

# Church Ministries / Departments

## Department of Christian Witness and Service

<b>Chairperson</b>	<b>Donna Karabin</b> 7611 Midday Ln. Alexandria, VA 22306	<b>Resource Handbook Coordinator</b> <b>Arlene Kallaur</b>
	<b>Home</b> 703-768-1184	<b>Department Email</b> christianwitness@oca.org
<b>Members</b>	<b>Rev. Thomas Moore</b> <b>Susan Aleandro</b> <b>Evelyn Hubiak</b> <b>Lori Kochan</b> <b>Kathy Pieracci</b> <b>Leon Sheean</b> <b>Natalie Stavrevsky</b> <b>Kitty Vitko</b> <b>Daria York</b>	<b>Department Web</b> www.oca.org /DOdept.asp?SID=5&LID=3

### Accomplishments/Progress Since the 13th All-American Council

At the beginning of the 2003-2005 triennium, there was a transition from ministries units to ministries departments. The change resulted in the expansion of parish and outreach ministries, and their evolution into a new entity. In the previous triennium, these ministries were relegated to a secondary role in the Education and Community Life Unit. With the restructuring, it became possible to renew the mission of the 1980s Department of Lay Ministries. The department was renamed the Department of Christian Witness and Service to better reflect the commitment of both clergy and laity in caring for the needs of others according to the teachings and Tradition of the Church.

### Focus

The Department of Christian Witness and Service began with the appointment of members from the dioceses within The Orthodox Church in America. The Holy Synod of Bishops, through the Central Church Administration, assigned us the task of developing and promoting materials for dioceses, deaneries, parishes, and individuals to enable them to minister more effectively to the needs of seniors and their families with the aim of enhancing their ongoing participation in the life of the Church. Other areas we need to address include ministries for women, the homebound, and families interested in Orthodox parochial schools and home schooling. Ministering to those in need, whether within the Church or in the outside community, is the foundation of the work of the department.

At the first departmental meeting, held in March 2003, we identified needs within parishes and in the outside communities. Existing programs and ministries within the Church (and also in social service organizations) were evaluated for their potential to effectively respond to the identified needs. In addition to prioritizing the extensive list of needs and ministry responses, the group in one voice enthusiastically finalized our mission statement:

“Fanning the flame of Christian witness and service in The Orthodox Church in America through training and resources.”

The action list from that meeting was only implemented in part. One internet project could not be completed because the OCA web site was in its early stages of redesign. Our intention to give financial support to a training program for the Parish Nursing Ministry could not be implemented due to budget constraints. The department members remained steadfast to the continuation of the mission.

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## Resource Handbook

By far the greatest accomplishment of the early Lay Ministries and subsequent Community Life initiatives is the *Resource Handbook*, Volumes I, II, and III. In continuous publication since 1982, the handbook contains over 250 articles written by laypeople and clergy on specific topics in eight categories: theological foundation for ministry, youth, families, seniors, stewardship, parish development, community service, and witness and mission. Programs and ministries described in the handbook also include practical applications and examples for implementation in local parishes.

The *Resource Handbook* had long been considered under-utilized in the Church. One of the primary goals of the Department of Christian Witness and Service has become the active promotion of the handbook. By June 2003, with the technical support of Chancery staff, every *Resource Handbook* article was posted on the OCA web site. In one study, the handbook was reported to be one of the three most visited sections of the web site. A far greater number of readers now have the resource materials for parish and outreach ministries available at their fingertips. The printed articles continue to be mailed to all OCA clergy and individual subscribers. Annual installments were published in 2003 and 2004, with another due in the summer of 2005.

Mrs. Arlene Kallaur serves as the Resource Handbook Coordinator. She is to be commended for her years of skilled and devoted service to the Church.

## Parish Ministries Conference

Beginning with the first meeting of the department, the sponsorship of a Church-wide Parish Ministries Conference was a priority. Discussions began with Protospesbyter Robert Kondratik, OCA Chancellor, at the Chancery in June 2003. In January 2004, a formal proposal was submitted for consideration and blessing from His Beatitude Metropolitan Herman, with the following plan:

*Theme:* Faith in Action!

