

Respectfully submitted by Matushka Tamara Cowan, Chair

This past August, seven of our Diocesan Church School teachers (including myself) attended a transformational *week-long formation-training* of Level I of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd graciously hosted by St. Tikhon's Seminary and sponsored by our Department. They were formed into *catechists* in this Orthodox adaptation of the 60-year old, Montessori-style program, led by Orthodox CGS Formation Leader, Shelley Finkler, where learning is experiential and matches the developmental phases of the child through the *environment*, the Atrium classroom, which facilitates the already present spirituality of the child.

Participant, Chris Wood of Holy Trinity Church in Randolph, NJ expressed what we were all feeling during this formation training: "The method of teaching observed was compelling and we were drawn in as if by a powerful magnet. With my attendance at the first workshop last year, God pierced my heart, and it has been my prayer to find what my purpose in this life is -- It is my firm belief that God has answered my prayer in leading me to become a Catechist of the Good Shepherd. By guiding our smallest members as they establish a relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and helping to guide them to better understanding and fuller participation in the common work of the Church, the Divine Liturgy, I believe my prayer is being answered. I have come to understand spreading the Good News is work we are all called to do -- each in our own way -- and have discovered my way to go about doing this important work as a CGS Catechist. Glory to God for all things!"

We are very pleased to announce that our Diocese now has 4 fledgling Atriums—spanning all three Deaneries, in Yonkers, Auburn, Ballston Spa, NY, and Randolph, NJ. These first efforts are the flagships that will set the course for growing the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd throughout our Diocese. In just 1 month of Atrium classes in my parish of Holy Trinity in Yonkers, we have witnessed the fruit of this program—students telling their parents they *do not* want to miss Atrium and teachers and parishioners energizing and deepening their relationships as we *literally* built our own Atrium!

And so it was fitting at this year's Church School Conference, for Shelley Finkler to present a one-day workshop of CGS Level 2, both in Paramus -- a joint event for the New Jersey and New York City Deaneries -- and in Endicott, for the New York State Deanery. With over 35 participants, both clergy members and church school teachers alike, there was great enthusiasm in taking the next step in implementing Level 2 in the future.

Planning is underway for a spring Level I training to be offered in the form of intensive weekend classes for those who cannot attend a week-long training. Next summer a

Level 1 Part 2 week-long training retreat is being planned for August 2019, to be held at Saint Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary.

We are looking forward to our 2nd Annual Bible Bowl, coming up in two weeks, on Saturday, November 16, at Holy Resurrection Church in Wayne, NJ featuring the Gospel of St. Luke. Our first effort, last November, yielded nearly 50 youth and adults from across the Diocese, gathered at Holy Trinity Church in Yonkers, NY. This event combined competition, camaraderie, t-shirts, trophies, and the culmination of months of diligent study of the Scriptures with eleven teams from six parishes competing in three divisions – Junior Youth, Senior Youth, and Adult – and responding to challenging questions from the Gospel of Saint Mark. The parishes represented in the competition were SS. Peter and Paul Church, Endicott NY; Holy Apostles Mission, Lansing NY; Holy Trinity Church, East Meadow NY; Christ the Savior Church, New York NY; Holy Trinity Church, Yonkers NY; and Mother of God Joy of All Who Sorrow Church, Princeton NJ.

With each successive year of passing on trophies and experiencing friendly competition among the youth of our Diocese, we hope to grow a tradition of excellence that will continue on to the next generation. Through these humble efforts we more fully realize the mission of our Department: to *experience* our Orthodox Christian Faith ever more completely, in Worship, Fellowship, Service, and Witness!

Archbishop Michael addressed the competitors with words of encouragement, stating that “although it is important to study English and math, science and history, the most important subject we can study is the Scriptures – the written record of the experience of the people of God. Reading the Scriptures every day, we become transformed by the Holy Spirit. We become more and more like Jesus Christ, and we grow in theosis – the process of knowing and loving the God Who loves us more than we love ourselves!”