

Church Ministries / Departments

Department of Youth, Young Adult, and Campus Ministry

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Accomplishments/Progress Since the 13th All-American Council

The department has worked on developing opportunities for young adults to gather and serve the Church on a Church-wide basis. Efforts are also made to foster deanery-based youth ministry efforts through The Orthodox Church in America Youth Movement as blessed by the Holy Synod, while maintaining and improving administration of the department's existing programs.

This is accomplished through the department's work to develop opportunities for young adults to gather and provide service to the Church on a Church-wide basis.

♦ **Young Adult Service Trips to Alaska**

During the summers of 2003 and 2004, the department organized service trips to Alaska for young adults throughout the Church. Coordinated with the blessing of His Grace Bishop Nikolai and the assistance of the Rev. Mikel Bock, the trips focused on hands-on work projects serving the needs of the Diocese of Alaska. The trip in 2003 restored the historic Eklutna cemetery, and the trip in 2004 focused on several maintenance projects at St. Herman Seminary on Kodiak Island, including finishing the roofing of the seminary chapel.

♦ **Young Adult Service Projects**

Expanding upon the Alaska service trips, the department assisted in holding a young adult forum at the Fellowship of Orthodox Christians in America (FOCA) national convention in Williamsburg, VA. As a result of that gathering, Lara Herzak began coordinating Church-wide service projects in which young adults from throughout the Church could participate. These projects are planned and implemented in cooperation with the Office of Humanitarian Aid and have been well supported by young adult members of the FOCA. To communicate with young adults throughout the Church about these projects, an email list was developed and is continually being updated. Projects are also announced through the OCA's web site and *The Orthodox Church* newspaper.

In the spring of 2004, young adults conducted a school supply and clothing drive for the children of the Chernovtsy Region Orphanage in Ukraine. Young adults gathered at the OCA Chancery in Syosset, NY, to organ-

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ize and pack the materials for shipping to Ukraine. In the fall of 2004, young adults from throughout the Church gathered in Staten Island, NY, to complete service projects at SS. Cosmas and Damian Adult Home. During the spring of 2005 young adults held a supply drive for play therapy rooms for the children who were exposed to the terrorist attacks in Beslan, Russia.

- ◆ Fostering deanery-based youth ministry efforts through The Orthodox Church in America Youth Movement (OCA Y) as blessed by the Holy Synod, the department seeks to encourage and assist deaneries in the development of teams of people from parishes within each deanery who plan and implement youth activities in their deanery each year.

The department has established two goals to accomplish this:

- ◆ To develop and maintain communication with each team in a consistent manner. Each department member involved in youth ministry was assigned specific deaneries and asked to establish a relationship with the newly formed deanery youth teams through phone calls and emails. This made it possible for the department to obtain updates about events, to provide support and suggestions for challenges a deanery may be facing, and to learn about local needs. Deanery teams were continually encouraged to contact the department with information on upcoming activities for inclusion on the online calendar, the results of completed activities for inclusion in *The Orthodox Church* newspaper and the OCA's web site, and to update new contact information.
- ◆ To develop materials to be used by the deanery teams in planning a fellowship, educational, and service event each year. The department created the *OCA Y Guidelines* booklet containing information on the youth movement, a guide to planning an initial meeting, a planning guide for setting up an annual schedule, and a list of answers to frequently asked questions.

Deanery team members and all deans received a mailing containing:

- ◆ a letter of introduction from the department identifying the deanery's department contact person.
- ◆ the OCA Y Guidelines booklet.
- ◆ OCA Y "success stories" about teams that have already met.
- ◆ a list of resources posted on the Hub, the department's online resource center.
- ◆ a list of all current deanery teams.
- ◆ a sample agenda for a first meeting.

