



The Department of Youth Ministry
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REPORT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH MINISTRY TO THE 2013 ANNUAL DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY

**Holy Trinity Orthodox Church
Yonkers, NY
November 12, 2013**

Your Grace, Reverend Chancellor, Brother Clergy and Faithful of our Beloved Diocese:

GLORY TO JESUS CHRIST! GLORY FOREVER!

With the Blessing and Archpastoral guidance and leadership of His Grace Bishop MICHAEL, the Department of Youth Ministry has been very active this past year. Whether it has been on the Diocesan Level or on the Parish Level, the youth of our Diocese have been very active in various activities through which they not only had the opportunity to come together in prayer and Christian Fellowship but also they had the opportunity of re-kindling their friendships with one another as well as making new ones.

Below is a list of activities that the Department of Youth Ministry organized as well as participated in throughout this past year:

Annual Altar Server Retreat: March 1-3, 2013

The 3rd Annual Diocesan Altar Servers Retreat was held at Saint Basil's Academy in Garrison NY from Friday, March 1st to Sunday, March 3rd. Over 60 participants were present for all or part of the weekend. Altar servers and clergy came from each of the three deaneries (New York City, New Jersey, New York State) as well as some from the Moscow Patriarchate, Carpatho-Russian Diocese and one young man from the local Academy community.

His Grace, Bishop Michael, eight priests and two deacons led the retreat. While there was excellent participation from adult altar servers, the weekend was also blessed with 39 young men and boys who came to learn about the Divine Services while enhancing their skills as servers at the Lord's altar. They also were prepared to serve when the

bishop comes to their home parish. The Divine Liturgy was celebrated on both mornings, with evening prayers and Vespers served each evening. All of the altar servers had the opportunity to actively participate.

The weekend was not all business. As they arrived at Saint Basils Academy, participants were treated to a pizza dinner and free-time in the swimming pool and on the basketball court. Several competitive games broke out among the older boys, while the younger boys also found a place to meet new friends.

One highlight of the weekend occurred as the bishop challenged the young men to a competition of Church knowledge. The boys won every time, being able to answer such things as the names of the 12 apostles and the 9 ranks of angels. The weekend ended with His Grace sharing his prayer that as the altar servers grow in love for Christ, that they would grow in service to the Church: becoming readers, sub-deacons, deacons and priests.

Also, with the blessing of His Grace, Bishop MICHAEL, we celebrated the World Day of Orthodox Youth here in the Diocese of New York and New Jersey. We encouraged all parishes within our Diocese to celebrate the World Day of Orthodox Youth by holding special services or activities that would bring the youth of their respective parishes together to honor and celebrate not only the Feast of the Meeting of Our Lord but also the World Day of Orthodox Youth. These celebrations were held anytime throughout the month of February.

Annual Lenten Teen Retreat: April 19-20, 2013

With the blessing of Bishop Michael, under the direction of Father Jason Vansuch (Chairperson, Department of Youth Ministry), teenagers gathered for an overnight retreat 19-20 April at Holy Resurrection Church in Wayne NJ. This has become an annual tradition for 7th-12th grade students during their Lenten journey to Pascha. Parishes from Long Island, Manhattan, and throughout New Jersey were represented. The theme of the retreat was "Keeping it Real: Isaiah 41:10." Session topics focused on contemporary issues facing teens every day of their lives and how God and our Orthodox Faith can help them persevere through anything.

"Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; Yes, I will help you; I will uphold you with My righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41:10)

Participants arrived on Friday evening and were greeted with pizza and icebreaker activities. This was followed by a movie: *"The Blind Side."* Shortly before midnight, Bishop Michael made a special appearance and spent an hour with the group, fielding questions and reminding them to keep God close to their hearts when faced with difficult situations. After saying evening prayers together, it was off to bed.

In honor of the 5th Saturday of Great Lent, Father Jason celebrated an Akathist to the Theotokos on Saturday morning with the teens singing the responses. Three learning sessions followed: (1) God and Fear, (2) God and Hope, and (3) God and Love. Each lesson expanded on the Church's understanding of fear, hope, and love. Examples were drawn from Holy Scripture as well as real-life experiences. Intermittently, participants broke-out into small groups led by Father Jason, Sub-deacon Mark Federoff, Juliana Mecera, and Danielle Geeza. The teens were given the opportunity to reflect on current circumstances in their lives, the choices they make, and how they can center themselves in God when serving others, the Church, and nurturing their own spiritual well-being.

After a few riveting rounds of "Orthodox Jeopardy" and "Catch Phrase," the event concluded with Vespers. *"It truly was a great weekend,"* said Danielle Geeza, *"spent in prayer, fellowship, education, and fun!"*

St. Andrew's Camp July – August 2013

Under the capable supervision of the Camp Director with the assistance of many volunteers, counselors, and choir directors -- the campers enjoyed an action-packed schedule. As one camper reported: *"Camp started out with 'Horse Week,' by far the most popular week, with over 20 kids attending. Many children had their first experience with horses this week. 'Ecology Week' with Tara and Gary was enjoyed by all, with activities centered around the natural surroundings of the camp, including making a rain garden and making fish print t-shirts. After that came 'Music Week' with Basil Kozak. Highlights included the re-writing of the camp song, a trip to the*

zoo, and mini golf. A Q&A with Bishop Michael was held every Tuesday night, as well as a Divine Liturgy every Wednesday morning with the Bishop.” ‘Teen Week’ brought the 2013 camping season to an end on August 3rd. Each day is grounded in the liturgical worship of the Orthodox faith. Campers took turns chanting, singing, and serving in the altar. And, as last year, the campers have been fortunate to benefit from the frequent presence of Bishop Michael, who has taken time out of his busy schedule to spend a few days at camp: to provide lessons, answer questions, and lead services with the campers and staff.

