



The Department of Youth Ministry
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Rev. Jason Vansuch, Chairperson
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REPORT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH MINISTRY TO THE 2014 ANNUAL DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY

**Ss Peter and Paul Orthodox Church
Endicott, NY
November 11, 2014**

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: February 14-16, 2014

The 4th Annual Diocesan Altar Servers Retreat was held at Saint Basil's Academy in Garrison NY from Friday, February 14 to Sunday, February 16. Over 45 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 and the Carpatho-Russian Diocese. His Grace, Bishop Michael, together with four priests, two deacons, one subdeacon, and one reader led the retreat. The weekend was blessed with young men and boys who came to learn about the Divine Services while enhancing their skills as servers at the Lord's altar as well as learning more about the importance of reading and singing in church. By learning both how to serve and how to

sing, they will now be prepared to assist more during the divine services in their home parish. The Divine Liturgy was celebrated on both mornings, with evening prayers served on Friday Evening and Vespers served on Saturday Evening. All of the altar servers had the opportunity to actively participate in the Divine Services by singing in the choir, reading, and serving in the Altar.

The weekend was filled with lots of fun, fellowship, education, and prayer. As they arrived at Saint Basils Academy, participants were treated to a pizza dinner and free-time on the basketball court. Besides playing basketball, the altar servers also had the opportunity to watch movies or play board games as the pool was out of service due to being repaired. This was evident as some participants watched the first portion of the famous movie: "Jesus of Nazareth" with His Grace on Saturday evening as a way of re-examining the life of Our Lord.

One of the many highlights of the weekend was having a new addition to our education program: learning how to read and sing in church. This session was for our returning participants and was led by Reader David Lucs (Holy Protection Cathedral in New York City). Reader David is well-known throughout the Diocese for his knowledge of the Divine Services and Liturgical Music. Reader David not only discussed and reviewed with the participants the meaning and the importance of reading and singing properly during the Divine Services but also guided them as they were the readers and singers for the Divine Services during the retreat. Some of the participants were inspired by what they had learned over the weekend, that they themselves may someday become readers in the church.

Another highlight that occurred was the usual Saturday night session: "Stump the Bishop" where the young men had the opportunity to ask Bishop MICHAEL questions ranging from, "What is your favorite thing to do as a bishop?" to "What is the historical aspect of the ecumenical councils in relation to the church today?" .

The weekend ended with His Grace sharing his prayer that as the altar servers grow in love for Christ, they would grow in service to the Church: becoming readers, sub-deacons, deacons and priests.

We express our sincere and heartfelt thanks and appreciation to His Grace Bishop MICHAEL for his blessing, leadership, guidance, and support for this years' 2014 Diocesan Altar Server Retreat! Thank You Dear Vladyko! We also express our sincere and heartfelt thanks and appreciation to Fr. Anthony and the staff of St. Basil Academy for allowing us to use their facility and for their help, assistance, and hard work and for all they did to make our retreat a success. We also express our sincere and heartfelt thanks and appreciation to the clergy and adult chaperones who came up for the weekend to assist with the retreat and for this we are truly grateful. We also thank Reader David Lucs and Subdeacon Mark Federoff who led the sessions for us. This event could not have happened if it wasn't for the parish priests and their support of this event, the parents who made arrangements for their children to participate, those who worked on the committee and all that they have done to make it a success, and especially if it wasn't for the enthusiastic Altar Servers who brought their joy and excitement with them. Truly the weekend of February 14-16 was a bright weekend in the Life of our Diocese where "The Future of Our Church" were seen and heard enjoying fellowship with one another and with their Bishop. Glory To God For All Things!

Annual Lenten Teen Retreat: April 4-5, 2014

With the blessing of Bishop Michael, under the direction of Father Jason Vansuch (Chairperson, Department of Youth Ministry), teenagers gathered for an overnight retreat 4-5 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. Nearly 20 teens representing parishes from NY State, NYC, Long Island, and throughout New Jersey were represented. The theme of the overnight event was "Miracles in Our Midst" and was led by Fr. Jason Vansuch, with support from Danielle Geeza (Holy Resurrection Church, Wayne).

"It is so important for our diocesan youth to come together as often as possible to strengthen their faith and have fun," Danielle Geeza commented. "By doing so, it is our prayer and hope that they will remain in The Church as they transition to adulthood, and build a network of Orthodox friendships."

Participants arrived on Friday evening, as did Bishop Michael. After dinner and several icebreaker activities, His Grace led the first session of the weekend, "Miracles in the Gospels," in which he defined what a miracle is, elaborated on the miracles of Christ, shared miracles he had experienced or witnessed personally, and closed with a Q&A session. Before leaving, he presented everyone with an icon of The Theotokos which would be blessed the next day. Free time followed, along with the teens preparing skits for the audience acting out various bible stories with a twist – a bag with an assortment of unrelated items that needed to be incorporated in their performance! Four groups performed, and themes included "Giving a weather report at the scene of Noah's Ark," "Mary and Joseph trying to check into a hotel in Bethlehem," "How Jonah occupied his time in the belly of the whale," and "The Parable of the Prodigal Son."

