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Annual Lenten Youth Retreat

With the blessing Archbishop Michael nearly twenty teenagers (grades 7-12) gathered on 20-22 March 2015 for the Annual Lenten Youth Retreat at Saint Basil Academy in Garrison NY. Father Jason Vansuch (Chairman, Department of Youth Ministry) coordinated the event together with youth workers Janine Alpaugh, Juliana Federoff, Danielle Geeza, and Tania Metz. The theme was *"Let My Prayer Arise: The Mystery of Prayer"* with guest speaker Father Timothy Hojnicky (Holy Apostles Mission, Mechanicsburg PA).

Participants arrived late into Friday evening, braving the snow for the opportunity to enjoy fellowship with old acquaintances and to make new friends. Following a pizza dinner and several ice-breaker activities, the group headed to the chapel for Father Timothy's first talk on the basics of why we pray. He then explained "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 and how his prayer life grew with age. After a short question and answer period, the night closed with evening prayers with several participants chanting the prayers in rotation.



Saturday morning started bright and early at 8:00 a.m. 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, Saint Basil Academy), Father Jason, and Father Timothy. They were assisted by Sub-deacon Mark Federoff and three altar servers; Father Stephen Evanina (Holy Assumption Church, Clifton NJ) directed the choir of participants the entire weekend. At the conclusion of the Liturgy, Archimandrite Anthony blessed the traditional Koliva (boiled wheat cooked with honey and mixed fruits, cinnamon, etc.) lovingly prepared by Juliana Federoff the night before in remembrance of her departed loved ones.

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.