Each year the Holy Synod chooses a theme for the OCA Y movement. Articles based on the theme are written by department members for each issue of *The Orthodox Church* newspaper. Educational materials are prepared and distributed by the Departments of Christian Education and Youth, Young Adult, and Campus Ministry. In the past, chat room sessions specifically related to theme topics were scheduled in the department's chat room, but it is currently offline. The theme concept and materials created to support it have been well received by Sunday school teachers, vacation Bible school directors, and parish youth coordinators.

The themes chosen so far are:

- ◆ 2002/03 - Jesus Christ: The Way, The Truth, The Life
- ◆ 2003/04 - Let Your Light So Shine
- ◆ 2004/05 - Champions of Faith
- ◆ 2005/06 - Our Church, Our Future: Become What You Are (*based on the theme for the 14th AAC*)

In cooperation and support of the youth movement, the Fellowship of Orthodox Christians in America (FOCA) has utilized the Holy Synod's theme for their new Celebrations of Faith Creative Arts Contest, which is open to all youth in communion with an Orthodox parish. Youth participation has increased each year, and results have been communicated through *The Orthodox Church* newspaper and on the department's web site.

As it is impossible for a group of volunteers to administer youth ministry efforts in all the deaneries of the Church, the department's goal is to provide support, encouragement, and suggestions to deanery teams and not to manage them.

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Department members have made regular contact with deanery teams. We have seen that in areas where there was already an established regional youth ministry effort or a junior chapter of the FOCA, deanery teams have been coordinating their existing events instead of creating competitive ones. Many newly formed teams have met, planned, and held events each year. Other deanery teams have not been able to overcome challenges they are facing. The challenges most commonly encountered are that parishes do not have enough youth or are too far away from another parish. In these situations, young people do not have opportunities to gather in a context larger than their parish and often feel isolated. These were the reasons why the youth movement was initially created and why it is important.

Following the 13th All-American Council, to maintain and better administer the existing programs, the Department of Youth, Young Adult, and Campus Ministry was transitioned from a one-person office to a department of 13 volunteer members with a full-time executive director and part-time chairperson. Department members have met at the OCA Chancery once a year to plan and develop strategy for the department's ongoing and expanded programs. Monthly updates have been sent by email and conference calls have been held when necessary to facilitate communication and to move projects along. To better serve the department's programs, members work on projects in areas of their expertise. The department has been divided into five areas for specific projects.

In addition to the efforts listed above, the following is a list of department programs as well as efforts in which the department participates:

Youth Programs

◆ Camping Assistance

The department provides support materials for parish youth directors to aid in the development, participation, and safety of camps within the Church. Resources including how-to articles for planning camping programs, suggested safety standards, and sample registration and medical forms have been posted online on the *Hub*. Ron Tucci stays in touch with camp directors and maintains the directory of camp contacts and dates included in the OCA Sourcebook, Desk Calendar, and *The Orthodox Church* newspaper. He also answers questions from camp contacts and parents looking for information, resources, and support with camping programs. The department director works with the youth directors of the SCOBA jurisdictions to plan the Inter-Orthodox Camp Directors Conferences held annually at different locations. In connection with the Seminarian Internship Program, the department has been able to send personnel to camps for assistance in a variety of ways. The director also currently sits on the Board of St. Andrew's Camp in Jewell, NY.

◆ St. Peter the Aleut Award

This award is issued by the Metropolitan and given to the winner by his or her parish priest. To increase awareness and improve participation for this award, the department decided to highlight award winners in the September 2004 issue of *The Orthodox Church* newspaper. It has been difficult to get usable photos for publishing, so a request for good photos has been added to the application form. The department is currently re-evaluating the September focus of this award.

◆ Youth Department Intern

Through the generous funding of the Fellowship of Orthodox Stewards and the Fellowship of Orthodox Christians in America, the department has been able to offer an internship program providing practical experience in youth ministry to seminary students. Projects of this internship include expanding and redesigning "The Hub for Youth and Young Adult Ministry" on the department's web site, assisting at camping programs throughout the Church each summer, leading local and regional retreats, developing resources, flyers, and presentations, and updating the department's web site. The director has visited St. Vladimir's and St. Tikhon's Seminaries each year to make presentations on the internship program.

