



Synod of Bishops concludes retreat

The retreat was held from June 24-26, 2014, and was led by the Rev. Deacon Stephen Muse, Ph.D., LMF, LPC, B.C.E.T.S., Director of the Pastoral Counselor Training program and Clinical Services for the D. A. and Elizabeth Turner Ministry Resource Center of the Pastoral Institute, Inc. in Columbus, GA.

The focus of the three-day encounter was “Clergy Health,” which is a priority in the Guiding Vision of His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon for the future of our Orthodox Church in America. The retreat focused on such issues as challenges facing the Church in the 21st century, clergy burnout, clergy abuse, the importance of a Christ-centered ministry, guideposts on the road to theosis, and guidelines for candidates for the episcopacy.

Among his specific counsels to the hierarchs, gleaned from the Scriptures, the Fathers, modern-day elders, and Orthodox psychotherapists, Dr. Muse offered the following as foundational for the health of hierarchs, their clergy and the Church in general.

1. Apostolic Witness: “The most essential determinant as to whether the modern culture values the ancient Orthodox faith’s representation of Christ as authentic or not depends on whether one has experienced or witnessed the glory of God as a human being fully alive in Christ in the face and life of another person.”
2. Spiritual Life of the Bishop: “The shepherd who lays down his own pretensions and worldly ambitions for the sake of serving the sheep is the one they will follow because they hear the Master’s voice clearly.”
3. Psychological Life of the Bishop: “Being able to manage his own psychosomatic needs and spiritual formation in the midst of a cornucopia of modern stimulations is more difficult than it was in the early centuries ... it is essential to keep a vital ongoing spiritual life of prayer, confession and authentic human relationships with those one serves.”

Dr. Muse is the author of *When Hearts Become Flame*, and several other books, articles and papers. He serves as a deacon in the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Atlanta.