



The Department of Youth Ministry
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Rev. Jason Vansuch, Chairperson
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REPORT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH MINISTRY TO THE 2015 ANNUAL DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY

**Ss Peter and Paul Orthodox Church
South River, NJ
November 10, 2015**

Your Beatitude, Your Eminence, Reverend Chancellor, Brother Clergy and Faithful of our Beloved Diocese:

GLORY TO JESUS CHRIST! GLORY FOREVER!

With the Blessing and Archpastoral guidance and leadership of His Eminence Archbishop MICHAEL, the Department of Youth Ministry has been very active this past year. Whether it has been on the Diocesan Level or on the Parish Level, the youth of our Diocese have been very active in various activities through which they not only had the opportunity to come together in prayer and Christian Fellowship but also they had the opportunity of re-kindling their friendships with one another as well as making new ones.

Below is a list of activities that the Department of Youth Ministry organized as well as participated in throughout this past year:

First Annual Diocesan Girl's Retreat: November 14-16, 2015

The **First Annual Diocesan Girls Retreat** was held, with the support and blessing of Bishop Michael, at Saint Basil's Academy in Garrison NY from Friday, 14 November to Sunday, 16 November 2014. Over 35 young women were present for all or part of the weekend along with approximately 20 chaperones. Participants came from each of the three diocesan deaneries (New Jersey, New York City, New York State) in addition to a contingent from Berwick PA and from the Moscow Patriarchate. Given the success of this year's inaugural event, His Grace gave his enthusiastic blessing to make this an annual retreat to occur each fall.

Retreat coordinator Father Jason Vansuch (Chair, Department of Youth Ministry) was on-site for the entire weekend. Under the guidance of Bishop Michael and Christine Nass, participants were introduced to the basic fundamentals of chanting and reading during worship services, thus introducing them to one of many aspects of church life they can be involved in at their home parishes. The three-day event allowed them to enhance their skills by actively participating in the services throughout the weekend: evening prayers on Friday evening, reading "*The Hours*" prior to Divine Liturgy on both Saturday and Sunday mornings, and singing responses at Liturgy and Great Vespers.

On Friday evening participants arrived throughout the night and came together for a few ice-breaker activities. It was great to see some old friends reuniting from the previous camping season and prior retreats. Pizza was served for dinner, and His Grace arrived to share a slideshow of his trip to the Holy Land in May 2013. After evening prayers, it was time for everyone to retire to their rooms for the night.

The next morning started bright and early in the chapel with a choir rehearsal directed by Christine Nass. Participants eagerly awaited Bishop Michael's arrival for the Divine Liturgy. Marianne Johnson, from Saints Peter & Paul Church in South River NJ, greeted His Grace with the traditional bread and salt, and the entire group proceeded to surround him during his vesting at the center of the chapel as Archdeacon Michael Suvak recited the vesting prayers. Fellow concelebrants of the Liturgy also included Father Jason, Archimandrite Anthony (Director, Saint Basil's Academy), and Sub-Deacon Mark Federoff.

Following the Liturgy a delicious brunch was served by the Academy staff, and then it was time for the learning sessions. Two groups were formed: 7-9th graders and 10-12th graders. The groups rotated time with His Grace during which he hosted a Q&A session and a rousing game of "**Orthodox Jeopardy!**" Christine coached participants in the fundamentals of chanting, encouraging each girl to develop her own style, taking turns reading psalms for extra practice. They put their skills to the test at Vespers that evening chanting the Resurrectional Stichera and Aposticha.

Saturday's schedule may seem to have been demanding, but there was plenty of time for fellowship and activities! Many girls enjoyed the indoor pool (special thanks to the weekend lifeguard, Janine Alpaugh of Holy Annunciation Church in Brick NJ) while others took to the basketball court, simply enjoyed exploring the beautiful grounds, or playing board games back at the dorms. The evening wrapped up with dividing into 4 groups and discussing how God and the Church have affected their lives; in particular, having each participant tell "her story." Everyone came together to watch a movie, "**Heaven is for Real,**" followed by discussion. Then, it was time to return to the dorms for the night.

The weekend concluded with the Divine Liturgy on Sunday morning celebrated by Father Jason and Archimandrite Anthony, with the responses again sung by participants. The service of "*Proskomedia*" (or "*prothesis*" -- preparation of the bread and wine) was held in the center of the chapel prior to the beginning of the Liturgy; each young woman was given a commemoration sheet allowing them to offer prayers for their family members, living and departed, as both priests remembered each and every name by placing a particle of bread on the "*diskos*" (or "*paten*"). They each received their own personal "*prospora*" (church bread) in remembrance of the offering.