Perhaps the highlight of the weekend was the visit of two myrrh-streaming icons from Christ the King Orthodox Church (Western Rite ROCOR) in Tullytown, PA on Saturday morning. This kicked off the second session of the retreat, "Modern Day Miracles in the Orthodox Church." The first icon was a copy of the Hawaiian Iveron Icon of the Mother of God, and the other of St. John Maximovitch of Shanghai and San Francisco.

In honor of the 5th Saturday of Great Lent, Fr. Jason co-served an Akathist to the Theotokos with Fr. Paul Kucynda (Holy Resurrection, Wayne), Fr. David Cowan (Holy Trinity, Yonkers), and Fr. Bernard Andracchio and Fr. Andrew Gomez (Christ the King ROCOR, Tullytown). Teens and chaperones sang the responses with the clergy, after which everyone was able to venerate the icons and be anointed with the icons' myrrh.

Fr. Bernard and Fr. Andrew then made a presentation on how their parish came to acquire the icons, when they first started streaming, and shared several miraculous stories attributed to the icons. A Q&A session followed. Fr. Bernard commented, "We were so blessed to be a part of the day and to share with those present our holy streaming Icons. We were blessed and pray we were also a blessing to all of you."

After lunch, Orthodox Olympics commenced! Participants were broken up into two teams. Six stations were set up; after receiving clues in the form of scripture verses, the teams had to make their way to their respective stations and complete organized tasks before receiving their next clue. Activities included team members jumping rope 5 consecutive times, untangling themselves from a human knot, and limbo. The first team to cross the finish line was deemed the winner!

Fr. Jason closed the retreat with a final presentation on The Holy Fire and Pascha in Jerusalem, and moderated an open discussion with participants and chaperones on the impact of miracles in our everyday life. Everyone was allowed to share any miracles they had experienced. After hearing the stories, everyone agreed that miracles indeed happen all around us, even if we do not realize it at the time they happen.

Free time and confessions drew the weekend to a close, along with Vespers. Participants gave the retreat an A+ and many did not want to leave. Plans are in the making for another retreat in Fall 2014!

Many thanks to Tania Metz (St. Gregory the Theologian, Wappingers Falls) for her pictures and YouTube [photo essay](#), and also to Michael Suchernick (St. Mary's, Jackson) for his pictures.

St. Andrew's Camp July – August 2014

The four-week 2014 camping season at **Saint Andrew's Camp in Jewell NY** concluded on 2 August. Weekly themes included: Horse Week, Music Week, Ecology Week, and Teen Week. According to camper and webmaster Raphael Platte of Rochester NY, *"Saint Andrew's Camp had a wonderful season this year! Nearly 70 campers came over four weeks to learn, play, and pray."*

On 23 August (Saturday) the summer activities at camp will conclude with an Annual Bicycle Ride fundraiser. To register for the bike ride, go [HERE!](#)

Week1:HorseWeek

"Horse Week has continued to be one of the most popular weeks at camp," said Father John Malcom (Camp Program Director). Through the gracious work of Tasha Federinko, the campers have been able to experience the great joy that comes from working with animals. The campers not only had the opportunity to work with animals on a regular basis, but also learned to take care of them. They were able to go to the Thousand Island's Region where they took a boat tour along the St. Lawrence River. Religious education focused on the Divine Liturgy. Father David Cowan (Holy Trinity Church, Yonkers NY) discussed the various parts of the Liturgy and Bishop Michael fielded questions from the campers. At the end of the week, campers were treated to a horse show by some of the staff from the horse barn they had been going to during the week. The week ended with a trip to an amusement park at Sylvan Beach.

Week2:MusicWeek

Through prayer we grow closer to God. There are many forms of praying, including music and singing. This year the campers and staff learned that song is a gift that God has given us. Throughout the week Saint Andrew's Camp was filled with music ... from morning and evening prayers to bonfires or just during daily activities! Basil Kozak (Choir Director, South River NJ) led the camp in music education where they learned about how to be an active part of the church choir. Father Jason Vansuch (Saint George Church, Buffalo NY) went through the seven sacraments of the Church and showed the kids a "hands-on" way to remember them all. Mid-way through the week, camp cook Stan was Chrismated into the Church! For most, this was a first experience seeing someone's full conversion into the Orthodox Christian faith from the start (4 years ago) of his introduction to the Orthodox Church to his Chrismation. The camp was also blessed to have an icon of Saint Anna brought to the chapel by Archimandrite Athanassy from St. Tikhon's Monastery. On Wednesday, the campers also had the opportunity to visit Holy Myrrh Bearer's Monastery in Otego NY. While there, they were able to see how the nuns care for animals, and they were given a history of the community. By the end of the week and all of the excitement, everyone had to say "farewell" to new and old friends. The evening was spent at a campfire where Levi Gangi performed on the guitar and sang for the campers.

