



Department Highlights of 2024 for the Diocesan Assembly

Master Bless!

Your Eminence, Very Reverend and Reverend Fathers, Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Our beloved Archbishop Michael continues to charge us with “re-examining our Church School programs and parish youth organizations ... giving way to more personally involved methods of bringing Christ to our young people.” We continue to follow this directive, and this year we have endeavored to focus on serving others as the way to build the faith of our youth.

In October, at this year’s Christian Education Workshop, *Connecting Our Youth To Their Faith By Serving Others*, we asked, “How do our children grow a servant’s heart?” Our presenter, Andrea Danko-Barna of the Neighborhood Resilience Project (NRP) took a deep look into this question through the teachings of St. Theophan the Recluse, as well as St. John Chrysostom, St. Maximos the Confessor, and other Church Fathers. She presented a three-part talk: The Life of the Church, Suffering & Trauma, and Raising Them Right.

Andrea, a PhD student, administrative assistant and Church School Director, for Father Paul Abernathy of the Antiochian Archdiocese, who is the head of NRP, a non-profit organization that responds in a uniquely Orthodox Christian way to acute and long term care of community members experiencing trauma. This ministry is based at their parish community of St. Moses the Black in Pittsburgh, PA.

We learned that serving others is not merely a ministry *of* the Church, but rather, the Church *is* Ministry. God comes to us in the person of the dying, the sick, the needy. We are “missing the mark” if we are not “going out” and “walking alongside” the “least of these” to achieve our salvation.

Over 25 of our Church School Teachers, Youth Workers, and Clergy benefited from this important presentation. Workshop recordings and presentation slides are being made available to those who couldn’t attend in person.

We are thankful to Fr. Ambrose Inlow and Saints Peter and Paul Parish in Syracuse, NY and to Fr. John Morris and Christ the Saviour Parish in Paramus, NJ for graciously hosting these events.

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) continues to grow in our Diocese, so lovingly tended by Olga Ptach, our Diocesan CGS Coordinator. In June, new Level 1 Catechists were trained in a week-long retreat at St Tikhon's Seminary. Ten (10) participants were led by Orthodox formation leader, Anne Marie McCollum, a seasoned CGS Catechist. Teachers from parishes in Medford and South River, NJ, and Rochester, Oneonta, and Yonkers, NY, and wives of seminarians from St. Tikhon's Seminary returned to their parishes to use CGS as their religious formation for Level 1 (3–6-year-olds). We hope to continue to offer such trainings on an annual basis at St. Tikhon's Seminary in the month of June.

As a result of all this past year's training, new Atriums have opened at Holy Cross Parish in Medford, NJ; SS. Peter and Paul Parish in South River, NJ; and Holy Trinity Parish in Elmira Heights, NY. Holy Trinity Parish in Yonkers, NY now offers both Levels 1 and 2 (ages 6-9) as their catechist received certification in May of this year. Soon, Holy Trinity Parish in Randolph, NJ will be offering Level 2, upon two of their catechists' completing the training in 2025.

The key parable of the Mustard Seed is one of the first parables presented to children in the CGS program. Truly the "mustard seed" is growing in our Diocese! We are truly grateful to all those who continue to encourage this unique approach for our children to fall more and more in love with the Good Shepherd.

In closing, we thank God for our beloved Archbishop Michael, who continues to pray, support and encourage our efforts to do the work of the Lord!
Glory to God for All Things!

Respectfully submitted and with love in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Matushka Tamara Cowan".

Matushka Tamara Cowan
Chair, Department of Christian Education
Diocese of New York and New Jersey