Given the success of this year's inaugural event, Bishop Michael gave his blessing to make this an annual retreat to occur each fall.

Special thanks for this labor of love on behalf of the youth of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey are extended to: His Grace, Bishop Michael; Father Jason Vansuch; all of the chaperones; and the entire staff of Saint Basil's Academy who always make our diocesan youth feel welcome. Of course, "thanks be to God" for the wonderful girls who brought enthusiasm, faith, and love to the weekend!

Family Day at the Palm Island Indoor Water Park (Batavia, NY) – Saturday January 3, 2015

On Saturday January 3, 2015, parishioners from **Saint George Church in Buffalo NY** and **Saint John the Baptist Church in Rochester NY** met "*half-way*" for family fun and fellowship at Palm Island Indoor Water Park (Batavia NY). The day featured fun on the waterslides, pool basketball, and lots of splashing. As children enjoyed the water fun, adults discussed ways the parishes could collaborate and support one another in the future. Coordinating the event were Sub-Deacon Sean McNulty and Fr. Jason Vansuch.

Evening prayers/Vespers were led by Deacon Mark Hoeplinger (Saint George parish) and chanted by Sub-Deacon Sean McNulty, Arthur Papanastasiou, and Raphael Platte (Saint John the Baptist parish) with all of the children reading portions of the beautifully prayerful service. After prayer, old and young feasted on pizza.

Another Buffalo-Rochester fellowship is planned for the near future.

Annual Altar Server Retreat: February 6-8, 2015

The 5th Annual Diocesan Altar Servers Retreat was held at Saint Basil's Academy in Garrison NY from Friday, February 6 to Sunday, February 8. Over 50 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 some from the Carpatho-Russian Diocese. His Grace, Bishop Michael, together with six priests, one deacon, one subdeacon, and one reader led the retreat. The weekend was blessed with young men and boys who came to learn about the Vestments of a Bishop while enhancing their skills as servers at the Lord's altar as well as learning about the history and theology of The Divine Liturgy. By learning both how to serve and the historical and theological aspect of the Divine Liturgy, they will now be prepared to assist more during the divine services in their home parish. The Divine Liturgy was celebrated on both mornings, with evening prayers served on Friday Evening and Vespers served on Saturday Evening. All of the altar servers had the opportunity to actively participate in the Divine Services by singing in the choir, reading, and serving in the Altar. The choir and readers were under the direction of Mr. Luis Camacho, Choir Director of Holy Assumption Orthodox Church (Clifton, NJ) who came for the entire weekend to lead our participants in singing and reading while guiding them in understanding the order of the Divine Liturgy.

The weekend was filled with lots of fun, fellowship, education, and prayer. As they arrived at Saint Basils Academy, participants were treated to a pizza dinner and free-time on the basketball court. Besides playing basketball and swimming in the pool, the altar servers also had the opportunity to watch movies or play board games.

As each year has a different theme and focus for our education sessions, this year's theme was focused on 'The History and Theology of the Divine Liturgy'. This session was led by Dr. Paul Witek, Lecturer of Pastoral Practice and Praxis and Assistant to the Dean at St. Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary. Reader David is well-known throughout the Diocese for his knowledge of the historical and theological aspects of the Divine Services. Dr. Paul discussed and reviewed with the participants the meaning and the importance of the Divine Liturgy by breaking down and explaining each part of the Divine Liturgy, its history, its meaning, and its theological understanding. Some of the participants were inspired by what they had learned over the weekend, that they themselves may someday go to seminary to further their education with the possibility of future service in the church.

Another highlight that occurred was the usual Saturday night session: 'Orthodox Jeopardy' with Bishop MICHAEL. The participants were divided two groups where they were asked questions by Bishop MICHAEL based upon what they learned during their education sessions. The game was close as both teams answered all of the questions correctly.

The weekend ended with His Grace 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, priests, church school teachers, and parish council members.

