



Prota Dragan, Protinica Vinka, Borislav, Tatjana, Krstan, Luka and Aleksija

Very Reverend Stavrophor Dragan K. Veleusic (1954)

was born on the feast day of St. Petka 1954, on Palez, the village of Radjici, a village under the jurisdiction of the municipality of Knezevo (or Skender Vakuf, a town on Ravna Vrhovina). He was born to father Krstan, and mother Mladjenka. He grew up among the hollows and pasture lands of the region, a shepherd surrounded by lamb and sheep.

He finished elementary school in Visevice and Zivinice. He was a “Vukovac”--that is, for eight years he never had a grade below “Excellent” (A). In September 1969, he enrolled in the Theological Seminary of St. Sava in Belgrade. In addition to the duties expected of him as a seminarian, Dragan was engaged in various other activities: he sang in the seminary choir; he worked in the seminary’s clinic; he attended classes in iconography; he participated in poetry recitals; worked in the library until they “kicked him out” (because he read more than he worked); and was a member of the stage play section of the Institute of Religious Charity Trusteeship in the Patriarchate. As a senior in 1974 and during the school’s St. Sava Celebration, his thematic paper on the origins of religion (written under the *nom de plume* Bogoljub Krstic) won him first place in a related competition, as well as The Patriarch’s Award.

After finishing his seminary studies and upon the completion of his mandatory military service, he married Vinka, nee Malesevic, and later started working as an officer on the

Executive board of the Patriarchate in Belgrade. On the Holy Feast of the Epiphany in 1978 and in the Cathedral Church of Belgrade, he was ordained as a deacon by the Serbian Patriarch German. Subsequently, in 1980 and on the day of the church patron saint of the Cathedral Church of Belgrade—the Saint Archangel Michael, Patriarch German ordained Deacon Dragan a presbyter and he was sent to begin his pastoral ministry with the parish of Saint Sava in Johannesburg, South Africa. After six years, he decided to relocate to America where, thanks to the Administrator at that time for the Midwestern American Diocese—the Bishop of Sumadija Dr. Sava, he was sent to Galveston, Texas.

Soon after, by the decision of Bishop Sava, he became the secretary for the Midwestern American Diocese. On January 1, 1989, upon the request and decision of the parishioners in Milwaukee, he was appointed as the second permanent parish priest of St. Sava Cathedral in Milwaukee. Always guided with fatherly and brotherly care by the then-Dean of the Cathedral Very Reverend Father Milan Markovina, Fr. Dragan took on a series of important tasks related to the parish in Milwaukee, including the organization of the first Serbian Orthodox parochial school on the North American continent (becoming its director). He incorporated some of his own artistic talent in more than one third of the priceless mosaics which adorn the beautiful Cathedral of St. Sava in Milwaukee, serving as an advisor to the artist Sirio Tonelli, the project's main author. With the iconographic beauty of its mosaics, this cathedral is said to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the church of St. George in Oplenac.

While performing his pastoral duties, Father Dragan also worked to improve his education, both theological and general. In that vein, he has taken classes at universities in Belgrade, Pretoria, South Africa, Galveston, Texas, Libertyville, Illinois, and Milwaukee. Since his student days at the Seminary School of St. Sava in Belgrade, Father Dragan has demonstrated God-given talent in the literary realm. He has published four books: *Cemernica* (translated into English), *Ravna Vrhovina, Wails, Cries and Prayers*, and *Letter to a Peer. The Diary of a Seminarian* contains a chronicle of his days as a theological student, a work which Father Dragan keeps private for now, even though a first, draft copy has been published for his own keeping. *Newly-Arrived Exiles*, a collection of short stories about the lives of expelled Serbs from their Old Country who settled in Milwaukee, soon will be offered to the public (primarily in the homeland). *Adages on Proverbs*, a unique repackaging of Serbian folk proverbs in today's terms, is also being prepared for publication. Father Dragan is a member of the writer's associations of Serbia, the Republic of Srpska, and the State of Wisconsin.

His poems, short stories and art work have also been published in a number of magazines. As a result of his contribution to a compendium of 327 works from Serbian writers in the Diaspora titled *Nase Gore List*, he received the Desanka Maksimovic Silver Award as a runner-up. Father Dragan participated in the cultural and literary festival known as *Kocic's Days* in Belgrade and Banja Luka. On the occasion of the 41st Kocic festival in 2006, he had the honor of serving as the main speaker at the festival's grand ceremony in Banja Luka's Ducal Palace. At an annual literary competition organized by KPD "Prosvjeta" out of the city of Gradiska in 2013, he won first place for his short story *Neither Here Nor There*. This story and two more were published in the book, *The Truth about Serbs*, in 2013.

Father Dragan is active in the work of the Diocese. He has been elected as Secretary of the Sabor (Assembly), as well as member of the Diocesan Council, Executive Board, and Diocesan Church Court. At a number of convening of the Sabor of the SOC in North and South America, he was an author of resolutions that these meetings formally adopted and published. Currently, he serves as treasurer of The Orthodox Clergy Brotherhood for Wisconsin. As a priest

at St. Sava Cathedral in Milwaukee, he performs duties as Dean of the Cathedral. For all the work he has done in the course of his pastoral duties, Father Dragan was awarded the highest decoration for non-monastic clergy—the right to wear the pectoral cross and the title *Very Reverend-Stavrophor*.

By the Grace of God, Father Dragan and his wife Vinka have two wonderful sons, Borislav and Krstan. They both speak the Serbian language, and read/write Cyrillic as if they came yesterday from Ravna Vrhovina, under Cemernica and Vlastic. Borislav and his wife Tatjana have a son, Luka, (born in Milwaukee, 2008) and daughter Aleksija (born in Milwaukee, 2010). Borislav is a Civil Engineer, and lives and works in Milwaukee. His wife Tatjana has a Master's Degree in Economics and Accounting. Krstan has a Master's Degree in Political Science and works as an analyst.

Father Veleusic remains unsure where he will be spending his retirement days that are soon to arrive, God willing. Whether in Milwaukee, Pakovrace by Cacak, on Ravna Vrhovina, in Banja Luka, or perhaps a fourth continent...God only knows.

Most likely, his grandchildren already know that answer best.

For now, Father teaches his people about Orthodoxy, writes, sings, plays, draws, plays golf and loves everything that is Serbian that is worthy. He tries, as he often says, to be a "Srbenda" as much as he is a man--for a bad man cannot be a good Serb.

