

St. Herman's Monastery and House of Hospitality is known to many. Our parish has for years assisted it in many ways: groups have cooked and serve meals; food and clothing were donated; trays were passed to support it. One thing was never in doubt, that the poor were being served, and so we knew that God's work was being done.

The breakdown early this year, so well publicized in the media, was heartbreaking. The crisis in confidence was justified; no one doubts this. Nevertheless many believed and continue to believe that God's work is still being done. Since the Abbot Fr. John Henry left, not a meal was missed, homeless men were sheltered, and groceries were distributed as before. On November 27, the 60,000th meal of the year was served. In short, the House has done remarkably well in the interim, though its finances have suffered.

As the President of the Greater Cleveland Council of Orthodox Clergy I was asked by the interim leadership and by the board of the Little Brothers of Divine Compassion (the corporation that legally owns the House), "Where are the Orthodox?" It was difficult to answer them. I know where the Orthodox are, but many are reluctant to get involved for a number of reasons. I was reluctant, fearful of getting into something without knowing all the facts.

Over the months that followed there have been many meetings with Fr. John Loejos, the President of the Board of the Little Brothers of Divine Compassion and with Ron Register, the interim director of St. Herman's. After much discussion it seemed that the best course of action would be to give St. Herman's a new start, by establishing a new corporation that will be able to run St. Herman's now and in the future without being bogged down in the past.

Representatives of all the Orthodox Churches in the Greater Cleveland area were invited to a meeting on August 15. The finances and other facts were presented as well as we could discern them. The consensus of the group was that (1) we feel a moral imperative to continue the ministry and (2) we believe this to be possible for the Orthodox community. Since then a Transition Task Force has been working to prepare for a transition to a new corporation by the year's end.

On the plus side: St. Herman's is doing sacred work; it has ongoing income, there is a tremendous reservoir of good will for St. Herman's, despite all that happened this past year; it has a donor base of more than 5,000 donors. One huge surprise was that the House's food budget is almost insignificant, because so much food is donated from restaurants and catering establishments. On the minus side: there will be a need to hire a new director; donations are down; costs will surely go up, as services that in the past were done freely may now require paid staff.

No one says that it will be easy, but I see the situation as a blessing in disguise. I see the House as a focal point for the Cleveland area Orthodox churches to work together in a common cause, service to the least of Christ's brothers and sisters. It will be a place where our middle class children can in safety look the poor in the eye and see that they, too, are God's children, while serving them a meal. It will be a place where philanthropic groups such as the Philoptochos chapters can develop programs to help break the cycle of poverty.

I have often told groups going to St. Herman's that we need them more than they need us. What I mean by this is that if we did not go, I suppose that the poor would survive somehow. They would find a place to eat or to sleep. But we need to do this ministry; we need to feed the hungry and give shelter to the

homeless, because in doing so we fulfill God's commandments and we gain blessings. I hope that all of you will in some way support St. Herman's in its new life.

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