

**Greeting From His Grace, Bishop MICHAEL**  
**To The Diocesan Department Of College Ministry Training Event**  
***“The Fields Are White For Harvest: Welcome To College Ministry”***  
**August 18, 2012, Holy Trinity Orthodox Church, Yonkers, New York**

Beloved in the Lord,

I greet you with joy and gratitude as you gather for this very special event. I am sorry that I cannot join you today. I have a commitment for a long weekend with the parish youth in Brick, NJ, and if the distance were closer, I would do both – but I simply cannot make the drive back and forth in time. I have asked Fr. David, the Rector here, to offer this greeting in my absence.

When we send our children away to college, we make sure that they have all the physical pieces in place. The laptop, the textbooks, the clothing, the sheets and towels, the spending money, the cell phone with the call-home-free plan. And we make sure, of course, that they will have a good place to stay.

And we also make sure that they will have the spiritual pieces in place. Their Bible, well worn from constant use, whose contents we have taught them to read, to love, and to live... their favorite icon, which through our prayerful example they have learned to venerate with such affection that they would not dare leave home without it. Their prayer book, whose pages are faded and brittle from years of devotion and growth in the Faith.

But, in addition to packing up all the pieces, and finding them the right place to stay, do we pour just as much effort into finding them the right place to pray? We sign them up with a meal plan... or we give them money for groceries and we admonish them to eat their vegetables. Do we go the same lengths to connect them to the Chalice, to point them to a welcoming parish and priest who will open their doors and offer these kids a spiritual home away from home?

And, do we connect them to other Orthodox Christians – both their contemporaries in age, with whom they can develop spiritually fruitful and enduring friendships – as well as adults who can give them a ride to Church, a Sunday meal and a family atmosphere, and a place in the life of a parish that, to these students, will be new, unfamiliar, and even intimidating?

Too many times, we send our children away to college with the reminder, “Now don’t forget to go to Church...” and they do forget. Too many times, we graduate them from Church School, from high school, and we send them out on their college journey of independence and self-discovery... and they never come back.

Why? Because the professors in whose classrooms their minds will be shaped, are likely to impart to them one of two spiritually deadly worldviews: the atheistic worldview,

which denies the reality of God; or the secular worldview, which stops short of saying God does not exist, but which teaches us to live as if God doesn't matter.

The activities in which they will be encouraged, or even required, to participate, will be scheduled during times that the Church reserves for prayer.

The morality to which they will be exposed, not just by their peers but by the very practices and propaganda of the schools they attend, will be a morality that is starkly opposed to the traditional teachings of self-restraint, sobriety, chastity, and humility that the Saints have passed down to us.

Ultimately, our children when they leave for college are thrust into an identity crisis whose proportions are immense and whose stakes could not be higher.

The forces of secularism and atheism, the culture of self-centeredness and unchecked consumption, and the idea that no one knows who you are better than you, all push our kids to the edge of an abyss of confusion, hopelessness, and despair. Saint Paul writes to the Colossians that our self – our life – is hidden with God in Christ. How are our kids to find themselves, at this most delicate and vulnerable stage of their lives, unless someone is there to connect them to Christ – in Whom their true selves are found?

The OCF is about making, sharing, and keeping that connection alive. And I am deeply grateful to everyone, clergy and laity, paid and volunteer, young and young-at-heart, who labors in any way to keep these kids connected to Christ in the Church. I am grateful to Deacon John Diamantis who has accepted the role of my Diocesan Chairman of College Ministry. I am grateful to Andrew Boyd, who fills that role on a national scale for the Orthodox Church in America. I am grateful to Edward Ryan who speaks to us from his own experience as first a seeker and now a leader in Orthodox college ministry – and I am grateful to all those in the trenches of college ministry who work so tirelessly to deliver the Good News of Jesus Christ in the midst of the bad news of atheism, secularism, hedonism, and nihilism.

I am grateful to Fr. David and the people here at Holy Trinity Church who have cooked, baked, set up, and hosted this very special event. And I am grateful to all of you who have sacrificed your Saturday to come here, to listen, and to learn what works in college ministry... and then take it home, to your churches and to the campuses where you live – and to claim our kids for Christ.

I extend my archpastoral blessings to each and every one of you, and I pray that Almighty God will richly bless your every effort in His Vineyard. May He grant you many blessed years!

With love in Christ,  
+Bishop Michael