

Department of College Ministry

Witnessing Orthodox Christianity in College

December 11, 2012

Your Grace, Bishop +MICHAEL, Very Reverend & Reverend Clergy, Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Glory to Jesus Christ!

In June, 2012 Bishop +Michael created our diocesan Department of College Ministry. The goal of this Department is:

“...to encourage the college students of our diocese and those transferred to colleges near our parishes to fully participate in the life of the Church—through worship, witness, service, and fellowship while they are in college. This department will also help train leaders, organize events, provide consultation in campus ministry for pastors and lay leaders across the diocese, maintain OCF-related data and a cache of ministry resources, and oversee future programs for our diocesan college students.”

This department works closely with the National Orthodox Christian Fellowship (OCF) office.

Why College Ministry?

This work is vitally important to our college students as well as to our parishes. Research shows that between 50 and 75 percent of *all* Christian college students abandon their faith while in college. At the same time it is during these precise years, the ages of 18—24, that our college students are making decisions, forming their personality and habits in ways that will guide the rest of their lives. It is during this window of opportunity that we as Orthodox Christians must engage and retain our college students through active witness of our Orthodox Christian faith on college campuses.

Personnel

The department is currently chaired and run solely by its chairman. I am actively looking to integrate additional personnel who have a passion for this ministry and the tools to engage in it productively. Attached are job descriptions for the department that I hope to fill throughout the year. I hope these will be a combination of clergy, laity, and college students representing different areas of our diocese.

While the report before you is for our diocese, the work of college ministry is pan-jurisdictional. Interested parties may contact me. I plan to accept inquiries during my travels as well.

Updates Diocesan/National

Clergy have been sent updates and notices of various sorts on many occasions. Among them were included a protocol letter detailing the procedure for interested parties to become engaged in OCF work, notices about events happening at the national level including College Conference, Real Break, 40 Days Program, and Orthodox Student Sunday.

The department website is under construction. Look soon for an OCF Facebook page the purpose of which will be to incorporate and advertise events for all of the OCF chapters throughout the diocese. Many thanks are extended to Fr. Ken Stavrevsky for his diligent efforts in updating the website and offering clear and timely communication to reflect this department's goals and activities.

Chapters

The Department has been busy compiling information for chapters that exist and sorting through the information to determine the health of each chapter. In our diocese are 269 college campuses with at least 1,000 students. The National OCF office lists 29 existing chapters of various health/involvement for our diocese. Due to an absence of contact information, outdated information, or simple failure to respond to this department's inquiries it is impossible to determine with absolute certainty which chapters are active and healthy. I estimate about twelve to meet regularly with a consistent clergy presence.

I hope to visit each chapter for one of their regular meetings, sit with their clergy and student leadership, and assess how this office can best assist each chapter and our chapters as a collective diocese. I have visited LIU Post and Stonybrook University.

Plans are underway to make visits throughout the year to the remaining chapters. Below are summaries of the chapters in the diocese listed with the National OCF office including their level of activity, student and clergy leadership updated this year. They have been updated to the best of my knowledge based on visits and other communication.

New Jersey

College of New Jersey

This chapter is registered with the National OCF office. It is not known to have any active chapter or clergy involvement at this time.

Kean University

This chapter is registered with the National OCF office where it is listed as being unchartered and active. No response to my inquiries was given by the listed contacts so I cannot verify the current status.

Middlesex County College

This chapter is registered with the National OCF office as being unchartered and active. No response to my inquiries was given by the listed contacts, so I cannot verify the current status. Based on the names of the listed contacts, this appears to be a Coptic-led chapter.

Montclair State University

This chapter was listed with the National OCF. It is currently inactive, with no known clergy/student leadership or meetings scheduled.

Princeton University

Fr. Daniel Skvir is the acting chaplain. Princeton University meets weekly. This chapter is active and chartered with the National OCF. They have an established student leadership.

Rutgers University

This chapter is active and chartered with the National OCF. They meet weekly. Fr. David Garretson is the acting chaplain. Andrew Wythe is the student contact.

New York (City)

Barnard College

There is a Coptic OCF already formed. It is led by Fr. John Rizkalla (Coptic) with the endorsement of the university. Dn. Nicholas Garklavs has been assisting and is the projected chaplain for Fall 2013. This chapter has traditionally been combined with the chapter at Columbia University.

Brooklyn College

This is reportedly a Coptic chapter with clergy of the same. Fr. Gerasimos Makris (GOA) has offered to be involved with meetings as an additional resource. The group meets Tuesdays from 12:30-2pm.

