

Hieromonk Porhpyrios

Surname : Plant

Orthodox Christian name: Porphyrios

Date of birth : 22 February 1952

Place of birth: Truro, Cornwall, United Kingdom



My Church Life – Hieromonk Porphyrios

I was born into a Christian family; my mother was at the time a devout member of the Church of England and my father a Roman Catholic. I came to know of the Holy Orthodox Church through television coverage of the historic meeting of His All Holiness Patriarch Athenagoras and Pope Paul VI in 1964. Thereafter I listened to Metropolitan Anthony's broadcast talks and particularly to his televised discussions with Marganita Lastki, an avowed atheist. I took Metropolitan Anthony's book 'Living Prayer' with me to Rome where in 1970 I went to prepare for Ordination to the Priesthood. With Hegumen Gregory (Woolfenden), who was a student with me, I discovered the Russian College (Russicum) and the Russian liturgical tradition and began meeting clergy from Russia. Hegumen Andrew (Wade) (Moscow Patriarchate) and Fr Paul Burholt (Orthodox Church in America) were students with us at that time. The seeds sown here through contact with the Eastern and Orthodox Churches remained with me throughout the following years and sustained me, coming to fruition when I was received into the Holy Orthodox Church in May 2012 through concelebration of the Divine Liturgy with H.E. Archbishop Gabriel of Comana.

After ordination to the priesthood I returned to work in the South West of England.

1977-1982: Assistant Priest, Newton Abbot, Devon. There were four churches and communities in the parish. I was also Officiating Chaplain to the Hospital and to Channings Wood Prison, a Category C Prison, where I celebrated the liturgy regularly and had a pastoral ministry to prisoners and prison staff.

1982-1986: Private Secretary to the Bishop. I lived with the bishop, prayed with him daily, kept his diary, attended to his correspondence and the telephone, ran his household, prepared for and accompanied him on pastoral visits and was responsible for all liturgies at which he was present. As such I was in a position to exercise a special ministry to priests in the diocese. I was already a member of the Diocesan Council of Priests and remained on it in various capacities until 1994. I was a member of the Diocesan Liturgical Commission and of the sub-committee for Church Buildings.

1986-1994: Director of Vocations for the Diocese, with responsibility for the assessment process for applicants for priestly training, the support of students in training, arranging practical pastoral formation through placements in parishes and liaising with seminary staff.

1986-1994: Parish Priest, St Austell, Cornwall. Previously this extensive parish had been cared for by a religious order. The buildings were makeshift and dilapidated. I raised funds and had a new church built. I oversaw the development and implementation of a programme of formation in the Christian faith of children and young people, from 5 years to 18 years and attended to all else necessary in a large parish where, during those years, about 400 people came to the church over the weekend. During this period, at the Bishop's request, I also oversaw the renovation of the Cathedral, establishing and working with a committee of clergy

and professionals for this purpose. I was responsible for presenting the proposals to various church groups both in the diocese and nationally and to heritage bodies.

1994-1998: Parish Priest, Axminster and Lyme Regis. There had been a problem of child abuse in the parish and I was asked to move there in the wake of this. This problem required a great deal of healing and I offered the opportunity for this through group work and pastoral care, while developing links with professionals in the field.

1998-2008: Parish Priest, Topsham, Exeter. At the invitation of the bishop I had begun training as a Group Analytic Psychotherapist. He thought that this small parish would provide me with a spiritual base while doing this. I stood down as parish priest in September 2008. During this time I also served as part time Officiating Chaplain to the Commando Training Centre of the Royal Marines in Devon.

2008-2012: I had been working part time as a mental health professional since 2002 and from 2008 I stopped being a parish priest and instead held a mandate from the Bishop to work with mentally ill people, using my training and skills as a psychotherapist.

In previous years I had always gone to Orthodox Churches when free to do so but from 2008 I was able to go regularly to St Anne's Orthodox Church. I felt I had come home. A period discernment followed and I became Orthodox.

2012-to the present: I was assigned to the Parish of the Holy Prophet Elias in Devon by HE Archbishop Gabriel, with responsibility for services in St Anne's Church, Exeter.

