

### Fr. Steven Con't

be it social or personal. I would suggest that those who are secular-minded will avoid such a term - if even aware of it - because it is associated with religious practices of an unenvious, "medieval" past, like flagellation or some other form of self-abuse. Other misplaced synonyms may be equally as frightening - austerity, deprivation, mortification, repression, penance, and so forth. Based on such misunderstandings, for the secular-minded the word asceticism does not readily come to mind. Rather, it is something to be avoided!

As Orthodox Christians, we know the positive meaning of asceticism as actually leading to some form of "liberation," and not to its repression. God is a God of freedom - not of repression! And since we embrace ascetical practices from time-to-time, as we just did for Great Lent, we have developed a strong respect for the concept and practice. I could be stretching the meaning of the word in what I am now writing, but it seems to me that even dissociated from any religious connection we, as Americans, are now being ascetical to some degree on a daily basis in our collective attempt to minimize the effects of the coronavirus. And my initial point remains: Social distancing is a secular form of asceticism - watered down a bit or not.

Of course, as Americans we embrace all kinds of discipline when it leads to a positive goal. The two that come most readily to mind are dieting and exercise. We know that for both to be effective, it will take a good deal of discipline. Even fasting, practiced for reasons of good health and "beauty," is a practice not unknown to the most secular of persons. Then, there are athletes and musicians. Both vocations takes hours of disciplined training, and they may combine this with either dietary restrictions, intense "workout sessions" or simply hours of repetitive practice. We can further add all of the men and women in the armed forces. Basic training is essential, and highly disciplined. Thus, we all know by experience that restraint and self-denial have their positive effects. Yet, this is now completely unmoored from any religious connotations, even though practiced "religiously."

In acknowledging all of this, there is still that element of "rebellion" when any such discipline - or simplified asceticism - is mandated, ordered or directed "from above," from the "powers that be."



### And Grandma's too...

While we honor all our mothers with words of love and praise. While we tell about their goodness and their kind and loving ways. We should also think of Grandma, she's a mother too, you see.... For she mothered my dear mother as my mother mothers me.

Author- Unkown



For a large swath of the population to place oneself under such authoritative directives is simply not the "American way." But since "the right to protest" is the "American way," this movement is now gaining momentum. I would again like to clarify that I am not criticizing these open protests. I am trying to understand some of the underlying motivations and causes beyond the pressing issue of gainful employment. What is happening to literally millions of American lives economically because of the coronavirus is clearly tragic. Lives are being ruined, perhaps never to recover. Do we now stress biological or economic health? Agonizing decisions are being forced upon our political and social leaders.

On the other hand, for many Christians - and this includes Orthodox Christians - the terms "secular," "secularist," and "secularism" are dismissed as terms associated with some form of "godless humanism." There is a "cultural war" going on here, and Christians better remain vigilant or they will lose their "religious rights" according to many Christians (and persons of other religious backgrounds, I would assume) Therefore, these same Christians positively bristle at the thought of joining the **Con't Next Page**

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In the more marginalized, “fringe” groups, to associate with the secular, or to follow directives from secular sources or authority, is nothing but a betrayal of one’s faith in God. And this leads to a suspicious attitude toward “science,” however that broad term is conceived. If science conflicts with a certain definition of faith, then science must be rejected, for science itself is one more manifestation of “godless humanism.” This presents a whole new set of perilous choices that can have tragic consequences. For this has led many churches in America to disregard social distancing and thus to gather in large numbers well beyond the time that such gatherings were designated as dangerous, and when other places were closed by state mandate. Was this a “religious protest movement” fueled by a suspicion of secular authority, that seemed to be challenging the authority of God? Such church gathering were possible, of course, because of the separation of church and state. Many worshippers became sick with the coronavirus and a share of prominent pastors/religious leaders lost their lives to the virus in the process. I am concerned with the bad theology that “believers” coming together in faith and worship, would somehow be exempt or protected by God. This, simply, is not reality, but a fantasy engendered by a faulty understanding of what faith actually is. Since Jesus did not tempt/test God (Matt. 3:5-6), then neither should we.