◆ Scouting

Questions about Orthodox scouting efforts are referred to department member the V. Rev. John Bacon. Fr. John is

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also the outreach coordinator for New England in the Eastern Orthodox Committee on Scouting (EOCS). The Eastern Orthodox Committee on Scouting continues to offer two major opportunities to scouting youth: (1) an annual retreat at St. Basil's Academy in Garrison, NY, on Columbus Day weekend, attended by about 120 Boy and Girl Scouts and leaders; and (2) the Spring Camporee in May. In 2004, the Spring Camporee was hosted by His Beatitude Metropolitan Herman, on the grounds of St. Tikhon's Monastery and Seminary. For the past twelve years, the Eastern Orthodox Committee on Scouting has offered two scholarships, one for \$1,000 and the other for \$500. Starting this year, the Russian Children's Welfare Society, Inc., has begun funding an additional scholarship for \$1,000 for a Scout who is of Russian descent and meets the eligibility requirements.

In the next two years, Fr. John hopes to introduce the parishes of the Diocese of New England to an adapted form of the Scouts' Youth Protection Training Program. Taught in a three-hour session, the program, when in place, serves as an additional barrier to child sexual abuse. Attendees of this training session receive certification recognized by the Boy Scouts of America. Fr. John has already accomplished this training in 2003 with the staff and volunteers of the Youth Rally of the Diocese of New England. He hopes to encourage the clergy of the Diocese of New England to open their parish facilities to chartering Scout units.

Youth Organizations

- ◆ **American Romanian Orthodox Youth (AROY)**
The Rev. David Subu attends the AROY National Congress each year over Labor Day weekend. The department has communicated with the AROY National Board about the deanery-based youth movement and is working to create a more comprehensive presentation on the goals of the movement to facilitate discussion on how AROY can participate in it.
- ◆ **Fellowship of Orthodox Christians in America (FOCA)**
Communication between the department and the president of the FOCA is ongoing. The FOCA and our department have worked in cooperation on the FOCA's Celebrations of Faith Creative Arts Contest and the OCA Young Adult Service projects. The FOCA continues to fund the summer internship programs.
- ◆ **Resources**
Using the talents of department members and other volunteers, these resources have been developed and distributed within the OCA.
 - ◆ OCAY Guidelines booklet.
 - ◆ Posters relating to the Holy Synod's annual OCAY theme.
 - ◆ Education materials on the OCAY theme.
 - ◆ Youth component for the Seminary, FOS, Charity, and Mission Appeals.
 - ◆ Camp guidelines.
 - ◆ Series of articles based on the OCAY theme each year.
 - ◆ Youth month activity suggestions.
- ◆ **Inter-Orthodox Youth Ministry**
The director is in regular communication with the youth directors of the Orthodox jurisdictions in America and works in cooperation on common projects when possible. The two most successful projects include the Camp Directors Conference and the Inter-Orthodox Youth Workers Conference. The participation for these conferences has improved since "twin" conferences have been held annually on both the East Coast and the West Coast. Department members have participated in the conferences as attendees and speakers.

Young Adult Programs

- ◆ **YO-Mail**
Since 2004, Christina Kuchta has worked hard to manage this monthly cyber-publication. The publication

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continually welcomes new subscribers from North America and throughout the world and is emailed to its 1300 registered subscribers. Christina Kuchta and Joseph Matusiak compile issues in alternate months. The Rev. Marc Vranes serves as editor. Department members write articles on an occasional basis and help recruit new writers. Difficulties continually arise, however, in obtaining articles on time from the volunteer writers.

