, the brooks gurgled, and sweet youthful hopes agitated his soul; he marched on and felt like a soldier going to battle and confident of victory; he walked on dreaming, and composed poems and hymns, and reached the end of his journey without noticing it.

But his voice quivered, his eyes flashed, and he was full of wrath when he came to speak of the town and of the men in it. Never in his life had he seen or even dared to imagine what he met with when he went into the town. Only then for the first time in his life, in his old age, he saw and understood how powerful was the devil, how fair was evil and how weak and faint-hearted and worthless were men. By an unhappy chance the first dwelling he entered was the abode of vice. Some fifty men in possession of much money were eating and drinking wine beyond measure. Intoxicated by the wine, they sang songs and boldly uttered terrible, revolting words such as a God-fearing man could not bring himself to pronounce; boundlessly free, self-confident, and happy, they feared neither God nor the devil, nor death, but said and did what they liked, and went whither their lust led them. And the wine, clear as amber, flecked with sparks of gold, must have been irresistibly sweet and fragrant, for each man who drank it smiled blissfully and wanted to drink more. To the smile of man it responded with a smile and sparkled joyfully when they drank it, as though it knew the devilish charm it kept hidden in its sweetness.

The old man, growing more and more incensed and weeping with wrath, went on to describe what he had seen. On a table in the midst of the revelers, he said, stood a sinful, half-naked woman. It was hard to imagine or to find in nature anything more lovely and fascinating. This reptile, young, longhaired, dark-skinned, with black eyes and full lips, shameless and insolent, showed her snow-white teeth and smiled as though to say: "Look how shameless, how beautiful I am." Silk and brocade fell in lovely folds from her shoulders, but her beauty would not hide itself under her clothes, but eagerly thrust itself through the folds, like the young grass through the ground in spring. The shameless woman drank wine, sang songs, and abandoned herself to anyone who wanted her.

Then the old man, wrathfully brandishing his arms, described the horse-races, the bull-fights, the theatres, the artists' studios where they painted naked women or moulded them of clay. He spoke with inspiration, with sonorous beauty, as though he were playing on unseen chords, while the monks, petrified, greedily drank in his words and gasped with rapture. . . .

After describing all the charms of the devil, the beauty of evil, and the fascinating grace of the dreadful female form, the old man cursed the devil, turned and shut himself up in his cell. . . .

When he came out of his cell in the morning there was not a monk left in the monastery; they had all fled to the town.

Via e-mail from Father Vitaly Dudkin

FASTING REMINDER: The Apostles Fast begins on Monday, June 4th, and ends on Thursday, July 12th. Please fast according to your best efforts—add prayers as you can and try to emphasize what comes out of your mouth rather than what goes into it! Please see Father Bob if you have any questions.

UPCOMING EVENTS—MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

On Saturday, June 9, Saint Vladimir's Parish on the South Side of Pittsburgh will honor Father John Haluszczak and His Beatitude, Metropolitan Constantine at a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy, followed by refreshments. Father John recently celebrated the 15th anniversary of his ordination to the Holy Priesthood. Father John and his family attended Holy Ghost for several years when he lived in the Greensburg area. His Beatitude also recently celebrated the 35th anniversary of his consecration to the episcopate and is a son of that parish. Divine Liturgy will begin at 10 AM and a reception will follow.

On Saturday, June 16, Saints Peter & Paul in Carnegie will celebrate with a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy as His Beatitude, Metropolitan Constantine, will ordain Subdeacon Mark Swindle to the Holy Diaconate. Divine Liturgy will begin at 10:30 AM and refreshments will follow.

SCOBA

The Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas
8 East 79th Street, New York, NY 10021

SCOBA Press Release May 25, 2007

The following "Pastoral Letter on Suicide" was adopted by the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA) at their May 23, 2007 Session held at St. Vladimir's Seminary in Crestwood, NY. The document was prepared by the SCOBA Social and Moral Issues Commission (SMIC). The Letter offers pastoral perspectives, consistent with both Holy Tradition and current medical and psychological thought, to clergy and laity alike on this human tragedy and how best to minister to those whose lives are so deeply affected by it.