Needless to say, most Christian churches - including the Orthodox Church in America and other North American Orthodox jurisdictions - have fully cooperated with the secular authorities and with the scientific community in severely restricting access to our churches, and in reducing to a “skeletal” minimum the persons allowed to conduct the services. Our own Holy Synod consulted with the “experts” in order to formulate realistic directives that primarily sought the well-being of everyone within the Church. This was a form of ecclesial asceticism freely embraced to serve the faithful and the common good. It was a prudent course of action meant to both protect the faithful and minimize the burden placed upon our overwhelmed health care system. It hurt during Holy Week and Pascha, so dear to the Orthodox, but it was the right thing to do. Asceticism may be personal, but it must take into account the “neighbor.” Otherwise, “self-limitation” only hides “self-centeredness” behind a pious facade.

I just read this morning that there is a coalition of

conservative Christian groups energizing their churches and the faithful for what is being termed “Reopen Church Sunday” on May 3. Of course, social distancing and sanitation methods are also being emphasized. Other Christian groups, however, are questioning the timing of this movement. Is this too soon? Will it lead to another upsurge of coronavirus patients and thus (needlessly?) further tax local health care systems? Are pastors afraid that further delay will erode the faith of their flocks? Are Christians being just as fearful as the secular-minded when facing danger to our health? But is it then wise to rush into a course of action imprudently meant to “prove” our Christian faith? Hard questions, indeed! We will have to patiently await to access how things are unfolding. And we hope and trust that our leaders - secular and ecclesial - respond with discernment and responsibility.

There is no denying that there is a huge difference between how theistic-oriented persons and the secular-oriented understand the world around us. These are clashing “worldviews.” Our very understanding of reality is different! But we all live in the same “real” world. We can ungrudgingly cooperate with each other when the common good is at stake. We can continue to wage our ideological battles in due time. Now, however, is the time to work together. The coronavirus has had that effect on us.



### ONLY ONE MOTHER

Hundreds of Stars in the pretty sky, Hundreds of shells on the shore together, Hundreds of birds that go singing by, Hundreds of lambs in the sunny weather. Hundreds of dewdrops to greet the dawn, Hundreds of bees in the purple clover, Hundreds of butterflies on the lawn, But only one mother the world wide over.

### BUILDING / RESTORATION FUND

Our 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary is coming!  
Fund Purpose: To collect funds to pay for the restoration, repair and beautification of the building and parish room. This will avoid using general funds which are earmarked for budgetary items.

Please consider contributing generously to the  
*Building/Restoration Fund.*

**Sunday of the Paralytic**  
Commemorated on [May 10](#)

On this day the Church remembers the man who lay by the Sheep's Pool in Jerusalem for thirty-eight years, waiting for someone to put him into the pool. The first one to enter the pool after an angel troubled the water would be healed of his infirmities, but someone always entered the pool before him. Seeing the man, the Lord felt compassion for him and healed him.

The Kontakion for this Fourth Sunday of Pascha asks Christ to raise up our souls, "paralyzed by sins and thoughtless acts."

**Apostle Simon the Zealot**  
Commemorated on [May 10](#)

Saint Simon was from Cana in Galilee, and was known to the Lord and His Mother. Tradition says that he was the bridegroom at the wedding where the Savior performed His first miracle. After witnessing the miracle of the water which had been turned into wine, he became a zealous follower of Christ. For this reason, he is known as Saint Simon the Zealot.

Saint Simon was one of the twelve Apostles, and received the Holy Spirit with the others on Pentecost. He traveled to many places from Britain to the Black Sea, proclaiming the Gospel of Christ. After winning many pagans to the Lord, Saint Simon suffered martyrdom by crucifixion. Saint Demetrius of Rostov says that this Saint Simon is to be distinguished from the Apostle Simon Peter, and from the Lord's relative Simon (Mt.13:55), who was the second Bishop of Jerusalem.

Saint Simon is also commemorated on June 30 with the other Apostles.