*Target Groups:* Clergy and laity involved in existing effective outreach ministries and those interested in initiating new outreach ministries.

*Goals:*

- ◆ To implement our mission statement: “Fanning the Flame of Christian Witness and Service in The Orthodox Church in America by inspiring our faithful through training and resources.”
- ◆ To bring together those involved with Christian ministries to exchange ideas and to network so they could promote further development of their services.
- ◆ To introduce ministries already active in the OCA, encouraging others to develop and expand ministries within their own parishes and communities.

The proposal was approved, and by the March 2004 meeting, conference planning was well under way by the department members. On July 28, 2004, nearly 100 clergy and laity representing a broad cross section of parishes from nearly every OCA diocese and four Orthodox jurisdictions gathered on the campus of Saint Vladimir’s Seminary for the three-day “Faith in Action!” Parish Ministries Conference. The retreat/workshop format provided liturgical services, keynote addresses, work sessions and time for networking and fellowship.

In the first keynote address, the V. Rev. Sergei Glagolev, Director Emeritus of the Fellowship of Orthodox Stewards and former rector of Holy Trinity Church, East Meadow, NY, presented the theme, “Fanning the Flame of Christian Witness and Service.” He noted that the image of the Holy Fire of Pentecost serves as the basis for all Christian service. This fire still burns in today’s Church in active Christian ministry, which finds its source in the Holy Eucharist. Fr. Sergei’s inspiring words affirmed that all the faithful are called and equipped to serve the needs of others through the grace of the Sacraments and the gifts and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The second keynote address was given by the V. Rev. George Gray, rector of Saint Nicholas Church, Portland, OR, who

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explored the theme of light in Scripture, emphasizing that all ministry is a sharing in the ministry of Jesus Christ. He also offered the examples of three saints who were well-known for their selfless ministry: Saint Elizabeth the New-Martyr, Saint Olympiada the Deaconess of Constantinople and Saint Maria Skobstova.

The Department of Christian Witness and Service offers this prayer for those who are interested in Christian service:

“Set our hearts on fire with the love of Thee, O Christ our God, that in its flame we may love Thee with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul, with all our strength, and love our neighbor as ourselves, so that thus keeping Thy commandments, we may glorify Thee, the Giver of all good gifts! Amen.”

The texts of both keynote addresses are available on the OCA web site, and audiotapes of the addresses along with other resources are available for purchase through Saint Vladimir’s Seminary Bookstore.

The conference included 24 workshops, grouped under the themes: Ministry Within the Parish, Community Ministry, Family Ministry, and Senior Ministry. More than 40 clergy and laypeople were presenters during the workshops, speaking about their experiences in effective ministries. Two foundational workshops focused on “How to Discern and Develop Talents in the Parish” and “How to Coordinate Ministries in the Parish.” Information was also offered on a wide variety of ministry topics, including parish nursing ministry, serving those in need, hospital visitation, outreach to immigrants, prison ministry, addictions and recovery, protecting the unborn, end-of-life decisions, dealing with loss, supporting the military, senior and youth ministries, organizing libraries and bookstores, Orthodox schools, home schooling, and other family-related topics. Supplemental resources on each of these topics is available in the *Resource Handbook*.

International programs such as International Orthodox Christian Charities, the Orthodox Christian Mission Center, Project Mexico, and Church World Service were highlighted on one evening during the conference, and a report was also given on the 2004 Diakonia conference held in Finland.

The evaluations completed by the participants conveyed their enthusiasm and commitment to initiating and expanding parish ministries, and to making connections with one another through a common vision of service in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of this, the members of the department feel that the conference’s goals were met.

In January 2005, a letter was sent to all conference participants asking what effect their “Faith in Action” experience had on their personal and parish ministries. The answers ranged from frustration over apathetic responses from parish councils, to optimism in the early stages of program development, to enthusiasm over the successful initiation of new or expanded ministries. Further contacts with the participants will provide more information on the progress being made.

The 2004 conference was the first phase of the implementation of the department’s mission statement. Subsequent phases are planned for the 14th All-American Council and future parish ministries conferences.

