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Annual Diocesan Altar Servers Retreat

The 4th Annual Diocesan Altar Servers Retreat was held at Saint Basil Academy in Garrison NY from 14 February (Friday) to 16 February (Sunday) 2014. 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 from the Moscow Patriarchate and Carpatho-Russian Diocese. Bishop Michael led the retreat together with four Priests, two Deacons, a Sub-deacon and Reader.



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 and learning more about the importance of reading and singing in church. By learning both how to serve and how to sing, they are now prepared to better assist during the divine services in their home parishes. The Divine Liturgy was celebrated on both mornings with evening prayers served Friday evening and Vespers on Saturday evening. All altar servers actively participated 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 Basil 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. Some participants watched the first portion of the movie "Jesus of Nazareth" on Saturday evening and were engaged by Bishop Michael in discussing the movie as a way of re-examining the life of our Lord.

One of the many highlights of the weekend was a new feature: learning how to read and sing in church. This session was for returning participants and was led by Reader David Lucs (Holy Protection Cathedral, NY City) who is well-known throughout the diocese for his knowledge of the divine services and liturgical music. He discussed and reviewed the meaning and importance of reading and singing properly, and guided participants as they read and sang the services during the retreat. Some of the participants were so inspired by what they learned over the weekend, they expressed a desire to someday become tonsured readers in the church.

Another highlight was the Saturday night session: "Stump the Bishop!" The young men had the opportunity to ask His Grace 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 Bishop 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.