**John 5:1-15 (Gospel)**

After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had. Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me." Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath. The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed." He answered them, "He who made me well said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk.'" Then they asked him, "Who is the Man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk'?" But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in that place. Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you." The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

**A Mother's Love**

There are times when only a mother's love can understand our tears, can soothe our disappointments and calm all of our fears. There are times when only a mother's love can share the joy we feel, when something we've dreamed about quite suddenly is real. There are times when only a mother's faith can help us on life's way and inspire in us the confidence we need from day to day. For a mother's heart and a mother's faith and a mother's steadfast love were fashioned by the Angels and sent from God above.

Author- unknown

## Acts 9:32-42 (Epistle)

Now it came to pass, as Peter went through all parts of the country, that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda. There he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed. And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed." Then he arose immediately. So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord. At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them. But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord.

## "MOM-ISMS"

- Money does not grow on trees.
- Don't make that face or it'll freeze in that position.
- If I talked to my mother like you talk to me....
- Always change your underwear; you never know when you'll have an accident.
- Be careful or you'll put your eye out.
- What if everyone jumped off a cliff? Would you do it, too?
- Close that door! Were you born in a barn?
- If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all.
- Don't put that in your mouth; you don't know where it's been!
- Be careful what you wish for, it might come true.
- Don't eat those, they will stunt your growth.
- If you don't eat those, you will stunt your growth.
- It doesn't matter what you accomplish, I'll always be proud of you.
- I hope that when you grow up, you have kids "Just Like you"! (Also known as the "Mother's Curse")
- If I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times.

## The Outstretched Arms of Moses By Fr. Lawrence Farley

After Israel was brought out of Egypt and as they journeyed to the foot of Mount Sinai, they faced a multitude of dangers in the howling wilderness. They faced the threat of starvation as they slowly trudged southward through the west side of the Sinai peninsula, and in response God provided for them through the provision of manna. They faced the threat of dying from thirst, and in response God provided for them by bringing water from the rock. And perhaps more terrifying than these silent challenges to their existence, they faced the threat of ultimate extermination from the Amalekites who warred against them as plodded ever forward.

The Amalekites were a Bedouin tribe that seems to have lived mostly in the Negev, the southern part of the Holy Land (Numbers 13:29). It appears that the Amalekites knew that Israel was heading through the

Sinai peninsula on their way to Palestine and wanted to prevent their entry into what they considered their own territory. They therefore began to harass them, picking off the weakest, most helpless, the stragglers at the fringes of the company (Deuteronomy 25:17-18).

It was a contemptible strategy, combining both cruelty and cowardice. Israel as a whole was hardly an armed company, since they left Egypt with their pots and pans and with some silver and gold, but not with weapons enough to fully arm and defend themselves against a seasoned enemy. The Amalekites struck those who lagged behind, killing the women, the elderly, and the children. The men from the main body of Israel could only look on helplessly as Amalek swooped down on the helpless, slaughtered them, and then galloped away. The Amalekites were not just another Bedouin tribe; they were the embodiment of all that was wrong in the world; a kind of walking Covid virus *Con't Pg 13*

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preying upon the weak and helpless. Even in days of David they were still raiding and marauding, burning villages and carrying off women and children (1 Samuel 30:1-2).

We read of God provision for Israel's safety and survival in Exodus 17:8-16. Moses commanded Joshua to pick men who would fight Amalek the next time they attacked. By merely human figuring, it would be an unequal battle, for the Amalekites were seasoned warriors with well-used weapons; the Israelites were recently liberated slaves with no experience of warfare and few resources to wage it. They needed not just courage; they needed help from their God.

To secure this help, Moses climbed to the top of a hill with the rod of God in his hand. He stood at the top of the hill and stretched out his hands in a posture of prayer and supplication. As long as he remained in such supplication, Israel prevailed on the battlefield below him. But when he grew slack and lowered his hands, Amalek prevailed. To ensure success, Aaron and Hur set up a stone there for Moses to sit upon and stood on either side of him, both of them holding his arms aloft, keeping them steady until the setting of the sun and Israel's final victory.

