



Orthodox Church in America
Diocese of New York and New Jersey
Department of Youth Ministry

2024 Diocesan Assembly Report

Master Bless!

Your Eminence, Very Reverend and Reverend Fathers, brothers and sisters in Christ,

This year marks the end of Danielle Geeza's remarkable 11-year leadership of the Department of Youth Ministry, as she relocated to Chicago in August 2022 to pursue graduate studies at DePaul University. Despite the distance, Danielle continued to plan and administer events from August 2022 through the end of 2023, often traveling back to the Diocese to be with our young people. With Archbishop MICHAEL's blessing, Fr. Martin and I assumed the role of Co-directors in early 2024, benefiting immensely from Danielle's exceptional organizational skills, creativity, and deep love for the youth of this Diocese. May God grant her many years!

This year's Events:

- **Lenten Teen Retreat: April 12-14, 2024 at Frost Valley YMCA in Claryville, NY**
 - **Attendance:** 16 teens
 - **Parishes Represented:** Jersey City, Randolph, Trenton (NJ Deanery); East Meadow, Dix Hills, NYC-St. Mary Magdalen (NYC Deanery); Pearl River (NY State Deanery); Philadelphia (OCA Albanian Archdiocese); Little Falls, NJ (Moscow Patriarchate); Columbus, OH (OCA – Midwest)
 - **Topic:** Contemporary Issues - Gender, Sexuality, and Relationships w/Guest Speaker Rev. Dn. Dr. Sampson Ryan Nash
 - **Event Recap:** [A Transformative Teen Retreat Amidst Snow and Rain | Diocese of New York and New Jersey - OCA \(nynjoca.org\)](https://www.nynjoca.org)

- **Altar Servers Retreat:** Organized by Fr. David Cowan, the retreat included teaching sessions on how to serve at the Hierarchical Liturgy.
 - June 15, 2024 at Sts Peter & Paul, Endicott, NY
 - **Attendance:** 25 (17 adult, 8 youth) altar servers plus clergy and faithful

- June 29, 2024 at Holy Resurrection Church, Wayne, NJ
 - **Attendance:** 27 (18 adult, 9 youth) altar servers plus clergy, and faithful
- **Honoring our Graduates**
 - The accomplishments and photos of high school and college graduates from our diocese are being finalized and will be featured shortly on the Diocesan website and in the next issue of Jacob's Well. May God grant them many blessed years!
- **Youth Day: August 29, 2024 at Christ Our Savior in Paramus, NJ**
 - This was our first Family Youth Day Picnic and included waterslides, bouncy houses and obstacle courses and a BBQ picnic. The day began with a Molieben and homily by Archbishop Michael and ended with Great Vespers.
 - Attendance: 52 youth and 54 adults
- **Fall Teen Retreat: October 4-6, 2024 Frost Valley YMCA in Claryville, NY**
 - **Attendance:** 13 teens
 - **Parishes Represented:** Clifton (NJ Deanery); Dix Hills (NYC Deanery); Syracuse, Rochester (NY State Deanery); Southbury, CT (OCA-NE) Stratford, CT (ROCOR)
 - **Event Recap:** <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/R93uA7iKPD2MRyXe/>

Online Presence

- **Facebook:** 1045 followers
- **Instagram:** 677 followers
- **YouTube:** 16 subscribers, 13 videos and various recordings from past events
- **Youth Department Website:** Currently under construction

Beyond Our Diocese

Our Department continues to be recognized by other OCA dioceses and jurisdictions, serving as inspiration for the building up of their respective youth ministry programs. A majority of our Youth who attended this year's Teen Retreat were from outside our Diocese.

Upcoming Events – *All events are posted on our FB page as well as the Diocesan Website*

- **Girls Retreat:** Tentatively scheduled for January
- **Lenten Teen Retreat:** *Tentatively* April 4-6, 2025 at Frost Valley YMCA in Claryville, NY. But we are investigating a Service-oriented retreat in the NYC area instead.

Reflection

While this has been our first full year as Co-directors of the Department of Youth Ministry, my husband and I have been involved in Diocesan Youth ministry since the beginning of his priestly ministry back in 2002

and we have seen the ups and downs of participation in youth events. The pandemic years were particularly hard on our parishes and our youth and while we have returned to a full calendar of scheduled Diocesan Youth events, we have seen a decline in participation of our youth and families. As of the 2023 Census, we have 267 teens (ages 13-18) and 670 children (up to age 12) in our Diocese. However, we have but a fraction of those youth participate in any of our youth events. We need your help in engaging our youth with each other and with the life of the Church!

His Eminence, Archbishop MICHAEL, works tirelessly in general, but especially for the youth making sure he is at ALL of our Youth events. He has made sure we have the funding we need to sponsor events that are *free* to all who want to attend, and yet, attendance is low relative to the amount of youth we have. That being said, I have found that smaller groups are more intimate and allow for more spiritual formation of the youth that do attend. To this end, I'd like to encourage more local events across the Diocese that draw together youth in their area with help from the Diocesan Youth Ministry Department.

We plan on attending the Department of Christian Education's workshop later this month to explore ways to inspire our youth through service projects and hope to integrate service-oriented events into our future Diocesan Youth activities.

I express my sincere thanks to Archbishop MICHAEL for his support, guidance, and presence; my husband Fr. Martin Kraus, Department Chaplain and Co-director, for being a wonderful spiritual father to our young people, Ms. Janet Drobish-Neis for directing the choir at retreats and encouraging young people to take an active role in chanting and singing; diocesan administration for their administrative assistance; and the many volunteers, chaperones, and parents who have supported the Department in the building up of this ministry.

Respectfully submitted with love in Christ,

Dennise Kraus

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