

## Our Current Eparch: Bishop BENEDICT (Aleksiychuk), M.S.U.

Some men take a direct path to become a bishop, and others the Lord leads through various life experiences that provide a more comprehensive understanding of the human experience. Bishop Benedict is from the latter group. Therefore, Bishop Benedict's background and growth before coming to the eparchy is the focus of this article rather than a chronological look at his accomplishments here.

Valeriy Dmitrovich Aleksiychuk was born on January 16, 1968, in the small village of Borshchivka, Kostopil district, Rivne region, Ukraine SSR.

### *His educational background*

He attended the local village schools until 1983. He then began his studies at Rivne Medical College, completing his degree in 1987 as a Physician's Assistant. After graduation, he worked as an Emergency Medical Technician at the ambulance station in Kostopil. Then, from 1989 to 1990, he worked as a Physician's Assistant, initially at a city clinic and later at Karpaty, the sanatorium in Truskavets. He, therefore, has a background in physical healing.

For mental health healing, later in 2008 to 2010, he completed a course in Practical Psychology at the European School of Correspondence Education (Kharkiv). In addition, he studied Introduction to Mental Disorders at the Ukrainian Community of Psychiatrists. And from 2009 to 2012, he studied pedagogy and psychology at the Ignatianum University in Krakow (Poland).

### *Real-Life Experience*

Besides being an EMT and physician's assistant and at Karpaty which provided eye-opening experiences, from May, 1987 to May, 1989 he did military service.

In June 2016, he received a master's degree in Business Administration from the Ukrainian Catholic University.

### *His theological background*

Shortly after leaving the military, he studied at the Drohobych Theological Seminary. This started his theological and spiritual preparation for future ministry.

In 1996, he graduated from the Catholic University of Lublin, where he defended his master's thesis on the topic "The Christian Spirituality of John of Kronstadt." In October 2004, he continued completing his Licentiate Degree in 2006. At the same university, on April 18, 2008, he defended his Ph.D. thesis on the topic "The Superior As a Spiritual Father. Investigation in the light of the works of Saint Theodore the Studite," completing his doctorate in spiritual theology.

It is safe to conclude that the eparch is one of the most-educated bishops in the Catholic Church.

### *His monasticism*

On May 13, 1993, he was admitted to the Holy Dormition Univ Lavra of Monks of the Studian Charter (Studites.) He received the monastic tonsure on October 13, 1993. On December 31, 1995, he accepted the Small Schema and took his first vows. As a mem-

ber, he took as his religious name Benedict. From July, 1994 he dedicated himself to pastoral work in the new monastery of Saints Boris and Gleb in Polotsk. On December 3, 1996, he was transferred to St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada, to found a monastery there. After a short time he returned to Ukraine in April, 1999, having been elected hegumen of the Holy Dormition Univ Lavra. In May 2000, he was re-elected as hegumen, and in May 2005. He served three terms in this position.

### *His Pastoral Experience*

In April 1992, he was appointed administrator at a parish in Bystrytsia village, Drohobych deanery. Simultaneously he served as assistant priest at Holy Trinity Church in Drohobych and was responsible for children's ministry within the deanery.

In 1994, while attending to Boris and Gleb, he served at five Greek Catholic parishes in Belarus,

1996-1999, St Catherine's Ontario. while there, he served at several parishes of the Ukrainian Eparchy of Toronto,

2006 – Served as the administrator of St. Nicholas parish in Pere-myshlyany,

### *His Church Administration experience other than pastor or bishop*

- 2004-10 – Served as a member of the Patriarchal Commission on Monasticism.

- 2006 – Served as the administrator of St. Nicholas parish in Peremyshlyany.

- 2006-08 – Served as the Head of the Secretariat of UGCC Council of Monasticism.

- 2007-09 – Headed the UGCC Liturgical Council on preparing texts of divine services.

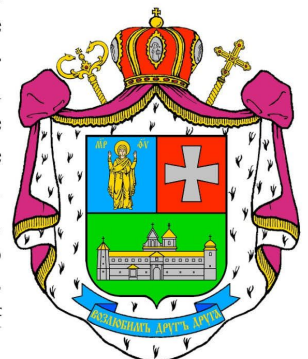
- 2007-10 – Served as the Head of the Council of Major Superiors of Monasteries of the UGCC.

- 2009 – Appointed a member of the Secretariat of the Patriarchal Sobor, which was held in Brazil in 2011.

The Patriarchal Liturgical Commission, in collaboration with the Vibrant Parish working group, has issued the first two volumes of a series on the liturgy of the Church entitled *Let us Lift up Our Hearts* (Брою Піднесім Серця).