Many thanks to Alan, Tatiana, John, and Daria for cooking. A sincere thank you to Fr. James Worthington, Daria York, and to all the staff and counselors.

Annual Diocesan Youth Day – August 22, 2013

The 3rd Annual Diocesan Youth Day was on August 22 as over 90 participants gathered at Saint Mary Orthodox Church, Jackson NJ. Even though the weather was not as beautiful as last year, the enthusiasm of everyone was still spectacular! Participants included His Grace Bishop MICHAEL, Clergy, adult chaperones and 70+ youth participants representing parishes in our diocese. A parish from Rahway NJ of the American Carpatho-Russian Diocese also participated. At registration each youth participant was given a green t-shirt to wear with “Orthodox Youth Day 2013” written on the front so they could easily be identified. Before we begin any type of work, we pray! So, the day began with Father John Diamantis (filling in for Fr. Jason) leading everyone in celebrating a Molioben Service. Imagine hearing a choir filled with nearly 90 voices ranging from the youngest child to the oldest adult -- truly the “Future of Our Church” was present! After giving thanks to God and asking His blessing upon their endeavors, breakfast was served. While everyone was enjoying the delicious continental breakfast, it was time to “Stump the Clergy!” His Grace and the Clergy held a Question and Answer Session with the participants where everyone had the opportunity to spend some time with the priests, asking them questions as well as enjoying fellowship and discussion with them. Following the “Q&A” session, it was time to pack everything up and load everyone onto the buses or into their cars and head off to Six Flags Great Adventure for the rest of the day! At the Park it was time for the chaperones to take their groups to wherever they wanted to go: Batman the Ride, Kinga Ka, El Toro, Green Lantern, just to mention a few of the many rides the children enjoyed while at Six Flags. Riding all of those rides can build up an appetite, so when it came time for lunch all gathered together around the “Water Fountain” to distribute a free meal voucher to the youth participants to enjoy a delicious meal. At this time, everyone gathered around Bishop Michael to take a picture/ What a blessing to behold a flock of children gather around their Shepherd. After lunchtime it was back to more rides and thrills before heading back to Saint Mary’s Church Hall for the departure home.

Family Day at the Buffalo Zoo – September 7, 2013

In an unprecedented and inaugural effort toward inter-parish fellowship, families from three Western Upstate New York churches gathered on 7 September for a day of prayer and fun highlighted by a visit to the Buffalo Zoo. The parishes - Ss. Peter & Paul, St. George (Buffalo), and St. John the Baptist (Rochester) - participated thanks to the initiative and efforts of recent graduates of the Diocesan Diaconal Formation Program: Deacon Dr. Mark Hoeplinger and Sub-Deacon Sean McNulty. Following this extremely successful event, future fellowships are planned.

The "Family Day" began at Saints Peter and Paul Church, the recipient of the good will and labors exhibited by faithful throughout the diocese during "OPERATION BUFFALO" in 2011. Now revitalized and under the spiritual care of Father Volodymyr Zablotskyy, the parish welcomed the families for an opening prayer (thanksgiving service) and a bountiful breakfast planned by Matushka Jeanne, assisted by Father Vlad. Then, it was off to the zoo! Saint George Church is conveniently located near the Buffalo Zoo ... in fact, the parking lot of the parish is "next door." Movements were coordinated masterfully as Father Jason Vansuch (recently assigned to the parish) employed modern technologies in communication with Matushka Catherine who was on-the-ground at the destination point. The afternoon of fun and fellowship culminated with the families reassembling at Saint George

Church for Great Vespers at 4:00 p.m. A pizza party followed the service and was enjoyed by all. As friendships were made and renewed, everyone expressed a strong desire for increased fellowship in the future.

"Saint George Church is very similar in history and demographic composition to our parish in Rochester," said Father Ken James Stavrevsky. "On the other hand, Saints Peter and Paul Church is more than twice older than either parish and has recently undergone a major transformation from 'dying' to 'thriving.' The joy that these three parishes will be blessed by frequent fellowship and cooperation has been actualized thanks to Deacon Mark and Sub-Deacon Sean working wonderfully with the respective parish priests and parishioners." The parishes involved, while in different cities, are all within about an hour drive from one another.

If you have any questions about plans for the Diocesan Department of Youth Ministry or about upcoming future events or if you are eager to personally participate in this labor of love alongside Bishop Michael, then please do not hesitate to contact one of us. We thank you for your cooperation, and we look forward to hearing from you. May GOD continue to bless and guide you, your families, and the faithful of your parishes!

With Love in Christ,

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