

DIocese OF NEW YORK & NEW JERSEY

Department of Youth Ministry

2017 Diocesan Assembly Report

Your Eminence, Reverend Fathers, and lay delegates and observers to the Diocesan Assembly:

Glory to Jesus Christ!

Once again, the Department of Youth Ministry has been very active this year. Please read on to see a breakdown of 2017 event participation, our presence on social media, challenges that our Department faces, plans for 2018 events, and goals for the upcoming year.

2017 Annual Events

- **2016 Annual Girls' Retreat: November 11-13th, after the 2016 Assembly concluded**
 - **Speaker:** Randi Sider-Rose
 - **Theme:** *Iconography: Windows Into Heaven*
 - **Attendance:** 21 Participants, 6 Chaperones/Adults
 - **Parishes Represented:** Brick, Medford, South River (NJ Deanery); Christ the Savior NYC, Cathedral NYC, Shirley (NYC Deanery); Ballston Spa (NY State Deanery); Syosset (Stavropegial); Pottstown (Eastern Pennsylvania)

- **Annual Altar Servers' Retreat: February 10-12, 2017 at Saint Basil Academy, Garrison NY**
 - **Speaker:** Protodeacon Peter Skoog
 - **Theme:** *The Mystery of the Diaconate: Service in the Church and Beyond!*
 - **Attendance:** 29 Participants, 18 Chaperones/Clergy
 - **Parishes Represented:** Clifton, Paramus, Perth Amboy, Princeton, Saddle Brook, Trenton, Wantage, Wappingers Falls (NJ Deanery); Cathedral NYC, East Meadow, Yonkers (NYC Deanery); Elmira Heights, Endicott, Syracuse (NY State Deanery); ACROD

- **Annual Teen Retreat: March 10-12, 2017 at Saint Basil Academy, Garrison NY**
 - **Speaker:** Gregory Fedorchak
 - **Theme:** *The Challenge: Who Are We Called To Be?*
 - **Attendance:** 33 Participants, 17 Chaperones/Clergy
 - **Parishes Represented:** Brick, Paramus, Princeton, Randolph, Wappingers Falls (NJ Deanery); Christ the Savior NYC, Shirley, Yonkers (NYC Deanery); Endicott (NY State Deanery); Syosset (Stavropegial)

- **Diocesan Youth Day: August 24, 2017 at Six Flags Great Adventure, Jackson NJ**
 - **Attendance:** ~75 total; Mix of youth participants, adult chaperones, and clergy
 - **Parishes Represented:** Medford, Perth Amboy, Princeton, Saddle Brook, Trenton (NJ Deanery); Yonkers (NYC Deanery); Endicott (NY State Deanery); Bergenfield, NJ (St. Anthony's Church, Antiochian Archdiocese)

- **Annual Girls' Retreat: November 10-12, 2017 at Saint Basil Academy, Garrison NY**
 - **Speaker:** Melinda Johnson
 - **Theme:** *Connection Established: Journeying with Your Patron Saint*
 - **Registrants (as of Oct 21th):** 6 Participants, 4 Chaperones/Adults
 - **Parishes Represented (as of Oct 21th):** Brick, Manville, Randolph (NJ Deanery); Christ the Savior NYC (NYC Deanery); Elmira Heights (NY State Deanery); Syosset (Stavropegial)

Social Media Presence

Ever since launching the Youth Department website, a concerted effort has been made to have an active social media presence. Many other jurisdictions, namely the Greek Archdiocese and Antiochian Archdiocese, consistently post inspirational quotes from the holy fathers, scripture, and saints—in addition to advertising their youth events and photos.

Using this as inspiration, our Department has a presence on the platforms listed below; click the links if you wish to view the pages, **and follow us!**

- **Facebook:** 136 followers; mainly used for advertising our own diocesan sponsored events, sharing photos and write-ups from our past events, in addition to promoting St. Andrew's Camp and other local activities. It is important to cultivate relationships with other parishes in our Diocese and cross-jurisdictionally. Parishes are welcome to send announcements for youth events that their parish is hosting and submit photos to showcase how active our parishes are. Please feel free to email any of the above to me at nynjocayouth@gmail.com.
- **Instagram:** 69 followers; mainly used for sharing daily, Orthodox inspiration and to send greetings on Feast Days. Since September 27th, daily "Little Reminders" are shared with the intention of encouraging followers to live an Orthodox Christian life each day and to "get connected" with their faith. This platform is most popular with the teens who have attended our retreats, and is intended to showcase live events/real-time updates from our retreats to keep parents informed of what is happening throughout the weekend.
- **YouTube:** This is the least visited platform because it is not something we readily advertise. If you do visit, you will see slideshow presentations and various recordings. At the 2017 Distinguished Diocesan Benefactors (DDB) dinners, the following video was played to showcase just how much the Department has accomplished since its early days in 2012: [Department of Youth Ministry: Who Are We and What Do We Do?](#)
- **Youth Department Website:** Since its launch in August 2016, we have had over 2,090 visitors to the site. The website has allowed us to "Go Green" and have event participants register online—which has been much more efficient and easier to keep track of attendees' paperwork. There is a Media Gallery filled with pictures, videos, and articles from past events, in addition to a comprehensive listing of our Upcoming Events.