After the victory, God commanded Moses to create a lasting memorial of the event, as a pledge that Israel would remember and wage war against Amalek throughout the coming generations until they had been blotted out of human memory. In obedience Moses built an altar there on the site, inscribing upon it the words "Yahweh my Banner"—i.e. Yahweh was their battle standard, their hope of victory over all their foes, and devotion to Him would keep them safe. Israel would long remember this battle and obey the divine mandate to wage war against Amalek. When Israel received Saul as their first dynastic king, one of his first tasks was to wage holy war against the raiding Amalekites (1 Samuel 15).

This brief glimpse at Israel's first encounter with Amalek offers us two things—a prophecy and a lesson.

The prophecy is found in the posture of Moses. Witnesses that day could look up and see him on the lonely hill surrounded by tumult and battle,

lifting up his arms. As the long day turned to evening, he was still atop that hill, now with a man of either side of him, and his arms still outstretched on either side. His outstretched arms brought victory in the battle, and gave life to God's people. Later Christian eyes read of that day and saw another Man on a lonely hill with outstretched arms, surrounded by the tumult and battle of the world. The world beneath that hill was filled with war, and teemed with the enemies of God's people—both visible and invisible enemies. That Man also had men on either side of Him, witnessing His prayer. And by His outstretched arms God brought victory over the foe, and eternal life to His people. Moses' outstretched arms prefigured the saving and bleeding outstretched arms of Christ, and the hill on which Moses ascended in the Sinai peninsula prefigured the holy hill of Golgotha. Moses stayed there until the evening and until the battle was won. Christ remained on the cross until the ninth hour, giving victory to all who would trust in His saving death.

The lesson is found in the altar that Moses built—an altar built as a memorial to that victory over Amalek and as a mandate to wage war against the cruel foe until not a trace of him remained, for "Yahweh will have war with Amalek from generation to generation" (Exodus 17:16). We also are called to wage war against the foe throughout this age, and we must never stop until the evil is utterly blotted out from under heaven.

But our enemy is not flesh and blood. We do not war against people, but against the demons, against the world rulers of this present darkness, the spiritual armies of evil in the heavenlies (Ephesians 6:12). The temptation is to make a treaty with evil, to tolerate at least some evil within our hearts, to imagine that saving repentance can be partial, and that we can make a bargain with the devil and with death. No such treaty is possible. As George McDonald once reminded us, "There is no heaven with a little hell in it—no plan to retain this or that of the devil in our hearts or our pockets. Out Satan must go, every hair and feather". Our repentance must be total; our hatred of evil and of the devil, relentless and uncompromising. Only with such steely determination can the inner battle be won. Yahweh would have us war against sin and Satan from generation to generation, and never cease fighting until the evil is gone.

The Church bids us take part in this ceaseless war against sin and death. When one is made a catechumen, before one is *Con't Pg 14*

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even baptized, the priest lays his hand upon the candidate's head, thereby making him into a "sealed, newly-enlisted soldier of Christ our God". It is our duty and privilege to fight under Christ's banner against the spiritual hordes of Amalek, for Christ has stretched out His arms on the cross. The final victory has already been won.



### Dispassion in the Spiritual Life

Here's a story from a Desert Father that helps us to understand Dispassion:

*There was an elder living in the desert. One day, a young man came to visit him and asked, "Abba, what can I do to be saved?"*

*The old man thought for a moment, and then said, "Go to the cemetery and curse the gravestones." The young man was puzzled, but he obeyed. He went to the cemetery and shouted the worst curses he could imagine at the gravestones. When he returned, the Elder said, "Now go back and praise the tombs to the sky." The young man again obeyed, feeling rather foolish.*

*When he returned the second time, the Elder asked, "Now tell me: when you yelled curses at the graves, what did they say?" "Nothing," the young man replied, still not knowing where this was going. "And when you praised them, what was their response?" "Nothing, Abba. They were silent." "If you would be saved," the Elder said, "you must become like the gravestones, being moved neither by men's curses nor their praise."*

In this story, the Elder was not suggesting that the young man become void of feeling, his heart as hard as a gravestone. He would certainly say that emotions are an integral part of who we are, and that to deny them is to deny our very humanity.

