



The Department of Youth Ministry
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REPORT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH MINISTRY TO THE 2016 ANNUAL DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY

**Holy Trinity Orthodox Church
Yonkers, NY
November 1, 2016**

Your Eminence, 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 Eminence Archbishop 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:

The Second Annual Diocesan Girl's Retreat: November 13-15, 2015

What does it mean to “serve out of love?”

With the blessing Archbishop Michael, under the leadership of Father Jason Vansuch (Chairman, Department of Youth Ministry), young women from across the diocese were asked to ponder this question at the **2nd Annual Girls Retreat from 13-15 November 2015 at Saint Basil Academy in Garrison NY**. Thirty youth participants and nearly twenty chaperones gathered to grow in their faith and experience the fellowship offered in the beautiful retreat setting. The group was blessed to have in their midst guest speakers: Mother Christophora (Abbess, Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Ellwood City PA) along with Mother Paula and Sister Christine who guided discussions of how their personal talents and abilities can be used in various aspects of church life. Participants

arrived on Friday evening carrying not only their personal items for the weekend, but also bags of hygiene products and other items to be donated to the Dutchess [County] Outreach mission located in Poughkeepsie NY. This project was a new addition to the youth retreat program, which complimented the “**Serving out of Love**” theme for the weekend. Dutchess Outreach strives to meet the basic needs of low-income individuals when no other resources are available to them and assist them in becoming self-sufficient. The generosity of our young women was overwhelming!

After enjoying pizza and getting settled in their dorms, the group gathered at the chapel for evening prayers. Archbishop Michael spoke at the end of the service saying: “*The purpose of this retreat is to help you to grow in the church, so that you can take your rightful place as leaders of parishes, of the diocese, and of the national church . . . God has given each of us talents. We have to find out what they are and what you want to do with them. But you have to remember that because they are gifts from God, you have to give at least part of it back to Him to work with people in the church, and out of the church, to help them in whatever way you can to use those talents that God has given you. The church is your future.*”

Encouraged by the words from His Eminence, the group went back to the dorms for icebreaker activities and to start a poster project that would be presented to him the following evening. The young women were asked to complete two open-ended statements:

“I am good at; I’m talented at; I like doing ...?”
“How could you use your talents to serve God and the church?”

While chaperones prepared s’mores and popcorn, lay youth workers Janine Alpaugh and Danielle Geeza moderated a discussion between the participants in which they shared their answers to the questions posed and then categorized their talents into five categories: artistic abilities, music, athleticism, good with kids, and traditions. Some of their specific talents were sewing, singing, soccer, mentoring, cooking, and theater. The discussion ultimately culminated in suggestions as to how they can execute their talents in their parishes, both now and in the future; for example: making vestments and altar coverings, writing icons, becoming choir directors, organizing youth sports tournaments, volunteering as camp counselors, baking prosphora (*church bread*), and directing Nativity yolkas (*pageants*).

Special thanks are extended to Janine, Danielle, Matushka Jessica Evanina, and Christina Ioukliaevskikh who oversaw the creation of **the poster titled “As a young woman in the OCA . . .”** At its center is a tree, drawn by the talented Alexia May (Annunciation Church, Brick NJ); the trunk represents the five overall groups of talents, the branches identify participants’ specific skills, and the bunches of leaves envelope the ways these talents can be executed in order to help serve the church.

On Saturday morning, Divine Liturgy was celebrated by Father Jason and Archimandrite Anthony (Director, Saint Basil Academy). Janet Neis (Saint Stephen Cathedral, Philadelphia PA) directed the choir of participants for the entire weekend. Following Liturgy and brunch, Mother Christophora, Mother Paula, and Sister Christine held their educational sessions. Each of them shared their personal journeys to the monastic life -- how they found, and ultimately joined, Holy Transfiguration Monastery. They reminded the young women that “***Orthodoxy is something personal,***” ***to always communicate with God and to not be afraid to ask Him for direction in who they are called to be, given their personal gifts.***

Between sessions, Father Jason led the group in baking prosphora (*communion bread*) to be used in the following morning’s Liturgy. It was one of the highlights of the weekend. Some of the participants were heading home to ask their parish priest if they could help bake prosphora for the respective parishes. The girls were then given free time to enjoy swimming in the pool, playing basketball in the gym, exploring the Academy grounds, and hanging out together in the dorms.