A Pastoral Letter on Suicide

5/23/07

The tragedy of suicide has been a part of the human story from very early on, and it continues to affect the lives of our faithful today. As Hierarchs of the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas, we are asked frequently to clarify the Church's teachings on this critical issue. Our desire is to offer a pastoral perspective that is consistent with both the Tradition of our Orthodox Church and our improved understanding of the medical and psychological factors that might lead one to take his or her life.

The Sacredness of Life

As Orthodox Christians, we believe that life is a gift from God. The All-Holy and Life-Giving Trinity created all things and granted life to all living creatures. Out of His love, God made us, human beings, in His own divine image and likeness, entrusting us as stewards - not owners - of our lives, blessing us with the capacity of freedom, and calling us to a life of loving communion.

Our ancestors' original rebellion against God was a misuse of freedom, which ushered in the reality of both spiritual and physical death. Throughout history, God has acted to redeem the fallen race and to restore the communion and life that had been forfeited. Indeed, our Lord Jesus Christ identifies the very purpose of His incarnation and earthly mission with the gift of life, proclaiming, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). Remaining faithful to the Lord's Gospel, the Orthodox Church invites all human beings to enter into the living body of Christ, to be sustained through the life-giving sacraments, and to preserve and perpetuate both spiritual and physical life.

Suicide and the Orthodox Tradition

While a precise and unproblematic definition of "suicide" is difficult to articulate, we can say that the type of suicide here being addressed pertains to the intentional causing of one's own physical death through a decisive act. Understood in this way, suicide is regarded generally within the Orthodox Tradition as a rejection of God's gift of physical life, a failure of stewardship, an act of despair, and a transgression of the sixth commandment, "You shall not kill" (Exodus 20:13).

Historically, the Church was called upon to address the issue of suicide from the outset. When the Gospel was first being preached, philosophical and religious teachings prevalent in the Greco-Roman world tended both to disparage the body and to endorse suicide in circumstances of severe hardship. The Cynics, Epicureans, Stoics, and Gnostics, for example, all endorsed voluntary death for reasons consistent with each group's broader ethical vision. The early Church's condemnation of suicide, as reflected in the teachings of Clement of Alexandria, Lactantius, St. Augustine, and others, thus served to affirm teachings that were sharply different from those of the broader culture: the sacredness of each human being, the holiness of our bodies as Temples of the Holy Spirit, and, especially, the call for each one of us to maintain faith and hope even in the midst of extreme adversity. While these core teachings provided a Christian witness to Greco-Roman society, they also were reflected internally, to the members of the early Church, through the condemnation of all attempts to hasten one's entry into the Kingdom by self-sought martyrdom. Clement of Alexandria, for instance, condemns both suicide and such martyrdom when he writes, "He who presents himself before the judgment-seat becomes guilty of his own death. And such is also the case with him who does not avoid persecution, but out of daring presents himself for capture. Such a person...becomes an accomplice in the crime of the persecutor" (Stromateis 4.77.1).

Notwithstanding its strong general stance against the moral permissibility of suicide, the Church, historically, has offered a balanced teaching on this issue. On the one hand, the Church has maintained the normative position described above by condemning acts of suicide and by declining to offer a funeral service and burial to suicide victims. This dimension of the Church's teaching has underscored the sacredness of physical life and the responsibility of human beings to express proper self-love, gratitude, and hope. This dimension has also served as an intended deterrent for those suffering suicidal thoughts.

On the other hand, in her wisdom, the Church has acknowledged the complex etiology and emotionally charged character of a suicide. The corruption of human nature, brought about by the ancestral sin, carried profound implications for both the spiritual

and physical dimensions of the human person. While human freedom was not annihilated in the fall, both spiritual factors, like acedia (spiritual torpor), and physical factors, like depression, can severely compromise a person's ability to reason clearly and act freely. In regard to suicide, the Church has taken very seriously such spiritual and physical factors, and has responded pastorally by offering a funeral service and burial to suicide victims whose capacities for judgment and action were found to be significantly diminished. Thus, Canon 14 of Timothy of Alexandria states that liturgical services should be offered, "if a man having no control of himself lays violent hands on himself or hurls himself to destruction." And the patristic interpretation of this teaching states that services should be offered when a suicide victim "is not of sound mind, whether it be as a result of a demon or of an ailment of some sort." Question XIV of the 18 Canons of Timothy, Archbishop of Alexandria. Pedalion, p. 898