Rather, the Elder was exhorting his protégé to become free from enslavement to external forces.

However good or bad something may feel, he is suggesting, you cannot allow that feeling to control how you respond. Having a feeling is perfectly natural and good; being controlled by that feeling is something else entirely.

It comes down to this: if someone behaves like a jerk and I feel like punching his lights out, do I act on it? Or do I heed the Psalmist's advice: "Be angry, but sin not; commune with your own hearts on your beds, and be silent" (Ps. 4:4). When someone hurts me unjustly, do I react as my feelings would dictate, or do I follow Jesus and say, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:24).

The right choice seems clear. And yet our society would have us follow our feelings blindly, making choices according to our least whim and impulse. Advertisers count on precisely this kind of reaction when they bombard our senses with their sounds and images. Faced with such an onslaught, dispassion is the answer.

Indeed, I would go even further and say that acquiring dispassion is the most important and urgent challenge of the spiritual life. If we want to mediate true spiritual healing in this world of ours, each of us needs to seek freedom from those forces—biological, psychological, emotional, social, national, ideological and even religious—that would subject us to their wills and ultimately, pit us against one another.

When something comes into our orbit and threatens to throw off our equilibrium—whether towards the negative or the positive—we cannot allow it dictate our actions or reactions. Instead, we must offer everything—however bad or good it feels—to God, allowing Him and Him alone to measure our best response.

*The above narrative was taken from:*  
<http://www.pravmir.com/more-on-dispassion/>

In next week's note I want to take this above story and explanation and apply it to the question I raised

last week. "So what can be done to help our children walk through this challenging mine field of polarity, especially in addressing the Covid 19 issue?"

Christ is risen! The Lord's blessing be upon you!  
+Paul

**“This is the Way”**  
**by Father Gregory and Matushka**  
**Ksenia Bruner**

It has been repeatedly stated that we are in an unprecedented situation. While parallels have been drawn to the Spanish Flu Pandemic, there is no living memory of those days and we must use the historical record as a guide. Naturally, there has been debate on how to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak. Scientists. Politicians. Bishops. Every Tom, Dick, and Haralambos with an opinion/perspective on what must be done. Ultimately, directives were handed down on how we should conduct services and maintain safety in compliance with local governmental orders. For many, this meant staying at home except for necessary travel. Minimal personnel were authorized for services, and in many places those services were limited. Dig in and ride out the storm. For my family, things materialized differently.

One of the initial directives given prohibited anyone in contact with a healthcare employee working in a facility treating COVID-19 patients within 15 days, as well as the healthcare worker, from attending the services. This presented my wife, Ksenia, and I with a conundrum. She is a Hospitalist Nurse Practitioner in a hospital that had confirmed COVID-19 patients. If we spent any time together from that point, I would be prevented from serving in the church for two weeks, which would be just enough time for her to finish her next week of shifts and start the cycle again. In short, I could not serve the remainder of Lent, Holy Week, Pascha, and so on, to live stream the services to those at home until the restrictions were lifted. In the end, we made the only decision we could, as difficult as it was: until given a reprieve, Ksenia would retreat to our home in Indiana near where she works, while I would remain in Ohio with our three children.

Matushka Ksenia has never been one to shy away from a challenge. It is what drove her to apply to top-tier schools, to teach in Japan, to attend seminary, to open her own business, to begin a career as a nurse, and become a Board Certified Nurse Practitioner, and probably her greater challenge: marrying me. This separation has been a daunting challenge in that it is compounded with her responsibilities in the hospital caring for those who are gravely ill, an increasing number with COVID-19. What was the other option? Even if she had the opportunity, Ksenia would not turn her back

on her co-workers or her patients. She is driven to service in helping those who cannot help themselves. This is the Way.