Archbishop Michael returned in the evening for Great Vespers, dinner, and a Q&A session with the nuns and participants. Prior to kicking off the Q&A session, Danielle Geeza and Janine Alpaugh presented to His Eminence the “**As a young woman in the OCA . . .**” poster on behalf of the girls. It will be shared and distributed throughout the diocese. Mother Paula also spoke about Blessed Matushka Olga of Alaska, highlighting the ways in which she served the church and Alaskan natives, and presented participants with bookmarks that had an icon of the beloved Matushka on it.

The weekend culminated with the Divine Liturgy on Sunday morning. Prior to Liturgy the service of preparation – Proskomedie – was served in the center of the chapel. Over the course of the weekend the young women had the opportunity to fill out commemoration sheets, allowing them to offer prayers for their living and departed family members. The priests commemorated each and every name offered by the girls by placing a particle of bread on the diskos, or paten, while the participants recited the names of their loved ones. Everyone received their own personal proskomedie in remembrance of the offering.

Danielle Geeza, one of the lay youth workers for the Department of Youth Ministry, was blown away by the girls' enthusiasm throughout the weekend. ***"I can sincerely say that out of the many retreats our diocese has sponsored over the past several years, this was one of the best. The young women were engaged throughout the entire weekend; they loved spending time getting to know the nuns, who made an effort to learn each of their names and more about them, and especially enjoyed learning how to bake proskomedie on Saturday afternoon. The Q&A session on Saturday evening lasted almost three hours! Each question posed to Archbishop Michael and the nuns was thoughtful and unique. It was just an incredible weekend!"***

On behalf of the young women of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey, special thanks are extended to His Eminence, Archbishop Michael; Father Jason Vansuch; Abbess Mother Christophora, Mother Paula, and Sister Christine; Janet Neis (retreat choir director); Janine Alpaugh (photography and lifeguarding); Danielle Geeza and all of the youth workers and chaperones. Of course, many thanks are extended to the entire staff of Saint Basil Academy who once again lovingly opened their welcoming arms to all participants.

Next year's retreat is scheduled for 11-13 November 2016. As each year has a theme, based on the feedback received from attendees the theme for the 2016 Diocesan Girls Retreat will be "iconography."

Annual Altar Server Retreat: February 12-14, 2016

The 6th Annual Diocesan Altar Servers Retreat was held at Saint Basil's Academy in Garrison NY from Friday, 12 February to Sunday, 14 February 2016. Over fifty participants were present for all or part of the weekend. Altar servers and clergy came from each of the three deaneries (New Jersey, New York City and New York State) as well as from the Carpatho-Russian Diocese. Archbishop Michael, together with multiple priests, an archdeacon, as many other adult altar servers also came to share in the revitalizing weekend. The retreat was blessed with young men and boys who came to learn about serving with a bishop while enhancing all of their skills as servers at the Lord's altar.

As the youths and young men arrived on Friday evening, they shared in a pizza dinner and recreational time, which is always popular. The night concluded with evening prayers in the beautiful chapel.

A Hierarchical Divine Liturgy was celebrated on Saturday morning at which half of the young men served, while the other half populated the choir. These groups switched on the following day, giving each group the opportunity to study under experienced directors of these two aspects of the services.

Classes with His Eminence and Reader Daniel Drobish followed the sumptuous breakfast. Archbishop Michael taught the history and vesting of the episcopal vestments, while Reader Daniel Drobish, an educated and accomplished choir director, offered the young men principles of liturgical singing. It is the hope of His Eminence and the organizers of the retreat that the young men take this knowledge back to their home parishes and enhance the beauty of the divine services.

