



ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA

DIOCESE OF NEW YORK & NEW JERSEY

DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH MINISTRY

2018 Diocesan Assembly Report

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

Glory to Jesus Christ!

It is my joy to share with you an overview of the Department of Youth Ministry's 2018 event participation, our presence on social media, a review of our 2018 Goals, plans for 2019 events, and goals for the upcoming year.

Annual Events

- **2017 Annual Girls' Retreat: November 10-12, 2017 (after the 2017 Assembly concluded)**
 - **Speaker:** Melinda Johnson
 - **Theme:** *Connection Established: Journeying With Your Patron Saint*
 - **Attendance:** 12 Participants, 11 Chaperones/Adults
 - **Parishes Represented:** Brick, Paramus, Randolph (NJ Deanery); Christ the Savior NYC, East Meadow (NYC Deanery); Ballston Lake, Lansing, Rochester (NY State Deanery); Syosset (Stavropegial)
- **Annual Altar Servers' Retreat: February 16-18, 2018 at Saint Basil Academy, Garrison NY**
 - **Attendance:** 25 Participants, 21 Chaperones/Clergy
 - **Parishes Represented:** Clifton, Passaic, Perth Amboy, Saddle Brook, Trenton, Wappingers Falls (NJ Deanery); Cathedral NYC, Yonkers (NYC Deanery); Endicott, Syracuse (NY State Deanery); ACROD; Syosset (Stavropegial)
- **Annual Teen Retreat: March 16-18, 2018 at Saint Basil Academy, Garrison NY**
 - **Speaker:** Fr. Andrew Stephen Damick
 - **Theme:** *In the World, But Not of the World: Orthodox Christianity in a Complicated Religious Landscape*
 - **Attendance:** 47 Participants, 16 Chaperones/Clergy
 - **Parishes Represented:** Brick, Paramus, Princeton, South River, Wantage, Wappingers Falls (NJ Deanery); Cathedral NYC, Christ the Savior NYC, East Meadow, Yonkers (NYC Deanery); Ballston Lake, Elmira Heights, Endicott, Lansing, Rochester (NY State Deanery); Syosset (Stavropegial)
- **Diocesan Youth Day: August 22, 2018 – Aladdin on Broadway, NYC**
 - **Attendance:** 102 total; 52 youth, 50 adults
- **UPCOMING: Annual Girls' Retreat: November 9-11, 2018 at Saint Basil Academy, Garrison NY**
 - **Speaker:** Natalie Kapeluck-Nixon
 - **Theme:** *Finding Your True North: Where Does Christ Fit into Your Life?*
 - **Registrants (as of Oct 22nd):** 8 Participants, 7 Chaperones/Adults
 - **Parishes Represented (as of Oct 22nd):** Brick, Paramus (NJ Deanery); Christ the Savior NYC (NYC Deanery); Ballston Lake, Endicott (NY State Deanery); Syosset (Stavropegial)

Other Events

- **Local Diocesan Youth Meeting: January 21st, 2018 at Christ the Saviour Church, Paramus, NJ**
 - **Purpose:** Several past Diocesan Retreat attendees in the NJ Deanery expressed an interest in having more local activities both socially and community service related. In an effort to expand the opportunities for our teens (Grades 7-12) to spend time together more than a few times a year, our goal at this meeting was to brainstorm ideas and establish a calendar of events for what they would like to see and do moving forward. All parishes were invited to participate. Archbishop Michael was in attendance, along with parish youth advisors.
 - **Attendance:** 11 teens, 12 parents/parish youth advisors
 - **Parishes Represented:** Bayonne, Manville, Paramus, Princeton, South River, Wappingers Falls, Wayne (NJ Deanery); Christ the Savior NYC (NYC Deanery)
- **“Feed My Starving Children” Community Service Project: March 24th, 2018 at Hawthorne Gospel Church, Hawthorne, NJ**
 - **The Cause:** [Feed My Starving Children](#) offers volunteers a one-of-a-kind experience. Attendees hand-pack rice, soy, dried vegetables and a nutritionally complete blend of vitamins and minerals into bags which are then sealed, boxed, placed on pallets and shipped to our incredible partners working hard to reach the neediest children around the world. The event was the first of its kind in the diocese, and was open to youth in grades 4-12, and adult chaperones.
 - **Attendance:** 13 Participants, 9 Chaperones/Adults
 - **Parishes Represented:** Paramus, Princeton, Randolph, Wayne (NJ Deanery); Christ the Savior NYC (NYC Deanery)
 - **Outcome:** Our group of 22 volunteers packaged approximately 4,620 meals which will feed 13 kids consistently for one year in Swaziland (a country in Southern Africa)
- **19th All-American Council Youth Program: July 23-27, 2018 in Saint Louis, MO**
 - **Attendance:** 10 Participants, 4 Staff Volunteers
 - **Parishes Represented:** Manville, Paramus, Princeton (NJ Deanery); Ballston Lake, Endicott (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 (and positive!) social media presence. Many other jurisdictions 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:** 288 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. Parishes are welcome to send announcements for youth events that their parish is hosting and submit photos to be featured. Please feel free to email any of the above to me at nynjocayouth@gmail.com.
- **Instagram:** 216 followers; mainly used for sharing Orthodox inspirational quotes, photos from events, and greetings on Feast Days. This platform is most popular with the teens who have attended our events, and is intended to showcase live events/real-time updates from events 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?](#). Before the end of the year, a scaled down version of the [All-American Council video](#) showcasing the Youth Department, in part, will be uploaded.
- **Youth Department Website:** Since its launch in August 2016, we have had over 3,575 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.