- ◆ **Orthodox Christian Fellowship (OCF)**

The Orthodox Christian Fellowship (OCF) has become the official campus ministry effort under SCOBA. In the spirit of cooperation, all SCOBA jurisdictions have decided to work together in the area of campus ministry. The director of our department serves on the OCF National Executive Committee and is involved in the development and maintenance of its programs. With an expanded department, several members have been able to represent the OCA in these areas of the OCF program:

Basil Leaf: Department member Fr. Marc Vranes has been named adviser to the *Basil Leaf* newsletter which is published by the national OCF.

College Conferences: The department helps to plan the East and West Coast College Conferences each December and continually assists in providing speakers (including members of the department). The department, like the young adult departments of other SCOBA jurisdictions, also provides limited scholarships to college students to attend these conferences.

Real Break: Fr. Michael Anderson, Fr. David Subu, and Fr. Marc Vranes have taken an active role in leading Real Break projects for young adults.

College Student Sunday: This was designated by SCOBA to be the third Sunday in September. Its purpose is to develop awareness of the OCF and the importance of campus ministry. The department was given the responsibility of coordinating the development of materials for the first year this event was held. Materials were created by department members and sent to the OCF executive committee, which then distributed them to all SCOBA parishes.

Vespers Book: With the cooperation of several SCOBA jurisdictions, an OCF Vespers book has been created for campus groups to use. The service is written so that anyone from any Orthodox tradition should feel “at home” at some point within it. Currently, the music for the service is being recorded. Several department members will pilot the books with their OCF groups.

- ◆ **Syndesmos**

David Wagshal of the OCA Department of External Church Relations participated in the General Assembly of Syndesmos, which was held in July 2003, in Durres, Albania.

Joseph Matusiak helped plan a celebration of the 50th Anniversary of Syndesmos, which was held in October 2003 in New York City. Joseph Matusiak and Ksenia Babich participated.

World Day of Orthodox Youth: The department sent a resource mailing in 2003 and 2004 on how parishes can participate in this celebration. As part of the 2004 mailing, Joseph Matusiak developed a flyer to educate parishes about Syndesmos’ goals, vision, and programs.

Fr. Michael Anderson was the keynote speaker at the 2005 World Day of Orthodox Youth in February 2005 in New York City. Joseph Matusiak also participated in the event.

Communications

The department regularly submits articles to *The Orthodox Church* paper in a timely manner. Each department member is in contact with deanery teams and encourages them to submit articles about their events. Mailings of informational flyers and newly developed resources are sent to deanery team members, youth coordinators, and clergy. This information is bundled when possible with mailings done from the Chancery to reduce costs.

Web site (<http://yya.oca.org>): Communicating resources and information through the internet has been the most economical and easiest way to reach a large number of people. It is also a popular method of communication between teens, young adults, and parents. Over the past year or so, however, the department has faced many

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difficulties with its web site, including ongoing server problems that have disabled the chat rooms and the YO-Mail subscription forms. The department is currently addressing these problems and is working to redesign its web site to resolve these issues.

- ◆ **Inter-Department Cooperation:** Department members have worked with the Department of Christian Education to develop resource materials for the OCA Appeals youth component, camps, vacation church schools, and the educational materials for the OCAY theme. The two departments also cooperate on developing and implementing the educational materials for the next All-American Council. The department also works with the Department of Humanitarian Aid to identify and implement Young Adult Service projects.

The primary difficulties the department faces are continued funding challenges and lack of personnel who can help consistently. As the department increases its goals to reach out to the youth and young adults within the OCA, and with Inter-Orthodox cooperation growing in many areas, administrative tasks at the office assume the majority of director's time. Consequently, the ability of the director to recruit and manage volunteers, as well as to facilitate the development, maintenance and growth of programs, has become very limited.