For my part, in addition to my duties as Dean of St. George Cathedral (Bulgarian Diocese), I am also a chaplain in the Indiana Air National Guard. The second of the Air Force Core Values is “Service before Self.” This notion was at the core of my upbringing. Service to Faith, Family, and Flag come before my own comforts and desires. As a priest, it is my duty and privilege to perform the Divine Services “on behalf of all and for all.” The knowledge that the Cathedral continues to function and that liturgical prayers are still offered up is a comfort to many, including myself. As a chaplain, I am continually under the possibility of activation in support of state emergency efforts, and indeed I have already spent a few days providing spiritual support to the Airmen under my charge as they navigate the new normal. This is the Way.

The day-to-day workload and routine have changed dramatically. Far more time is spent behind a computer or on the phone trying to stay connected. Balancing church and family has proven even more difficult; with additional attention to each child being necessary, as well as oversight of the parish community. The increased need for technology, especially to live stream, was, and remains, unnerving to this luddite. I could not do it without the help of Matushka Ksenia. Prior to her departure, she made a “me-proof” kit to use to set up and record the live streams. Any and all postings, extractions, and other items related to this are done by her remotely. This ministry has allowed us to reach many inquirers and unchurched. The current state of technology has also allowed Matushka to maintain some sort of connection with myself and the children during her COVID-19 exile. Whether establishing a game plan for live streaming or other church communication or just following up on household activities, daily communication is consistent. This is the Way.

We look forward to the time when our family can be reunited, and we can settle into a new, balanced routine. Regardless, there is still a need that must be met. Matushka still has patients, the physically suffering, that must be cared for. I have my own spiritual patients, both in the parish and at my base, who likewise find themselves in need of care. Throughout all of this, it is our hope that our children can learn from this experience, understanding that the needs of others come before our wants: to be selfless instead of selfish.

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***This is the way con't***

To quote the movie, First Knight, "In serving one another, we become free."

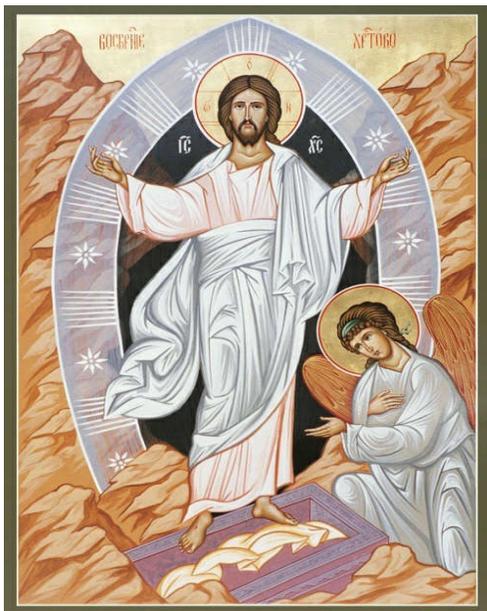
This is the Gospel.

This is the Way.

Priest Gregory Bruner is Dean of St. George Cathedral, Rossford, OH (Bulgarian Diocese). He is also a chaplain with the 122d Fighter Wing, Indiana Air National Guard, Ft. Wayne, IN.

Matushka Ksenia Bruner is a Board-certified Family Nurse Practitioner, currently serving as a Hospitalist at Parkview Hospital, Ft. Wayne, IN.

They have three children: Matthias, Thaddeus, and Ileana.



**CHRIST IS  
RISEN!  
INDEED HE IS  
RISEN!**

***CATASTROPHIC RELIEF FUND***

Purpose of fund: To provide some small financial assistance to a parishioner, family member or community member who has suffered a catastrophic event.

Funds will be offered at the discretion & blessing of the Rector and the discretion of the Board.

Two parishioners have given a portion of their stimulus checks to this fund. Please feel free to donate as well. Thank you and God bless!

**MAY SPECIAL  
COLLECTION**

**BABY BOTTLES  
FOR HEARTBEAT**



**PRAY FOR OUR  
CATECHUMENS**

Rachael Adamcio      Luke Welch  
Lydia Welch          Tristen Welch

**Possible Catechumens:**

Loreen Welch      Cheyenne Welch

May God & the Holy Spirit guide them in their journey in the Orthodox Church and the Orthodox way of Life.