2018 Goals... How did we do?

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.**
 - **Outcome:** I have only received names from 31 communities. Regardless of the size of your parish, the number of young people you have on your census, or whether or not you have an official youth advisor, I still kindly ask that you submit the name of an individual—even if it is yourself—so that I can close out this goal. It can be a church school teacher, a parent, parish council member, etc.
 - i. **NJ Deanery:** Brick, Clifton, Glen Gardner, Jackson, Jersey City, Mays Landing, Medford, New Brunswick, Princeton (Holy Transfiguration), Rahway, Wappingers Falls, Wayne
 - ii. **NYC Deanery:** Brooklyn (Holy Transfiguration Cathedral), Brooklyn (Holy Trinity), Brooklyn (St. Nino), Dix Hills, NYC (St. Mary Magdalen), Sea Cliff
 - iii. **NY State Deanery:** Buffalo (Ss. Peter & Paul), East Herkimer, Elmira Heights, Lansing, Oneonta

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.
 - **Outcome:** On Monday, February 12, 2018, Father Ken Stavrevsky sent out an official email communication to all parish clergy which contained a cover letter from myself requesting each parish to consider sending 2 youth, in addition to other materials describing the Youth Program. Additionally, I began sending out information regarding the All-American Council Youth Program at the end of December 2017 from my Department distribution list. Unfortunately, only 1 youth took advantage of this opportunity outside of the remaining 9 participants who were the sons and daughters of our clergy. Projecting ahead to the 20th All-American Council in 2021 (location TBD), I pray that we can, **as a Diocesan Family**, make this initiative a priority, provide funding, and have active participation. Make a summer vacation out of it! Those who participated described their experience to be "life-changing." I need the support from our clergy, youth advisors, and laity together in order to make this a reality.

3. **To increase youth participation** at our Diocesan events 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.
 - **Outcome:** We can always do better! Our Lenten Teen Retreat this past March was the largest turn out that we have ever had, and our venue reached maximum capacity; for this reason, we will be holding the 2019 Retreat at a different venue in New Jersey which offers more activities and opportunities for fellowship. At the same time, our 2017 Girls' Retreat was the smallest turn out we have had.

If your parish was not listed underneath the event summaries on pages 1 and 2, I ask that you reflect and ask yourself why that is. It takes a village, and our youth are worthy of this investment—please make sure that they and their families know that our Youth Department is alive and active! If your parish would like for me to visit and make a brief presentation on the Department and our activities, please get in contact with me and I would be more than happy to do so.

Plans for 2019

- **Annual Altar Servers' Retreat:** Friday-Sunday, March 1-3rd, *Saint Basil Academy (Garrison, NY)*
 - **Speaker:** Archpriest Jason Vansuch
 - **Theme:** *A Teaching Liturgy*
- **Annual Teen Retreat:** Friday-Sunday, April 5-7th, *Camp Shiloh (Hewitt, NJ)*
 - **Speaker:** TBD
 - **Theme:** TBD
- **Diocesan Youth Day:** Dates/Activity TBD
- **Annual Girls' Retreat:** Dates/Speaker/Theme TBD

Goals for 2019

- **Communication to Parish Youth Advisors/Contact Person:**
 - Finalize and complete the distribution list of "youth advisors" – **need names from the 23 outstanding parishes listed on page 3**. 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. Please use this link to provide your representative's information: [Diocesan Parish Youth Advisor Contact Information](#).
- **Coordinate at least one event geared towards elementary aged children:**
 - I am cognizant that, at present, our youth events are targeted to the middle school and high school age bracket. However, our kids should not have to wait 12 years in order to meet other kids throughout our Diocese. If you have any ideas or would like to contribute your time and talent to this endeavor, please share your thoughts with me and we can make this a reality. If regional activities are more feasible and preferable (at the deanery level vs. diocesan level), it would be helpful for me to know that.
- **To continue to increase youth participation** at our Diocesan events by way of encouragement and enthusiasm from clergy, youth advisors, laity, and parents. **This will be an on-going goal.**

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**. It continues to be my joy to serve the church in this capacity as the Department Chairperson.

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 worship, witness, service, and fellowship.

Respectfully submitted,



Danielle Geeza
Chairperson, The Department of Youth Ministry
OCA Diocese of New York and New Jersey
Phone: (914) 222-1317
Email: nynjocayouth@gmail.com

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