Columbia University

There is a Coptic OCF already formed. It is led by Fr. John Rizkalla (Coptic) with the endorsement of the university. Dn. Nicholas Garklavs has been assisting and is the projected chaplain for Fall 2013. This chapter has traditionally been combined with the chapter at Barnard College.

CUNY Hunter College

This chapter seems to be inactive. No response was given to the only listed contact, a student who seems to have a Coptic name.

Fordham University

Fr. Elias Villis (GOA) is the assigned chaplain. Awaiting reply for more information.

LIU Brooklyn

Fr. Gerasimos Makris (GOA) is acting chaplain of this chapter. The chapter is emerging.

New York University (NYU)

This is an emerging chapter. The involved clergy are Fr. Nathanael Symonides (GOA) with Dn. David Chow projected to assist. The current student leader is Cali Pantazis. I hope to meet with them all in the near future to discuss the implementation of a healthy meeting plan going forward.

St. John's University

Fr. Nathan Preston (Albanian) is the assigned chaplain. The student leader is Alexandra Drakoulis. The chapter is emerging.

There is also Coptic group with established clergy and student leadership.

New York (Long Island)

LIU Post (Formerly C.W. Post)

After recruiting students over the summer, I have handed over responsibility for the chaplaincy at LIU Post to Fr. John Bartholomew and Fr. John Vlahos (Holy Resurrection GOA in Brookville, NY). After several students initially expressed interest and signed up to be part of the OCF none replied to announcements or actually attended any meetings. Both clergy will be available for religious forums, pastoral needs etc. and will try again in 2013 to develop the group.

New York Institute of Technology (NYIT)

There is a large and very active Coptic/Indian group of approximately 40 students. I have not yet heard of involvement from clergy. A second group of canonical Orthodox students may also exist, but has not yet been verified. The student president of the Coptic group is Linda Yaccoub.

Stonybrook University

On October 2nd, I visited Stonybrook University. This is a collection of Coptic students with whom Fr. John Klingel has been meeting since October 16th. They are a vibrant group of 6—12 students. I hope with Fr. John's presence and the cooperation of the current group to integrate our own canonical Orthodox students. This chapter meets bi-weekly on Tuesday evenings.

New York (Upstate)

Cornell University

This chapter meets weekly. The chaplains are Fr. Thomas Parthenakis (GOA) and Fr. James Worthington. The student leader is Demetri Dedousis. The chapter is active and chartered with the National OCF.

Eastman School of Music

This chapter is listed with the National OCF office but without contact or meeting information. The chapter is likely dormant.

Hartwick College

Fr. Kiril Riggs is no longer chaplain. The status of this chapter, including student and clergy presence is unknown. No known student or clergy contact is listed for this college.

Marist College

The student leader is Eleni Waskiewicz. The group meets bi-weekly or monthly on campus, with no Orthodox Chaplain. There is no consistent clergy presence. The group mainly meets for purely social activities or to visit a local Greek parish together. Eleni reports that a group of four students primarily attend the meetings though they have a list of many other students who have displayed interest. Some of those other students have attended in the past but no longer do.

Monroe Community College

Awaiting more information.

Nazareth College

Awaiting more information.

Rochester Institute of Technology

Awaiting more information.

St. John Fisher College

Awaiting more information.

SUNY Albany

This chapter is emerging. Fr. Peter Olsen is the acting chaplain.

Syracuse University

This chapter has 10—15 students and meets monthly for pizza and discussion. The chaplains are Fr. David Smith (GOA) and Fr. Leonid Schmidt (Ss. Peter and Paul, Syracuse). The student leader is Matushka Laura Schmidt.

University of Buffalo

This chapter is listed with the National OCF office, but without any contact/meeting information. The status of this chapter is likely dormant, but it was not able to be verified.

University of Rochester

This group meets regularly with about 15 students. The chaplain is Fr. Patrick Cowles (Church of the Holy Spirit, GOA).

West Point Academy

This chapter is listed with the National OCF office as unchartered and inactive. Fr. Joseph Frawley is listed as the current chaplain. No other information is known.

Finances

As a result of the conference held August 18th, an anonymous \$5,000 donation was received for use by this department. This money will be used for student conferences, additional trainings and other student programs. Our diocese matched this donation with

an additional \$5,000, bringing the department's annual budget to \$10,000 for the fiscal year.

