

STRIVING TO BE  
A GOOD SHEPHERD  
By Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

In recent times, there has been a spate of articles, encyclicals and sermons on the role of the bishop in the Church. This material cites sound and authoritative sources written by saints of the Orthodox Church and underscoring the important role that a hierarch has in the good governance of the Church.

For example, in the pamphlet, *The Eucharist, the Word and the Bishop*, we read the following:

Essential to the Church's unity is the bishop, the Eucharist and the apostolic tradition.

Recently, someone asked me my views on this particular matter. I replied that I don't have personal views on this subject, and whatever views I do have coincided with those of the saints, and I added the following observation:

To be sure, I am not a parish priest [as some old calendar bishops in Greece have become!]. I am a bishop of *many* parishes and, as a result, I avoid, for example, hearing confessions in parishes, or making decisions about the décor, or furniture, or landscaping of a parish. Since my job is to administer a diocese, I don't have time to oversee the nitty gritty of the life of *one* single parish. That is what a parish priest is for. Also, in terms of ordination, I am much younger than many of the parish priests, and I look up to them and I respect them. I admire their sacrifice and dedication, their abilities and talents. I ask them for advice, for their spiritual counsel, and I try to respond to their needs by helping them however I can — for example, by printing useful pamphlets, and especially by being an *Orthodox* Bishop. Essentially that's it. I feel very comfortable asking people for help, because that is the only way I know to overcome my own inadequacies and limitations, and, thank God, people have responded. Consequently, if anything at all has been accomplished in and by this Metropolis, it is because of these good people.

I've ordained many people, including those that are worthy of the office they received, and some who proved to be not so worthy. But, in *every* case I ordained *only* those who were approved by the local spiritual father, the parish priest. Without his consent, I would not ordain even a taper-bearer, reader, ecclesiarch, or sub-deacon, because, obviously, the father confessors know their spiritual children better than I do.

I did, on one occasion, ordain someone to the priesthood without the full and heartfelt consent of the local spiritual father. That was in Seattle. He was a *disaster*! You

see, I was a young and inexperienced bishop then, and therefore I knew everything. So, I didn't listen to Father Neketas as I should have. From his many years of pastoral experience, Father Neketas had a sensitivity to the issue that I lacked. As Father Neketas put it so nicely and delicately, the individual I ordained was "unreceptive to instruction" [he said this in Ancient Greek].

We are all aware of the rights and prerogatives of a bishop, and many have done a remarkable job of articulating them in their sermons. But together with the rights and prerogatives are also the words of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, which supersede and trump all "rights and prerogatives":

Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your servant; even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.....

(Matt. 20:25-28)

Irascibility, anger, threats, shouting and intimidation are hardly the qualifications one expects to see in a secular ruler, much less in a minister and servant of Christ. Rather, they are definite hallmarks of one who has failed.

Since I personally am so inexperienced, I have to ask others for help all the time. For example, when we are discussing the needs of the clergy in East Africa at a meeting of the Missionary Society, someone will say that a banana plantation is needed to support the clergy there. Now what do I know about banana plantations in Uganda? I don't have a clue. Finally, someone will suggest that I write a letter describing our work in the missions and our needs there. I tell them, "I tell you what. *You* write the letter and I'll look it over. If I like it, I'll sign it."

Then, at a meeting of the Diocese Board, we discuss finances. Now what do I understand about finances? My eyes usually glaze over and I doze off and begin to snore gently when the Board is discussing the diocese budget. Then, someone will suggest that I write a letter about our financial needs. At this point, I tell them, "I tell you what. *You* write the letter and I'll look it over. If I like it, I'll sign it."

It's the same with everything at the Diocese House, St. Xenia's Camp, The Altar Boys Group, Clergy compensation. You name it. So when people come up to me and say with astonishment, "Metropolitan Ephraim, you are so talented! You write such wonderful letters on such a wide variety of subjects! How do you do it?" I just lower my eyes and say bashfully, "Oh, it's nothing."

The truth is that I have many sources I can turn to for help. For one thing, at the monastery I have a house full of geniuses. They know about all sorts of subjects: church history, theology, the holy canons, pastoral subjects, languages, music, patristics, iconography, liturgics, translations. Then, the clergy in our parishes are a well-spring of information and experience! And in the Diocese Board — more geniuses!

With such help, being a bishop is almost painless!!