Plans for the Future

The department has the following goals for the coming triennium:

- ◆ To maintain contact with deanery youth ministry teams and encourage the further development of the deanery-based youth movement.
- ◆ To continue to find news ways to maintain and better administer existing programs.
- ◆ To investigate ways to involve the Church's youth and young adults in programs of global significance or in global programs.
- ◆ The department will continue to make contact with each deanery team by phone and email three times each year (fall, winter, and spring).
- ◆ The department will create a presentation and resources to distribute to deanery teams to educate them on the deanery-based youth ministry concept and on how their teams can function.
- ◆ The department will continue to find resources to create outlines as well as other materials on the three-year theme of the AAC: "Our Church and the Future."
- ◆ The department will give attention to and expand *YO-Mail* by recruiting writers to produce a consistent, informative, and educational online publication.
- ◆ The department will better advertise its existing materials by developing a booklet/pamphlet for new missions titled "Introduction to OCA Youth and Young Adults."
- ◆ The department will create a "user friendly" format to announce events/news/programs by email. This will include flyers that will be ready for printing in parish bulletins.
- ◆ The department will continue to utilize *The Orthodox Church* newspaper as a vehicle for presenting information.
- ◆ The department will work with the Department of Missions to determine a method of identifying a youth and young adult ministry contact person for all new missions.
- ◆ As a member of Syndesmos, the department will develop resources to encourage parish participation in the World Day of Prayer for the Creation (September) and the World Day of Orthodox Youth/International Orthodox Youth Month (February).
- ◆ The department will continue to develop and support mission service projects for youth and young adults, such as the service trips to Alaska.
- ◆ The department will investigate the possibility of including a means through which young adults (paying their own way) could travel with His Beatitude on official visits to sister Orthodox Churches.

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Accountability

With the expansion of the department since the last AAC, department members have been able to increase contact with parish communities through communication with deanery teams, camp contacts and participation in camp programs, participation in inter-Orthodox programs and events, the development and leading of retreats, publication in *The Orthodox Church* paper, and development and distribution of resources through our Hub online resource library.

The department relates to the other departments, boards, commissions, offices, committees, and seminaries of the Church through the following projects:

- ◆ The department works with the Office of Humanitarian Aid in the planning and implementing of Young Adult Service projects.
- ◆ The department has worked with the Department of Christian Education in the development of educational materials and resources for the four OCA Appeals and theme-based materials for parishes.
- ◆ The department maintains contact with the Department of Communications and regularly submits information and articles for publication in *The Orthodox Church*.
- ◆ The department works in cooperation with several organizations of the Church.
- ◆ The department works with the FOCA on the Celebrations of Faith program and the Young Adult Service projects.
- ◆ The director sits on the board of the Orthodox Christian Fellowship (OCF), and department members support and participate in OCF activities.
- ◆ A department member represents the OCA as an active participant with the Eastern Orthodox Committee on Scouting and the Boy Scouts of America.
- ◆ A department member is in communication with and attends activities and events of the American Romanian Orthodox Youth (AROY).

The department has provided training, developed resources, implemented programs, and provided experiences for youth and young adults to grow in as well as discuss and live their faith, and has espoused the importance of reaching out and ministering to youth and young adults.

The department now coordinates and assists with all types of programs and ministries, including camping, Orthodox scouting, retreats, college “outreach” and “in reach,” publications, training, as well as internet ministries. At present, however, we are just scratching the surface of filling the need in any of these areas.

We lack an overall strategy for fostering ongoing spiritual growth and integration into the life and ministry of the Church that spans childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. We need to determine a plan to engage pre-teens (10-13) that motivates them to become involved in teen ministry efforts that provide reliable and consistent opportunities which then inspire them to take part in opportunities as young adults.

If the department is to continue to respond to the ever-growing need in these and other areas such as inter-Orthodox cooperation both here in North America and throughout the world, it will need to be restructured in the near future.

As mentioned in the department’s report to the 12th and 13th All-American Councils, this could include a full-time or half-time person in each of the following three areas:

- ◆ pre-teen and camping ministries,
- ◆ youth ministries and youth organizations, including training, publications, and Church-wide projects,
- ◆ young adult and college ministries.

At a bare minimum, the department office would need a full-time director with a full-time assistant.