The evening was stacked with fun, as the men and boys spent some recreational time swimming, playing basketball, using the fitness room or playing board games. Joyous laughter in fellowship was heard in all quarters. The assembly came together again for Great Vespers, followed by a thrill-packed session of ***"Orthodox Jeopardy."*** This year, the teams were evenly matched, with Team B squeezing out a win by a single point.

For Sunday morning's Divine Liturgy, a lesson on the preparation of the bread and wine, *the proskomedie*, was presented by Father Anthony (Falsarella), the chaplain at Saint Basil's Academy. During the Divine Liturgy, the young men and boys sang with voices like an angelic choir and served with renewed skill. After brunch, the

weekend came to a close as each of the participants headed back to their corner of the Diocese to share and teach what they had recently received.

The next Altar Servers Retreat is scheduled for 10-12 February 2017 at Saint Basil's Academy. Mark your calendars now! The Department of Youth Ministry is already working on some exciting things to offer during next year's retreat.

Annual Lenten Teen Retreat: April 1-April 3, 2016

What do faith, science, church services, zip lining, rock wall climbing, and "*Minute to Win It*" have in common? To an average person the answer would be "nothing!" However, if you were to ask the participants of this year's **Annual Lenten Teen Retreat held at the Taconic Retreat Center in Milan NY**, they would be able to tie each of these elements together; they were all components of the event held from Friday, 1 April to Sunday, 3 April 2016. Archbishop Michael, together with Father Jason Vansuch (Chairperson, Department of Youth Ministry), Danielle Geeza and Janine Alpaugh (Department of Youth Ministry Assistants) developed a wonderful weekend program centered on the sometimes controversial topics of "***Faith and Science***" and how they need not oppose each other.

Peter Parsells, MS, PA-C and Heather Parsells, MD, led the educational sessions during which they shared their testimonies as two Orthodox professionals in the field of medical science. As medical professionals, husband and wife, Peter and Heather are extensions of God's grace. Heather, a pediatric anesthesiologist, sees new life every day. Peter, a neuroscience physician assistant, witnesses God's healing presence through medical evaluations and procedures. Together, the couple compared and contrasted what it means to be a person born into Orthodoxy who came to discover the joys and wonders of science (Peter), versus a person rooted in the academics of science who later came to find the Orthodox Faith (Heather). In their testimonies, participants learned we can be people with immense scientific intelligence who are still grounded in our faith! They also entertained questions from participants.

A quaint chapel was assembled in the upper-room of the retreat center's main building on Friday afternoon. Participants arrived for registration, pizza, and icebreaker games later that evening. The group was blessed to have Archbishop Michael preside at Saturday's Memorial Divine Liturgy with Father Jason and, later in the evening, at Great Vespers. During their free time on Saturday the teens collectively played a heated game of basketball, but only after having climbed the retreat center's outdoor rock wall and zip-lining through its wooded property -- a highlight of the weekend! Following Vespers and dinner, the group was divided into two teams and played "*Minute to Win It*," a fun-filled competitive game coordinated by Janine and Danielle and modeled after the popular TV show. Participants stayed up late into the evening as they watched the movie "Do You Believe?" with Archbishop Michael, and then proceeded to have an informal Q&A session with their diocesan hierarch.

On the Sunday of the Veneration of the Cross, Father Jason served Divine Liturgy following a lesson on the service of preparation of the bread and wine, the *Proskomedia*. The scent of incense lingered in the air after each service throughout the weekend, leading many non-Orthodox from other visiting groups to sit in meditation taking in the beauty of our icons and peaceful environment.

After Sunday breakfast the weekend came to a close with participants feeling spiritually renewed and having gained many new Orthodox friends! The Department of Youth Ministry is excited to announce that the next Lenten Teen Retreat is scheduled for March 2017, specific date and location to be determined.