On behalf of the college students of our diocese I would like to sincerely thank both our anonymous donor and the diocese for your inspirational, sacrificial, and generous contributions!

Programs/Conferences

College Ministry Conference

The Department's first conference "*The Fields are White for Harvest: Welcome to College Ministry!*" was held at Holy Trinity in Yonkers, NY on August 18, 2012. The goal of the conference was twofold; to empower clergy, students, and laity to found and be involved with OCF at a local college and to demonstrate the impact the ministry can have on our college students and parishes.

Over 20 clergy, college students, and laity were in attendance. Though most of the attendees were of the OCA it was open to all jurisdictions. Feedback for the conference was excellent. It scored an eight out of ten on surveys. The department plans to replicate this conference in New York City, New Jersey, and one or two upstate locations in preparation for the fall semester of 2013.

As a result of this conference efforts are underway at NYU, Columbia University, St. John's University, and LIU Post to launch or revitalize OCF chapters.

Seminary Conferences

The presentation "How to Start an OCF" was given at St. Tikhon's Seminary by this department. The need for our future clergy to be educated about the existence, mission and work of OCF was made quite evident at this presentation.

The OCA national department of Youth, Young Adult and Campus Ministry has invited our diocesan department to join it and Jennifer Nahas, Executive Director of the National OCF, to offer a joint presentation/training at St. Vladimir's Seminary. This is scheduled tentatively for November 2012.

Student Conferences

Each year, the National OCF convenes what is known as "College Conference." There are now three such conferences that take place around the same time, December 25—29. The location closest to us is Antiochian Village, in western Pennsylvania. The others are in California and South Carolina.

College Conference gathers approximately 300 Orthodox Christian students from around the country. Through workshops, fellowship, and prayer it is a powerfully transformative event. It is common for students to be awake until 3a.m. each night singing hymns, praying, and having their confessions heard. These conferences have profound effects on our students and the parishes to which they are connected.

As of October 10th, the National OCF office reported that only seven of the 80-plus registrants for this year's conference are from our diocese. I have again encouraged our own clergy as well as clergy and representatives from each jurisdiction to follow up with our college students, ensuring that they register and attend this year's College Conference.

The National OCF offers some financial assistance to students who would like to attend College Conference. This department also plans to create a fund specifically to assist students from our diocese so that they may attend. All of our college-aged students, whether enrolled in college or not, should be strongly encouraged to attend!

At our diocesan level I plan to create conferences for students as well as clergy and laity who are involved with this ministry. By uniting our students from various schools I hope to increase their faith and desire to serve our Lord. Moreover, they will realize that they are not isolated and that a support network exists for our students. Prayer, student leadership training, fellowship, and many other components will be a part of these conferences.

Conferences and workshops will be developed to help involved clergy and laity identify student leaders, develop leadership, and augment the numbers of students in their chapters. These are in the process of being created.

Real Break

Each year during spring break the National OCF coordinates service trips to various parts of the world. Past trips have included Mexico, Guatemala, Romania, Constantinople and more. Real Break serves as an alternative to the sorts of activities that typically dominate college student culture during spring break. I ask that the parishes give generously to our college students who are interested in attending such trips.

This department hopes to organize similar local service projects for spring break as well as to offer subsidies for students who would like to serve with the national program.

40 Days

In 2012 the National OCF began the "40 Days" program. This is intended to help transition our high school students into OCF chapters while in college. Through the 40 Days program they will know where an OCF chapter is, and this department will better be able to track them, hopefully leading to more targeted and effective ministry. All clergy and parents are strongly encouraged to visit the OCF website (www.ocf.net) with your college students and share their information with our National OCF office. At the same time I ask that each chapter continue to provide our diocesan department office with updated contact information for chapter leaders and students.

Orthodox Student Sunday

Each year, the first Sunday following the elevation of the Holy Cross is designated as "College Student Sunday." A special petition for our college students is given for that

day. Parishes are asked to highlight college students and the good work they do in your parishes on this day.

Alumni

Plans are underway to create and develop an active OCF alumni department. The alumni department will help to support (financially, spiritually, and socially) the work done at the local chapters from which they graduated. There are a variety of programs that are envisioned to facilitate this. Attached is a *draft* summary of the projected programs and goals.

If you are a college student or know of a college student in the diocese who would like more information about OCF or are interested in starting a chapter, please contact me.

Respectfully Submitted,
Rev. Fr. John Diamantis
Chairman,
Department of College Ministry

Addendum