

## PROFESSOR, RECOGNIZED EXPERT ON THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH WRITES NEW BOOK

When Professor John Burgess first traveled to Russia nearly a decade ago, he was hoping to expand his theological horizons and explore the rebirth of the Orthodox Church since the fall of communism. But what he found changed some fundamental assumptions about his own tradition of North American Protestantism. In his new book, *Encounters with Orthodoxy: How Protestant Churches Can Reform Themselves Again* (WJK, 2013), John asks how an encounter with Orthodoxy can help Protestants better see both strengths and weaknesses of their own tradition.

In the book, John notes the decline of North American Protestantism, whose adherents now represent less than 50 percent of the U.S. population. He describes his experience of Russian Orthodoxy; his struggle to make sense of its rituals, icons, relics, monasteries, and miracles; and what it was like to attend an Orthodox parish for a year but never receive the Eucharist. He then asks how this ancient church tradition can help Protestants rethink—and reinvigorate—their worship, teaching, and sharing of the gospel.



John's personal encounters with Russian Orthodoxy began in 2004, when he spent a sabbatical year based in St. Petersburg. Regularly returning to Russia (and leading a group of PTS students there in 2007), he lived in Moscow for the 2011-2012 academic year as a Fulbright Scholar and Luce Theological Fellow. His research focused on how the Orthodox Church is reshaping Russian society, and he lectured at St. Tikhon's Orthodox Humanitarian University, which helped sponsor his stay.

Here in Pittsburgh, John has steadily built a relationship between the Seminary and St. Tikhon's. For example, in September, four sociologists of religion from the University spent a week and a half at PTS posing questions to pastors, church leaders, and Seminary faculty and students about North American congregational life. These Orthodox scholars were seeking insight from North American Christians to help the Russian church respond to the wonderful yet challenging opportunities that have emerged since the fall of communism in 1991. On the one hand, the Russian Orthodox Church has been able to reestablish thousands of parishes. On the other hand, renewing congregational life involves much more than constructing a new church building! The sociologists' research will eventually result in a book, with John as one of its editors.

Now a recognized expert on the Russian Orthodox Church, John speaks on the topic several times a year at the Foreign Service Institute in Washington, D.C., as part of the State Department's training program for foreign service personnel. And as a regular speaker in North American churches across the U.S., John offers Christian leaders and lay people new ways of refreshing their faith from the ancient traditions of Orthodoxy. It is scholar-mentors such as John Burgess who, at Pittsburgh Seminary, prepare pastor-theologians for globally informed service to the Church.

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