St. Andrew's Camp July – August 2016

The five-week 2016 camping season at **Saint Andrew's Camp in Jewell NY** concluded on 6 August. Weekly themes included: Teen Week, Horse Week, Art Week, Ecology Week, and Music Week. According to campers, *"Saint Andrew's Camp had a wonderful season this year! A great number of campers came over five weeks to learn, play, and pray."*

Week1:TeenWeek

Week2:EcologyWeek

Week3:HorseWeek

Week4:MusicWeek

Week5:ArtWeek

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

SaintAndrewsCamp.org

Annual Diocesan Youth Day – August 25, 2016

The 6th Annual Diocesan Youth Day was on August 25 as over 70 participants gathered at Saint Mary Orthodox Church, Jackson NJ. Alongside His Eminence Archbishop MICHAEL we had a number of Clergy, 20+ adult chaperones and 50+ youth participants representing parishes in our diocese as well as participants from other Diocese/Jurisdictions who joined us for the day of fun, fellowship, and prayer. At registration each youth participant was given a white t-shirt to wear with "Orthodox Youth Day 2016" written on the front so they could easily be identified. Before we begin any type of work, we pray! So, the day began with His Eminence Archbishop MICHAEL leading everyone in celebrating a Molioben Service. Imagine hearing a choir, under the direction of Reader Daniel Drobish, filled with nearly 70 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!" Archbishop MICHAEL 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.

The Diocese of New York & New Jersey Announces Launch of Department of Youth Ministry Website

The Orthodox Church in America's Diocese of New York & New Jersey is pleased to announce the launch of its new [Department of Youth Ministry website](#). With the Blessing of His Eminence Archbishop MICHAEL, this new platform offers easy access to information about upcoming events within the youth department, features a media gallery full of press releases and photos from past events, and will allow for online event registration in the near future.

"It is our hope that the youth in our diocese and beyond, together with their parents, will visit the site often and take advantage of the opportunities we create to grow in our faith, make new friends, and have fun," said Danielle Geeza, Department Assistant and Website Designer. "As His Eminence Archbishop Michael always reminds us, our youth are not only the future of the church, but are also the present!"

Although the activities planned by the Department of Youth Ministry are targeted to youth in the New York and New Jersey diocese, youth from other dioceses and jurisdictions are welcome to participate. The website will be updated regularly and continue to expand over the coming months. Visitors are encouraged to explore the website and sign-up to receive emails announcing future events by submitting their information via [Google Forms](#).

"Our prayer is but one that through the new website, the youth of our church together with the clergy and faithful will become connected to one another but more so become connected to The Church and to Our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ," said Rev. Jason Vansuch, (Chairperson, Department of Youth Ministry).

If any parishes within or outside the Diocese of New York & New Jersey would like to have their youth events announced on the website, please contact Rev. Jason Vansuch (Chairperson, Department of Youth Ministry) at jvansuch@hotmail.com, or Danielle Geeza (Assistant and Website Designer, Department of Youth Ministry) at nynjocayouth@gmail.com.

UPCOMING EVENTS WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH MINISTRY

THE 2016 DIOCESAN GIRLS RETREAT

Friday November 11-Sunday November 13, 2016
St. Basil's Academy (Garrison, NY)

THE 2017 WNY YOUTH DAY

January 2017
Palm Island Indoor Water Park (Batavia, NY)

THE 2017 DIOCESAN ALTAR SERVER RETREAT

Friday February 10-Sunday February 12, 2017
St. Basil's Academy (Garrison, NY)

THE 2017 DIOCESAN LENTEN TEEN RETREAT

Friday March 10-Sunday March 12, 2017
St. Basil's Academy (Garrison, NY)

THE 2017 DIOCESAN YOUTH DAY

St. Mary Church/Six Flags Great Adventure (Jackson, NJ)

THE 2017 ST. ANDREW CAMP SEASON

Teen Week
Horse Week
Art Week
Ecology Week
Music Week

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 Archbishop 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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