Regarding social media, the Department recognizes that some parents/guardians are concerned about having their children and teens' photos being made public. **We understand and take this very seriously**, and so require that a "Photo Release Form" be signed in each participant's event registration packet; The Department leaves this decision up to the guardian's discretion, and if they choose not to sign, please be assured that their photos are not posted.

Challenges

- **Communication to Parish Youth Advisors:**
 - Currently, the Diocese does not have a distribution list of youth advisors from each of our parishes. In addition to announcements being sent to our clergy, it would also be very helpful to have a direct line of contact to an adult who oversees—or would be willing to oversee—and communicate our events to parish youth. This individual would also be the liaison between their parish and myself to more efficiently monitor and coordinate our events. The Department strives to start advertising as early as possible, and it is our expectation that this information is being passed down to youth advisors, children, and especially their parents.
- **Enthusiasm and Encouraged Participation:**
 - How are parishes engaging their youth with regard to our diocesan events? Is it simply placed in the bulletin or up on a bulletin board? It is everyone's responsibility—not only our clergy's—to encourage participation. This is not at all about simply increasing our numbers; this is about **helping our children grow in their faith**. The unfortunate reality is that many youth, especially teens, will not attend events—no matter how much they want to go—unless at least one other parishioner goes with them. How do we combat this? It means all of us taking initiative, playing a small role, and **making youth work a priority**.
- **Responsiveness and Attendance:**
 - Our Diocesan sponsored events (retreats), with the exception of Diocesan Youth Day, are fully funded by the Diocese, for which our Department is grateful. The challenge with this, however, is that there is sometimes an assumption that registrants can wait until the last minute to sign up—this has become a problem. Our venues require us to provide firm headcounts 2 weeks before the event so that proper planning can be made for accommodations and food. Out of respect for our vendors who are helping us to coordinate our events, and the positive relationships that we have built with them, parishes must have all those who wish to participate (including chaperones) registered by the deadline advertised.

Plans for 2018

- **Annual Altar Servers' Retreat:** Friday-Sunday, February 16-18th, *Saint Basil Academy (Garrison, NY)*
- **Annual Teen Retreat:** Friday-Sunday, March 16-18th, *Saint Basil Academy (Garrison, NY)*
 - **Speaker:** Archpriest Andrew Stephen Damick
 - **Theme:** *In the World, but Not of the World: Orthodoxy in the Melting Pot of World Religions*
- **The 19th All-American Council's Youth Program:** July 17-23rd, *Union Station Hotel (St. Louis, MO)*
 - **Theme:** *"For the Life of the World"*
 - **Ages:** All youth who have completed kindergarten up through 12th grade
 - **More details to come!**
- **Diocesan Youth Day at Six Flags Great Adventure:** TBD
- **Annual Girls' Retreat:** Friday-Sunday, November 9-11th, *Saint Basil Academy (Garrison, NY)*

Goals for 2018

1. **To establish a database of Youth Advisors**, one from each parish, who will receive and communicate Department events to their youth, and also be the liaison between their parish and myself to more efficiently monitor and coordinate our events. A form has been created for clergy to fill out online for ease, designating their parish representative, which can be found here: [Diocesan Parish Youth Advisor Contact Information](#). **Fathers, I kindly ask that you please add this quick task to your "to-do" list.**
2. **To have each parish send at least 2 children (kindergarten – high school) to the 19th All-American Council** to participate in the Youth Program with hundreds of others their age from across North America. A formal announcement from the Department is forthcoming.
3. **To increase youth participation** in our Diocesan retreats by way of encouragement and enthusiasm from clergy, youth advisors, laity, and parents. If you would like to brainstorm ideas for as how to accomplish this, please email me: nynjocayouth@gmail.com.

I wish to thank Archbishop Michael for his continued support, guidance, and active participation not only in the planning stages of our events, but also for his **presence** at all of these events. Our youth love spending time with **him**, just as much as he loves spending time with **them**. Many thanks also to Father Jason Vansuch and Father James Worthington for their endeavors, as well.

Always remember that, as Archbishop Michael says, "the youth are not only the future of our Church, but they are also the present," and that we must not only remember to pray for them, but also encourage them to expand their Orthodox friendship circles by taking advantage of the opportunities our Department offers to help them grow in their faith through fellowship, education, and fun.

Respectfully submitted,



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*"The youth are not only the future of our Church, but they are also the present."
-Archbishop Michael*