

2014 ANNUAL LENTEN YOUTH RETREAT

On 4-5 April 2014 the diocese held its annual Lenten Youth Retreat at Holy Resurrection Church in Wayne NJ drawing teens from New Jersey and New York. The theme of the overnight event was "Miracles in Our Midst" and was led by Father Jason Vansuch (Chairperson, Department of Youth Ministry). *"It is so important for our diocesan youth to come together as often as possible to strengthen their faith and have fun,"* said Danielle Geeza (retreat facilitator) of the host parish. *"By doing so, it is our prayer and hope that they will remain in the Church as they transition to adulthood and build a network of Orthodox friendships."*

The participants and Bishop Michael arrived on Friday evening. After dinner and several icebreakers, His Grace led the first session of the weekend: "Miracles in the Gospels." He defined what a miracle is, elaborated on the miracles of Christ, shared miracles he had experienced or witnessed personally, and closed with a Q&A session. Before leaving, he presented everyone with an icon of the Theotokos which would be blessed the next day. Free-time followed along with the teens preparing skits for the audience acting out various Bible stories with a twist -- a bag with an assortment of unrelated items that needed to be incorporated in their performance! Four groups performed and themes included "Giving a weather report at the scene of Noah's Ark," "Mary and Joseph trying to check into a hotel in Bethlehem," "How Jonah occupied his time in the belly of the whale," and "The Parable of the Prodigal Son."

Perhaps the highlight of the weekend was the visit of two myrrh-streaming icons from Christ the King Orthodox Church (Western Rite, ROCOR) in Tullytown PA on Saturday morning. The first icon was a copy of the Hawaiian Iveron Icon of the Mother of God, and the other of Saint John Maximovitch of Shanghai and San Francisco. This kicked-off the second session of the retreat: "Modern Day Miracles in the Orthodox Church."

In honor of the 5th Saturday of Great Lent, Father Jason co-served an Akathist to the Theotokos with Father Paul Kucynda (parish rector), Father David Cowan (Holy Trinity Church, Yonkers NY), Father Bernard Andracchio and Father Andrew Gomez (Christ the King Church, Tullytown PA). Teens and chaperones sang the responses with the clergy, after which everyone was able to venerate the icons and be anointed with the myrrh flowing from them. Father Bernard and Father Andrew offered a presentation on how their parish came to acquire the icons, when they first started streaming myrrh, and several miraculous stories attributed to the icons. A Q&A session followed. *"We were so blessed to be a part of the day and to share with those present our holy streaming icons,"* said Father Bernard, *"and pray we were also a blessing to all of you."*

Orthodox Olympics commenced after lunch! Participants were broken up into two teams. Six stations were set up and, after receiving clues in the form of scripture verses, the teams had to make their way