We express our sincere and heartfelt thanks and appreciation to His Grace Bishop MICHAEL for his blessing, leadership, guidance, and support for this years' 2015 Diocesan Altar Server Retreat! Thank You Dear Vladyko! We also express our sincere and heartfelt thanks and appreciation to Fr. Anthony and the staff of St. Basil Academy for allowing us to use their facility and for their help, assistance, and hard work and for all they did to make our retreat a success. We also express our sincere and heartfelt thanks and appreciation to the clergy and adult chaperones who came up for the weekend to assist with the retreat and for this we are truly grateful. We also thank

Dr. Paul Witek, Mr. Luis Camacho, and Subdeacon Mark Federoff who led the sessions for us. This event could not have happened if it wasn't for the parish priests and their support of this event, the parents who made arrangements for their children to participate, those who worked on the committee and all that they have done to make it a success, and especially if it wasn't for the enthusiastic Altar Servers who brought their joy and excitement with them. Truly the weekend of February 6-8 was a bright weekend in the Life of our Diocese where "The Future of Our Church" were seen and heard enjoying fellowship with one another and with their Bishop. Glory To God For All Things!

Annual Lenten Teen Retreat: March 20-22, 2015

With the blessing of His Eminence, Archbishop Michael, and under the direction of Father Jason Vansuch (Chair, Department of Youth Ministry), nearly twenty teens in grades 7-12 gathered together on March 20-22nd, 2015 for the Annual Diocesan Lenten Youth Retreat held at Saint Basil's Academy in Garrison, NY. Father Jason coordinated the event together with diocesan lay youth workers: Janine Alpaugh, Juliana Federoff, Danielle Geeza, and Tania Metz. The theme of the weekend was "Let My Prayer Arise: The Mystery of Prayer," with Father Timothy Hojnicky of Holy Apostles Mission in Mechanicsburg, PA serving as the guest speaker.

Participants arrived late into Friday evening, braving the snow in order to not miss the opportunity to enjoy fellowship with old friends and to make new ones. Following a pizza dinner and several ice-breaker activities, the group headed to the chapel for Father Timothy's first talk which covered the basics of why we pray, and then broke down The Lord's Prayer using simple terminology. He also touched on how participants should develop their own, personal prayer rule, recalling his own teenage years on how his prayer life grew with age. After a short question and answer period, the night closed with Evening Prayers, with several participants chanting each prayer in rotation.

The next morning started bright and early at 8am with the Memorial Saturday Divine Liturgy. Evan Levitsky (Holy Resurrection Church, Wayne NJ) and Simeon Brasowski (Christ the Savior Church, Paramus NJ) greeted Archbishop Michael with the traditional bread and salt. Concelebrating with His Eminence were Archimandrite Anthony (Director of Saint Basil's Academy), Father Jason, and Father Timothy. They were assisted in the altar by Sub-deacon Mark Federoff and three altar servers, and Father Stephen Evanina (Holy Assumption Church, Clifton NJ) directed the choir of participants the entire weekend. End the end of Liturgy, Archimandrite Anthony blessed the *Koliva* (boiled wheat cooked with honey and mixed fruits, cinnamon, etc.), lovingly prepared by Juliana Federoff the night before in remembrance of all her departed loved ones on this Memorial Saturday.

Following Liturgy, a delicious brunch was served by the Academy staff, and then it was time for Father Tim's final learning session and closing remarks by Archbishop Michael. After receiving His Eminence's blessing and a gift, free-time and fellowship commenced! Participants enjoyed exploring the grounds, playing basketball in the gym, and hanging out together in the dorms. Later in the afternoon, organized games were played in the gym: Orthodox Olympics (always a favorite of attendees) and a Relay Race both organized by Danielle Geeza, with help from chaperones. After Vespers, the evening wrapped up with dinner, a viewing of the classic movie "Hoosiers," and a group discussion on how prayer played a part in the movie. Then it was time to return to the dorms for the night.

The weekend concluded with the Divine Liturgy on Sunday morning celebrated by Father Jason and Archimandrite Anthony, with responses again sung by participants. Prior to Liturgy, "Proskomedia" was served in the center of the chapel; over the course of the weekend, teens had the opportunity to fill out a commemoration sheet allowing them to offer prayers for their family members, living and departed, as both priests remembered each and every name by placing a particle of bread on the "diskos" (or "paten"). They each received their own personal "prospora" (church bread) in remembrance of the offering.

After another successful retreat with enthusiasm resonating from the teens, the Youth Department is already planning next year's event in March 2016 with the blessing of Archbishop Michael.

