

“Fr. Andrew’s seminar...truly noted one of the (great) needs of our Church. His presentation using his time, treasures and talent should be heard by many more.”

We all have questions. And, when it comes to our Church and our Faith, we find we have very certain and particular questions:

“What do we believe in? Why do we believe that?”

“What does that mean? Why do we DO that?”

“Where does that tradition come from?”

And, when it comes to others, *“What do THEY believe in? And how do I explain Orthodoxy to them?”*

For over three years now, His Grace, Bishop Michael has been promoting the concept of “sharing your story” throughout the diocese during his archpastoral visits. For many Orthodox, though, the idea of sharing a “story” can be scary. That story may be difficult to describe, and the task of sharing that story becomes even harder when one is confronted with questions, sometimes challenging and even hostile.

To help answer some of these questions, and many others, nearly 50 people coming from the Diocese of New York & New Jersey’s three deaneries joined together on Saturday, October 19 to hear Fr. Andrew Stephen Damick, pastor of St. Paul Orthodox Church, Emmaus, Pennsylvania, deliver over six hours of instruction in the differences between the Holy Orthodox Faith and non-Orthodox, or Heterodox, confessions.

The aim of the conference, sponsored by the Diocese’s Commission on Mission and Evangelism, was to teach and equip attendees in understanding where our non-Orthodox family, friends, neighbors and co-workers are coming from in terms of various faith traditions, and how, in better understanding them, to share Orthodoxy with them.

Fr. Andrew’s talks were divided into four sections:

1. *Churching the Nation: Sharing the Orthodox Christian Faith in America*

Where we find ourselves now in modern, contemporary America: the deformation and reformation of classical Christianity; starting a ‘Christian conversation’ with those around us, including things to say as well as possible conversational pitfalls to avoid, and things to know – and do – to make the non-Orthodox both knowledgeable and comfortable in an Orthodox ethos and environment.

2. *Two Roads Diverged: Orthodox Christianity and Roman Catholicism*

The issue of authority is the basis of the divisions that have come between the Orthodox ‘East’ and Roman ‘West’, and Fr. Andrew detailed these differences in light of their historic divergence from biblical, apostolic Christian Orthodoxy.

3. *The One and the Many: Orthodox Christianity and Protestantism*

The beginnings of historic Protestantism, starting with its initial reactions against the abuses of Roman Catholicism to its development of new doctrines based on the series of “Sola” teachings (like ‘Sola Scriptura’), and how these compare with an Orthodox understanding of these same teachings.

4. *Baptism into Data: Orthodox Christian Reflections and Comparisons with Evangelical Protestant Evangelism*

Surveying the various false “gospels” that have become popular in contemporary evangelical circles (such as the ‘gospel of prosperity’).

Fr. Andrew delivered his talk, based on his book, *Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy*, and Ancient Faith podcasts of the same name, in an easy to understand, “user-friendly” format aimed not at the clergy present, but at the laymen and women present, for they will be, as he pointed out, the very people who bear the burden of responsibility to share the Gospel and Orthodox Faith with others. Priests, as Fr. Andrew pointed out, are less than 6% of the reason people come to church, return to church, or join a church. It is the laypeople of the church that form the reason most people decide to join (or not). And, this means it will be the laypeople who have to be knowledgeable enough about that church and its beliefs to explain them to inquirers.

Lots of time was set aside for questions from the participants, and Fr. Andrew patiently answered each as they were raised. Much ground was covered, and many had the opportunity to both raise questions and reflect on personal experiences.

We can conclude by raising and answering one final question: Many have asked if this conference will be repeated, and Fr. Andrew has agreed to do another, identical conference in the New York State Deanery sometime in the coming winter for the benefit of those who could not make it down from northern New York. More information will be released shortly.

Thank you, Fr. Andrew, for taking from your busy schedule to be with us, and thank you, Vladyka Michael, for your support and encouragement to all of us to get out there and “share our story!”