Suicide and Science

Through advances in science we now have a better understanding of the relationship between suicide and depression, as well as a more accurate account of the causes of depression. Depression is an illness caused by both medical and psychological factors. It is characterized by feelings of marked worthlessness and hopelessness and is often accompanied by physical changes such as loss of appetite, weight loss, or in some cases, weight gain. Both insomnia and hypersomnia are common symptoms.

Current medical knowledge helps us to understand that all depressions are multifactorial. Genetic, hormonal, neurochemical, environmental, and psychological contributions can combine to create a depressive picture. Furthermore, depression can present as the only expression of an underlying physical illness such as occult cancers, thyroid dysfunction, and drug reactions.

Sometimes depressions are very severe and psychotic in nature. These can be accompanied by delusions, hallucinations, and an altered sense of reality. In most instances, the depressed person is less impaired. Nonetheless, in all cases, depression is determined by non-rational psychological and physical internal events. Even an apparently rational and clear-thinking person may have his or her outlook and choices strongly affected by those non-rational internal events.

Pastoral Recommendation

In light of the above theological and scientific reflections, it is clear that the articulation of a proper Orthodox response to the tragedy of suicide is both acutely needed and particularly challenging. We are sensitive to the difficulty of maintaining a balance between the call of every human person to responsible stewardship of his or her physical life and the call of the Church to consider how advances in medical knowledge

impact Orthodox pastoral ministry. Conscious of this need for discernment, we offer the following guidelines for ministering in the wake of a suicide.

First, we must remain mindful that the primary focus of the Church and its pastoral ministry in cases where a suicide has taken place is on the living, the family and friends of the deceased. We should maintain a certain humility while remembering that the state of the suicide victim is and must remain in the hands of God. Those left behind carry a great burden – of hurt, guilt, and often shame – with the realization that their loved one has taken his or her own life. They look to the Church and, especially, to the parish family, for strength and hope regarding the deceased, and for the support and love they themselves so urgently need. In addition to their personal pastoral response, clergy should direct grief-stricken family and friends to crisis counseling resources in the area, which can complement the healing ministry of the Church.

Second, as we have studied this issue, it has become clear to us that far more cases of suicide than have previously been recognized involve spiritual and/or physiological factors that significantly compromise a person's rationality and freedom. While not removing moral culpability from all suicide cases or changing our general stance against suicide's moral permissibility, we affirm the deep relationship between physical and spiritual factors in human agency and we acknowledge that, in most instances, the complex web of causes contributing to a suicide lies beyond our full understanding.

Finally, because of the complexity of suicide, both in terms of determining causes and in terms of ministering to those most affected, the parish priest should always consult with his diocesan hierarch in order to discern the proper course of action, the general pastoral recommendation being that a church burial and memorial services could be granted unless there were an absence of significantly diminished capacities.

CONCLUSION

In his beautiful description of the Church as the "body of Christ," St. Paul writes, "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together." (1 Cor 12:26) The suicide of an Orthodox Christian is a tragedy that is suffered by the entire Church. As hierarchs of the Orthodox Church, we are acutely mindful of the need to maintain a perspective on suicide that is consistent with our identity and mission as the unified body of Christ. We believe that the perspective outlined in this statement, which reflects our common mind, accomplishes this purpose by drawing from our Holy Tradition as well as our deepened understanding of suicide's causes.

We extend our fervent prayers for the victims of suicide and for all whose lives and faith have been shaken by the suicide of a loved one. Furthermore, as Orthodox

bishops and members of SCOBA, we affirm that we will work together rigorously in order both to prevent suicides from occurring and to provide a unified pastoral response when they do, one characterized by the faith, hope, and love made possible by God, in Whom "we live and move and have our being." (Acts 17:28)