

# KOINONIA: A Publication of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey

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## LEADING THE FLOCK

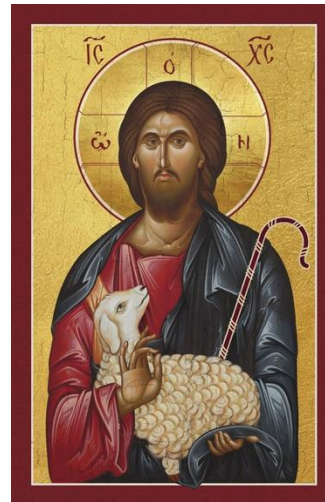
by Archpriest Eric G. Tosi

*“Today, there are more words and books and fewer living examples.”*  
– Elder Paisios of Athos

### Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory Forever!

Once I heard a sermon by an OCA bishop, where he related that there are two types of shepherds. In the Scottish model, the shepherd leads from behind the flock; he has trained dogs who nip at the feet of the sheep and move them along. Then there is the Middle Eastern model, in which the shepherd walks in front of the herd and makes noises, which the sheep hear and follow him in response. This begs the question: which is the proper model for Christian leadership – forcing the flock or leading the flock?

The answer lies in the Gospel of John, Chapter 10: *“The gatekeeper opens the gate for him [the shepherd], and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.”* (John 10:3-4)



Clearly Christ is giving to us the model for leadership. We need to guide the flock that Christ entrusts to us by leading them, such that they respond to the voice they recognize: the voice of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Leadership in the Church can be difficult, frustrating and even disheartening. Yet it can also be fulfilling, energizing and joyful – all depending on how we approach our work as Christian leaders. If we follow the model that Christ gives to us, then our leadership can be effective. If we do not, then it can be destructive – endangering our own souls and the souls of those whom we lead.

How do we lead ... and how should we be willing to be led? *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”* (John 10:27) Are we listening to the voice of the Shepherd? Do we know our flock? Are we willing to lead by example, willing to lay down our life for the flock, like our Lord? *“I am the good shepherd. The shepherd gives up his life for the sheep.”* (John 10:11)

Each of us is given that opportunity for leadership, whether it is in the flock which is the Church or the flock which is our family. Each of us has to exercise that leadership in a Christ-like way, as outlined in John 10. We lead not from behind, forcing the flock to move in a certain direction, but rather from the front, so that all hear and follow Christ's voice, which in turn draws others to the Church. As John 10:16 states, *“And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.”*

**Lead people to Christ!**

## Christian Leadership is Loving One Another

*“Christian leadership is the conscious working together in faith and in love.”*

The Church Fathers speak of both difficulties and victories within the later Christian communities that sought to make their way to the Kingdom while living in the confines of the empire. The Church has persevered to this day by seeking to do God’s will. As Christians, we must work together as leaders to attain the promise of the Kingdom.

Christian Leadership: It is loving one another. It is doing the will of God. It is striving together for union with God in His Kingdom. We can put these concepts together into a

definition of Christian leadership, as follows:

*Christian Leadership is the conscious working together in faith and in love, in a community of fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, to do God’s will on earth as it is in heaven, and to attain to the Kingdom of God, in the love of the God the Father, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.*

This “working together” implies that each of us in the “community of broth-

ers and sisters” contributes our own divinely given gifts and talents. We work according to our own specific responsibilities with some as “apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers” (Ephesians 4:11). All will be mutual servants of God and of one another. All will be leaders.

*Excerpt from Protodeacon Peter Danilchick’s **Thy Will Be Done: Strategic Leadership, Planning and Management for Christians** (Crestwood: SVS Press, 2016), p. 18.*

*“Leadership, again, may simply rest in the role. Appointment to an office may bring with it duties and responsibilities which require actions, decisions, and presentations which guide, direct and influence the lives and actions of others.”*

## The Variety of Leaders

Leadership may be understood as the exercise of dictatorial power and authority over followers. It may be interpreted charismatically, in which case the awe and reverence engendered by the *charismata* [the appeal and talents of a charismatic person] create a desire to follow on the part of others, which may or may not be desired or welcomed by the charismatic. Leadership, again, may simply rest in the role. Appointment to an office may bring with it duties and responsibilities which require actions, decisions and presentations which guide, direct and influence the

lives and actions of others. Leadership is today often described as “enabling.” The leader is thought of as the person who provides the opportunities, the circumstances, the capabilities, and the possibilities for others to freely respond, should they care to do so. And, finally, leadership may be simply one of example, or as is often called, “moral leadership.” What is a fact is that leadership in any case is a complex concept and not easily delineated. [The role of the ordained Christian leader] is to show his people, through his life and his service at the altar table,

that life finds its goal and its fulfillment when all that we are, all that we do, all that we have is laid down at the feet of the Master. “We lay down our whole lives and hope before You, O Master”, is the message of his leadership. His leadership consists of showing his people how to say to God with their whole lives: “The things that are Thine from the things that are Thine do we offer to You according to all things and for all things.”