2014: I received the Monastic tonsure on 13 September 2014, Notre Dame de Kazan, Moisenney, France, by HE Archbishop Job of Telmessos.

My formal Theological Studies – Hieromonk Porphyrios

Between 1970 to 1977 I was resident in the Venerable English College, Rome. For most of that time HE Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor, Emeritus Archbishop of Westminster, was the Rector. These years followed in the wake of the Second Vatican Council and were characterised by a great deal of upheaval and liturgical change. Under the guidance of the Rector the college community settled. Life together in common centred on the regular celebration of the Mass, and the morning and evening offices. This was the context for our studies. During these years the community doubled in size, at its height numbering in the region of 80 people, staff and students.

I attended the Gregorian University. The first two years were taken up with the study of philosophy. The following three years were given over to the study of theology. The curriculum included an introduction to the Gospels and to biblical exegesis, the writings of St Paul, the early and later prophets, and the Wisdom books. I successfully completed courses in Fundamental Theology, Christology, Revelation, Ecclesiology and the Mother of God, Sacramental Theology and Liturgy, Moral Theology, Spiritual Theology, Pastoral Theology and Canon Law.

The year I spent at the Pontifical Athenaeum of Sant'Anselmo included studies in Eastern Monasticism and Monastic Spirituality.

For my Master's Degree I studied the spiritual writings of Thomas Merton, a 20th Century Cistercian Monk and Hermit. I wrote my dissertation on Spiritual Direction in the Western tradition with reference to his work.

These studies took place over 40 years ago and I am surprised to be able to recall this much! I understand the intention was to provide us with a broad introduction to theology.

Qualifications:

Seminary studies and formation: Venerable English College, Rome (1970-1977)

Baccalaureate in Philosophy, Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome (1970-1972)

Baccalaureate in Theology, Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome (1972-1975)

Post-graduate studies in Sacramental Theology, Pontifical Athenaeum of Sant'Anselmo, Rome (1975-1976)

Master of Theology (Studies in Spirituality), Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome (1976-1977)

My professional life – Hieromonk Porphyrios

In 1991, at the invitation of the Bishop and with funds left in a bequest by a priest who had suffered from mental health problems, I began training as a Group Analytic Psychotherapist.

Training and Professional Qualification

I completed my training in 2002 and was admitted as a Member of the Institute of Group Analysis, London. I am registered with the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy in its college for Psychoanalysis and Jungian Analysis and in its Register of Supervisors.

Employed role

I have been working as a psychotherapist since 1995. In 2002 I became a Senior Adult Psychotherapist in the British National Health Service and I am an employed permanent member of staff. I work as part of a multidisciplinary team specialising in the treatment of people with long-term, severe and complex mental health problems. I am part of the Training Unit which works with the Medical School to prepare Psychiatrists for Membership of the Royal College of Psychiatry. I offer clinical supervision and staff support groups for mental health professionals in the NHS Trust.

Private Practice

I combine my employed role in the National Health Service with private practice where I offer psychotherapy to a wide range of clients and clinical supervision to other mental health professionals, including the University Counselling Service. I work closely with the Pastoral Care Advisor for the local Anglican Diocese. Clergy and Diocesan Employees are referred to me for psychotherapy, or for consultancy or supervision. I have helped establish a network of Reflective Practice groups for clergy and currently convene two such groups myself.

Organisational Roles

From 2004 I was a Trustee and Board Member of the Institute of Group Analysis, London attending regular meetings of the Board at a time of great organisational change.

Training Roles

In addition to my training role in the NHS, in 2008 I was appointed to develop and implement a post-graduate training in clinical supervision on behalf of the Institute of Group Analysis, London. The training has attracted students from the United Kingdom and from countries abroad including Germany, Poland and Greece and we have graduated over 50 students.

"The method and theory of group analysis is concerned with a dynamic understanding of the inner working of the human mind as a social, multi-personal phenomenon" (Foulkes 1975) and as such can be applied to groups, individuals, couples, families and applied groups.