On behalf of the youth of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey, special thanks are extended to: His Eminence, Archbishop Michael; Father Jason Vansuch; Father Timothy Hojnicky; Father Stephen Evanina; all of the Diocesan Youth Workers and chaperones; and the entire staff of Saint Basil's Academy who lovingly open their arms to us three times each year and always make our youth feel welcome.

St. Andrew's Camp July – August 2015

The five-week 2015 camping season at **Saint Andrew's Camp in Jewell NY** concluded on 1 August. Weekly themes included: Teen Week, Horse Week, Art Week, Ecology Week, and Music Week. According to campers, *"Saint Andrew's Camp had a wonderful season this year! Nearly 70 campers came over five weeks to learn, play, and pray."*

Week1:TeenWeek

Week2:HorseWeek

Week3:ArtWeek

Week4:EcologyWeek

Week5:MusicWeek

For more information about the camp, photos, and the Camp Blog, go to:

SaintAndrewsCamp.org

Annual Diocesan Youth Day – August 20, 2015

The 5th Annual Diocesan Youth Day was on August 20 as over 90 participants gathered at Saint Mary Orthodox Church, Jackson NJ. Alongside His Eminence Archbishop MICHAEL we had a number of Clergy, 20+ adult chaperones and 70+ youth participants representing parishes in our diocese as well as participants from other Diocese/Jurisdictions who joined us for the day of fun, fellowship, and prayer. At registration each youth participant was given a white t-shirt to wear with "Orthodox Youth Day 2015" written on the front so they could easily be identified. Before we begin any type of work, we pray! So, the day began with His Eminence Archbishop MICHAEL leading everyone in celebrating a Molieben Service. Imagine hearing a choir, under the direction of Archpriest Stephen Evanina, filled with nearly 90 voices ranging from the youngest child to the oldest adult -- truly the "Future of Our Church" was present! After giving thanks to God and asking His blessing upon their endeavors, breakfast was served. While everyone was enjoying the delicious continental breakfast, it was time to "Stump the Clergy!" Archbishop MICHAEL and the Clergy held a Question and Answer Session with the participants where everyone had the opportunity to spend some time with the priests, asking them questions as well as enjoying fellowship and discussion with them. Following the "Q&A" session, it was time to pack everything up and load everyone onto the buses or into their cars and head off to Six Flags Great Adventure for the rest of the day! At the Park it was time for the chaperones to take their groups to wherever they wanted to go: Batman the Ride, Kinga Ka, El Toro, Green Lantern, just to mention a few of the many rides the children enjoyed while at Six Flags. Riding all of those rides can build up an appetite, so when it came time for lunch all gathered together around the "Water Fountain" to distribute a free meal voucher to the youth participants to enjoy a delicious meal. At this time, everyone gathered at the 'Water Fountain' to take a picture. What a blessing to behold a flock of children gather with one another enjoying a day of prayer, fun, and Christian Fellowship. After lunchtime it was back to more rides and thrills before heading back to Saint Mary's Church Hall for the departure home.

UPCOMING EVENTS WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH MINISTRY

THE 2015 DIOCESAN GIRLS RETREAT

Friday November 13-Sunday November 15, 2015
St. Basil's Academy (Garrison, NY)

THE 2016 WNY YOUTH DAY

January 2016
Palm Island Indoor Water Park (Batavia, NY)

THE 2016 DIOCESAN ALTAR SERVER RETREAT

Friday February 12-Sunday February 14, 2016
St. Basil's Academy (Garrison, NY)

THE 2016 DIOCESAN LENTEN TEEN RETREAT

Friday April 6-Sunday April 8, 2016
St. Basil's Academy (Garrison, NY)

THE 2016 DIOCESAN YOUTH DAY

Thursday August 25, 2016
St. Mary Church/Six Flags Great Adventure (Jackson, NJ)

THE 2016 ST. ANDREW CAMP SEASON

Teen Week (July 3-9)
Horse Week (July 10-16)
Art Week (July 17-23)
Ecology Week (July 24-30)
Music Week (July 31-August 6)

If you have any questions about plans for the Diocesan Department of Youth Ministry or about upcoming future events or if you are eager to personally participate in this labor of love alongside Archbishop Michael, then please do not hesitate to contact one of us. We thank you for your cooperation, and we look forward to hearing from you. May GOD continue to bless and guide you, your families, and the faithful of your parishes!

With Love in Christ,

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