The collaborating authors of the volumes are some of the most well-known popular voices on liturgical theology and practice today in the Ukrainian Catholic Church. The Bishop of Chicago, Benedict; Rev. Dr. Vasyl Rudeyko; Maksym Tymo; and Ivan Dutka have put out two books that can introduce anyone interested, to a better understanding of the liturgy of the Church.

Volume 1 - *The Liturgical Prayer Life of the Church* serves as an introduction to the basic liturgical practices of the Church. It





covers everything from which role everyone has in the liturgical life; singings; the basic format of services; vestments; and a brief commentary on the Divine Liturgy.

Volume 2 - *The Church Year* addresses some of the history and practices of the major seasons and feast days throughout the Church year. It also delves into the spiritual significance that each major liturgical celebration provides.

- The bishop's other published works include: *A Superior As a Spiritual Father* - 2009

*Spiritual Instructions* - 2010

*Be Saints* - 2011

*Borshchivka – A Pearl of Polesia* - 2013

*Reflections on The Liturgical Reading of the Gospel* - 2015

*Reflections on The Liturgical Reading of the Apostles* - 2015

*50 Thoughts of Bishop Benedict* - (2018),

*The Mystery of Encounters (Мученицько з'єднання)* - (2019)

*School of Prayer* - (2020).

- Since 2014 he has been a member of Rome's charitable, religious community "Saint Sophia."

#### *His road to consecration*

On October 9, 1991, he was ordained a deacon by Bishop PHILEMON (Kurchaba), Titular Bishop of Abrittum. On March 29, 1992, he received his priestly ordination from His Beatitude MYROSLAV IVAN (Lubachivsky). On August 3, 2010, LUBOMYR (Husar), Major Archbishop of Kyiv-Halych, by general consent of the Synod of Bishops of the UGCC, appointed hieromonk Benedict Aleksiy-chuk bishop-auxiliary of the Lviv Archeparchy and titular bishop of Germaniciana. His episcopal ordination was on September 5, 2010, at St. George's Cathedral in Lviv. The main consecrator was Archbishop IHOR (Vozniak), Metropolitan of Lviv, co-consecrators were Bishop JULIAN (Voronovsky) of Sambir-Drohobych and Bishop PAUL (Chomytsky) of Stamford. On April 20, 2017, Pope Francis appointed him bishop for the Eparchy of Saint Nicholas of Chicago for the Ukrainians, confirming the selection of the Synod of Ukrainian Catholic Bishops. His enthronement was on June 29, 2017.

In an English-language translation of the Latin document sent from Pope Francis, dated April 20, 2017, all were informed of the appointment of Bishop Benedict to the See of Chicago. Metropolitan-Archbishop STEFAN (Soroka) of the Archeparchy of Philadelphia began the ceremony of enthronement, calling forth Patriarch Sviatoslav to impart the insignia of the episcopal office, and escort

Bishop Benedict to the *cathedra* (chair) in place in the main church of the eparchy and declare him worthy of his new office, proclaiming him *Axios*. After a resounding affirmation by the clergy and congregation, Bishop Benedict sat in his chair to receive the clergy of the eparchy over which he is the overseer.

Speaking during the dinner that followed the enthronement service, Patriarch Sviatoslav noted that "His Beatitude LUBOMYR (Husar) knew about the appointment of Bishop Benedict, rejoiced and awaited this day." He pointed out that Cardinal Husar, his predecessor as primate of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, was beloved by the people and that he was proclaimed "our national intercessor for peace in Ukraine."

In turn, Bishop Benedict spoke about his calling: "Monastic life is a calling... God is calling. Why? For what? You don't know. God is calling you. I am feeling even today that I had this calling and chose it. Serving as a monk, a priest, a bishop, I tried to value the people whom God was giving me."

He added: "I don't know why God has led me here, but I believe that He wants to do something good here. I am not a Savior, but I came here so we could do something good together. It is not going to be easy and simple. But when we are working, the Lord will help us."

#### *His arrival in Chicago*

As one who has kept busy all his life, our eparchy should have expected this whirlwind of a bishop. In his earliest days as eparch he gave his mission statement to CNS:

"My eparchy, for example, includes California with its Silicon Valley," he said. "Many Ukrainian IT professionals work there, and the majority of them are not acquainted with the life of Church. We need to go to them."

Bishop Aleksiychuk said he has decided to establish a new department in his curia to be responsible for mission and strategy.

"This department will not deal with the routine challenges but will look in the future, will keep the hand on the pulse and will be constantly looking for the new ways to talk to people about God—the God they seek, sometimes unconsciously," he said.

This office has been established, and work has begun and continues.

The cathedral is being renovated; the Mission Institute begun; parishes visited; a Shrine dedicated in Palatine; and a womens monastery established, among other events, The faithful of the eparchy have a leader with the heart of a missionary, and together he will lead us forward.

*Fr Jonathan Morse*