Week3:EcologyWeek

"Lions and tigers and bears, oh my!" Ecology week was fun-filled with t-shirt making, environmental testing, and a surprise trip to the zoo. Gary and Tara Paxton taught everyone how to check the water for animal population count and testing the pH. They also headed a camp beautification project. Garden boxes in front of the chapel were cleaned, re-soiled, mulched and planted with beautiful flowers. During religious education with Father James Worthington (Holy Apostles Church, Lansing NY), classes focused on the importance of the twelve major feast-days of the Church year. The kids were taught to understand the church calendar and why these specific events have such a profound impact on what we believe.

Week4:TeenWeek

The final week at Saint Andrew's Camp was Teen Week. Teens from all over come together for a time-out of their crazy everyday lives and enjoy the camp, where they can connect with other Orthodox Christians going through the similar life situations. Here, in a safe and loving space, they can feel free to talk openly and sincerely about pressing challenges. During religious education Father John Diamantis (Saint Vladimir Church, Trenton NJ) led a new topic of discussion each day dealing with issues that constantly bombard teens. On Wednesday, everyone loaded onto a bus and went to the Samaritan Center Soup Kitchen in Syracuse NY. They spent the entire day cleaning, serving food, and assisting the staff. When the group returned, Father Diamantis and Father Malcom led a debriefing about the camper's experience of the day. For many it was their first time at a soup kitchen, and for everyone it was an eye-opening experience. Throughout the week, campers had projects they worked on. Projects during teen week

have become an annual tradition and this year the campers worked on a new sign for the camp which was hung at the main entrance. They also planted trees throughout the property. The week ended with a trip to a water park where the teens were able to spend their last full day having fun with new friends and old acquaintances.

For more information about the camp, photos, and the Camp Blog, go to:

SaintAndrewsCamp.org

Annual Diocesan Youth Day – August 21, 2014

The 4th Annual Diocesan Youth Day was on August 21 as over 90 participants gathered at Saint Mary Orthodox Church, Jackson NJ. Unfortunately due to his travel schedule, His Grace Bishop MICHAEL was not able to be with us this year. However, we had 7 Clergy, 20+ adult chaperones and 70+ youth participants representing parishes in our diocese and the American Carpatho-Russian Diocese. At registration each youth participant was given a white shirt to wear with “Orthodox Youth Day 2014” written on the front so they could easily be identified. Before we begin any type of work, we pray! So, the day began with Fr. Jason Vansuch leading everyone in celebrating a Moleben Service. Imagine hearing a choir, under the direction of Archpriest Stephen Evanina, 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!” Fr. Jason 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 at the ‘Water Fountain’ to take a picture. What a blessing to behold a flock of children gather with one another enjoying a day of prayer, fun, and Christian Fellowship. 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 Palm Island Indoor Water Park (Batavia, NY) – Saturday January 4, 2014

Youth and families from three Western Upstate New York Parishes came together on 4 January 2014 for a day of prayer, fun, and fellowship at Palm Island Indoor Water Park in Batavia NY. This was the third youth gathering in the past several months, bringing together the parishes of **Saints Peter & Paul, Saint George (Buffalo) and Saint John the Baptist (Rochester)**. Over 25 children and adults participated thanks to the diligence and coordinating efforts of Sub-Deacon Sean McNulty, a graduate of our Diocesan Diaconal Formation Program.

After hours of splashing around in the swimming pool, playing pool basketball, relaxing in the hot tub, and riding the two water slides in the comfort of indoors, while the weather outside was cold and windy, the youth gathered for a brief prayer and pizza party in a cozy meeting room graciously donated by the water park staff and used as ‘home base’ throughout the day.

It was obvious that the youth and parents from the various parishes were getting to know each other quite well! This fun event led to a discussion of experiences in outreach and evangelism from the home parishes and how to increase the Orthodox “footprint” in Western New York State.

The afternoon culminated with Great Vespers celebrated on-site by Father Jason Vansuch and Deacon Mark Hoeplinger, both of Saint George parish. Readings were chanted by Sub-Deacon Sean of Saint John the Baptist parish.

“It was blessing for us to be able to serve Vespers together, not only as we are brothers and sisters in Christ, but as a true witness to our faith,” said Father Jason. *“As friendships were made and renewed,”* added Sub-Deacon Sean, *“everyone expressed a strong desire for increased fellowship in the future.”*

The joy that these three parishes will be blessed by frequent fellowship and cooperation has been actualized thanks to Sub-Deacon Sean working wonderfully with the respective parish priests and parishioners. Plans are in the works for another event with the three parishes in the Spring.

The next Family Day Event for the three Western New York Parishes is scheduled for Saturday October 25, 2014 at The Strong Museum of Play in Rochester NY followed by Vespers and Dinner at St. John the Baptist Church.

UPCOMING EVENTS WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH MINISTRY

DIOCESAN GIRLS RETREAT

Friday November 14-Sunday November 16, 2014
St. Basil's Academy

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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