

Father John: A Friend Who Knows the Cost *Where Presence Becomes Healing*



Dr. Jeffrey E. Hansen, PhD

There are people who talk about their faith, and there are people who live their faith. There are people who talk about being there for you, and there are people who actually are. Father John is that kind of man.

We met rather fortuitously when I was working in a large, beautiful building that I co-owned with three other colleagues, a space that housed multiple offices. Father John had recently transitioned out of active-duty military service, where he served as a medic and later as a chaplain. Somewhere along that journey, he also became an Orthodox priest, and he took an office in that building just two doors down from mine.

For those unfamiliar with Orthodoxy, it carries a deep continuity with the early Church. One of the unique aspects is that a man may



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be married before becoming a priest and remain married, but if he is not married at the time of ordination, he will remain celibate. Father John married Sabine, a lovely and gracious woman. We used to joke that he married up. She is German, speaks flawless English, and together they have three wonderful children. Olivia, in particular, I have come to know well. She has a sharp wit and a great sense of humor, and I have always enjoyed our banter.

At the time, he was building his practice, and I was overflowing with referrals, so in many ways it was a natural fit. I began sending him patients, particularly couples. He had a remarkable ability to connect with men who were struggling, especially husbands who were treating their wives poorly. He did not shy away from confrontation. He stepped into it with clarity and strength, yet without losing the person in front of him. It worked. He was sharp, intuitive, and he built his practice quickly. We worked together in a rhythm that simply made sense.

And then my world came apart.

The financial collapse of 2008, combined with a convergence of other events, forced a reckoning I was not prepared for. The economy was collapsing, houses would not sell, and we were forced into a short sale and had to move out of a home we could no longer afford and back into a smaller rental property. I was devastated, and more than that, I was ashamed. I had been undone, completely undone, and I had to step away from work to begin the long process of healing what had surfaced in me. Developmental trauma that had long been managed came roaring to the surface.

I had many friends who supported me in meaningful ways during that time, and I was blessed in that regard. But there was one who showed up in a way that marked me.

When it came time to leave that house, when I had very little energy to even face what needed to be done, Father John came to my doorstep. He rolled up his sleeves and helped me move furniture, carried boxes, cleared out my attic, and stepped into the very practical, very unglamorous work of helping a man whose life had fallen apart begin again. There was nothing performative about it. It was simply presence.

And then, when I needed help beyond what I could manage on my own, I turned to him again. I needed someone I could trust, someone grounded, someone with depth, someone whose faith was not theoretical. He received me in therapy, and he worked with me, and with Leah, for the

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better part of a year. When it came time to pay him, he took the check, looked at me, and said, "You are a financial disaster, I am not taking money from you." And he never cashed it.

Who does that?

A man who lives his faith. A man who walks the talk. A man who understands that love has a cost and chooses to pay it anyway.

During that time, there were days I could barely function. My system was completely dysregulated, though I did not have the language for it then. I understand it now. It was profound autonomic activation, and yet I would go see John, and sometimes all I needed was a hug. We would sit, he would pray, and there was something deeply grounding about his presence. At times he would wear his cassock and collar, his long priestly robe, and I loved it. There was something about it that grounded me.

Many days, he simply got me through.

I did not understand it at the time, but I do now. It was co regulation. His steadiness, his groundedness, his lack of anxiety in the face of mine, his ability to remain solid when I could not. He lent me his nervous system until I could find my own again. Sabine, in her quiet strength, was part of that story as well.

Over the years, our friendship did not fade, it deepened. Father John is an accomplished man. If you were to list all of his degrees, you would need another line. He has studied widely, even law, though he chose a different path. He holds advanced theological training and has lived a life of both intellectual depth and real world engagement. But what defines him is not his intellect. It is his willingness to step into the fire.

If he sees injustice, he moves toward it. Whether it is abuse, corruption, or wrongdoing, he does not look away, he leans in. He has taken on difficult roles, including leading within the federal marshal counseling program, where he again confronted what was wrong at personal cost. He has served at high levels, even within national leadership, and yet he remains the same man, steady, direct, and unafraid.

We have walked life together now for well over a decade, approaching two. We have shared ideas, supported one another, and stood in difficult places side by side. And now, as I sit in his home in Virginia, after not seeing him face to face for years, I am struck again by the depth of the man. His home reflects him. Books everywhere, old texts, a sense of history, of thought, of soul. It feels like being wrapped in something solid and enduring.

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And I am reminded that healing does not always come through words. Sometimes it comes through presence. Through steadiness. Through a man who refuses to turn away when things get hard.

That is where presence becomes healing.

I am deeply grateful for this man. I am grateful for his friendship, his strength, his faith, and his willingness to walk with me when I could not walk on my own. I am better because of him.



And if there is anything worth becoming, it is this.

A man who lives his faith.

A man who stands in the fire.

A man who knows the cost, and shows up anyway.