*Excerpt from Fr. Stanley Harakas, “The Orthodox Priest as Leader in the Divine Liturgy”, in **The Greek Orthodox Theological Review**, XX, no. 2, Summer 1976, p. 163.*

## From the Fathers: “Our Age is Lacking Examples” by Venerable Paisios of Mount Athos

“In the old times we had men of great stature; our present age is lacking in examples...Today, there are more words and books and fewer living examples. We admire the holy Athletes of our Church, but without understanding how much they struggled, because we have not struggled ourselves. Had we done so, we would appreciate their pain, we would love them even more and strive with *philotimo* to imitate them. The Good God will of course take into account the age and conditions in which we live, and He will ask of each one of us accordingly. If we only strive even a little bit, we will merit the crown more than our ancestors.

In the old days, when there was a fighting spirit and everyone was trying to measure up to the best, evil and negligence would not be tolerated. Good was in great supply back then, and with this competitive spirit, it was difficult for careless people to make it to the finish line. The others would run them over. I remember once, in Thessaloniki, we were waiting for the traffic light to cross the street, when I suddenly felt pushed by the crowd behind me, as if by a wave. I only had to lift my foot and the rest was done for me. All I am trying to say is that when everybody is going toward the same direction,

those who don't wish to follow will have difficulty resisting because the others will push them along.

Today, if someone wishes to live honestly and spiritually, he will have a hard time fitting in this world. And if he is not careful, he'll be swept by the secular stream downhill. In the old days, there was plenty of good around, plenty of virtue, many good examples, and evil was drowned by the good; so, the little disorder that existed in the world or in the monasteries was neither visible nor harmful. What's going on now? Bad examples abound, and the little good that exists is scorned. Thus, the opposite occurs; the little good that exists is drowned by an excess of evil, and evil reigns.

It helps so much when a person or a group of people has a fighting spirit. When even one person grows spiritually, he does not only benefit himself, but helps those who see him. Likewise, one who is laid back and lazy has the same effect on the others. When one gives in, others follow until in the end there's nothing left. This is why it's so important to have a fighting spirit in these lax times. We must pay great attention to this matter, because people today have reached the point where they make lax laws

and impose them on those who want to live strict and disciplined lives. For this reason, it is important for those who are struggling spiritually, not only to resist being influenced by the secular spirit, but also to resist comparing themselves to the world and concluding that they are saints. For when this happens, they end up being worse than those who live in the world. If we take one virtue at a time, find the Saint who exemplified it and study his or her life, we will soon realize that we have achieved nothing and will carry on with humility.

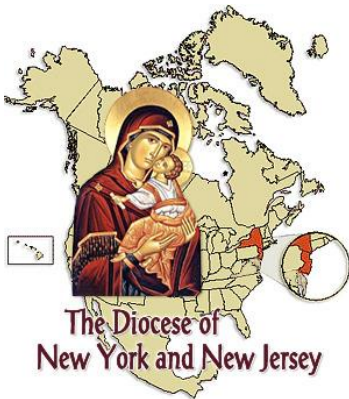
Just as in racing, the runner speeding for the end line does not look back toward those lagging behind, but fixes his eyes forward, so too in this struggle we don't want to be looking back and thus left behind. When I try to imitate those who are ahead of me, my conscience is refined. When, however, I look back, I justify myself and think that my faults are not important compared to theirs. The thought that others are inferior consoles me. Thus, I end up drowning my conscience or, to put it better, having a plastered, unfeeling heart.”

Excerpt from Elder Paisios. *With Pain and Love for Contemporary Man*. C. Taskiridou, trans. (Souroti, Greece: St. John the Theologian Monastery, 2019), pp. 33-34.



*“Today, there are more words and books and fewer living examples. We admire the holy Athletes of our Church, but without understanding how much they struggled, because we have not struggled ourselves.”*





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## Diocesan Evangelism School Announced

### By the Diocesan Commission on Missions and Evangelism

With the Blessing of His Eminence Archbishop Michael and the generous support of the Diocesan Council, the Commission on Missions and Evangelism announces the creation of the Diocesan Evangelism School. The three-day school will be held from August 8 to August 10, 2022, at St. Gregory the Theologian Church in Wappingers Falls, NY.



The purpose of the school is to educate clergy and lay people on the basic principles of evangelism, parish leadership and parish revitalization. Modeled in part after the Mission School sponsored by the Orthodox Church in America, the Diocesan Evangelism School will consist of classes and practical instruction from different instructors and experienced clergy.

The school is fully funded; there will be no cost to parishes or individuals. Each year, four parishes selected by His Eminence and the Deans will participate, each represented by the parish priest and one lay parishioner. New parishes will be selected to participate each year.

The three-day school will consist of six practical instruction sessions, three roundtable discussions which will be facilitated by an experienced clergyman, and an open discussion that will be led by His Eminence, Archbishop Michael.

The training sessions will consist of classes on the basic principles of evangelism, parish leadership, parish communications, catechism, and parish education. The round-tables will allow for conversations about how the outreach activities of a parish are affected by its liturgical life, its ethnic dimensions, and the social and moral norms that influence the culture within which the parish exists.

The open discussions will allow the participants to exchange concerns and ideas on various topics that impact the life and growth of their parishes. The principles developed at the School can, in turn, be brought back to the participants' respective parishes and applied in the future work of their churches.

If your parish is interested in attending the Evangelism School in August, please contact your Dean. Again, the School is fully funded, so travel, hotel and meals will be covered by the Diocese. If you have any further questions, please contact the Commission on Missions and Evangelism, Fr. Eric Tosi, Chair, at [egtosi@gmail.com](mailto:egtosi@gmail.com).

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