A summary of the conference has been produced in booklet form and is available at the department’s display at this All-American Council. Keynote addresses and resources from the conference workshops are available on the OCA web site on the department’s web page.

## Ongoing Communication of Services

While the *Resource Handbook* and the Parish Ministries Conference were the primary means of communication between the department and the Church, the OCA web site proved to be a great asset to our mission. The online *Resource Handbook* is most effective in disseminating information, and press releases posted to the web site before and after the conference highlighted the work of the department in a high-profile way. Photos and conference materials available online serve as additional resources. The department’s email address – christianwitness@oca.org – allows

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department members to communicate with inquirers and conference participants, many of whom have been encouraged to correspond about projects and programs. Along with the OCA web site, *The Orthodox Church* newspaper includes ministry-related articles that we have submitted for nearly every issue during the last triennium. Topics have included suggested ways to keep parish ministries going during the summer months, and ways to help the needy or the homebound and their caregivers. Other articles have focused on parish nursing ministry, outreach to the hungry and homeless, tsunami relief through Gift of the Heart kits, and essays related to the general themes of “fanning the flame” and having compassion for those who are suffering. Each article references related articles in the *Resource Handbook*.

The desire to communicate directly with deaneries and dioceses led to three opportunities for department members to highlight ministry efforts.

## Challenges

In August 2003, all department chairmen were asked, given unlimited financial resources, to define their “Dream Department.” At first, it seemed a bizarre concept, considering that the current department budget is unrealistically low even for the assigned tasks. But conceptualizing a fully funded agenda was a productive exercise. It is our hope that someday, a fully-funded Department of Christian Witness and Service would include:

- ◆ A full-time compensated director experienced in nonprofit administration, meeting monthly with an executive committee and quarterly with the full department.
- ◆ Continuing education for members and those interested in parish ministries.
- ◆ Attendance at Orthodox and other ministry conferences to facilitate coordination of efforts.
- ◆ Program development using a variety of technology and media resources to communicate with every OCA diocese and parish.

Unfortunately, none of this is possible within the current budget’s limitations. The department only met once in 2003, once in 2004, and not at all in 2005. As a substitute measure, “meetings” have been held through conference calls, while department members have personally funded their travel and fees for the “Faith in Action!” Parish Ministries Conference.

The personal sacrifices of the 11 department members must be acknowledged. The members must also be commended for their good will and their exemplary stewardship of time and talents. Nonetheless, frustration and discouragement must be minimized, and human and spiritual resources maximized, to carry on with the mission.

## Plans for the Future

The Department of Christian Witness and Service will continue to enthusiastically support and promote the publication of the *Resource Handbook* along with the following ongoing projects and new ideas which constitute our goals, but are not limited to:

- ◆ Sponsorship of future parish ministries conferences.
- ◆ Development of resources for diocesan or regional mini-parish ministries conferences.
- ◆ Promotion of parish nursing ministry.
- ◆ Promotion of Orthodox parochial schools.
- ◆ Expansion of the department web page to include resources and photos of active ministries.
- ◆ Expansion of mail and email contacts with clergy and laity.
- ◆ Encouragement to parishes for the expansion of existing parish and outreach ministries, and new initiatives.
- ◆ Development of a sign-language video of the Divine Liturgy for the hearing-impaired.
- ◆ Development of Braille Liturgy books for the blind.
- ◆ Offering *Resource Handbook* subscribers the option of discontinuing their hard-copy mailing in favor of accessing the articles online (email notification will be made when new articles are posted).

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To support and carry out these goals, the department will:

- ◆ Identify new external resources and materials.
- ◆ Identify potential members and additional consultants for the department.
- ◆ Partner with other OCA departments, Orthodox and other Christian charities, and social service agencies for the development of joint initiatives.
- ◆ Network with deaneries and dioceses.
- ◆ Encourage the faithful to support the Fellowship of Orthodox Stewards, the funding source for Church ministries.
- ◆ Consider a resolution for a Christian Witness and Service Church-Wide Initiative.
- ◆ Seek the archpastoral blessing of the Holy Synod, and the guidance and support of the Church Administration.

The implementation of the department's goals through the means listed above would improve and expand the department's ability to better serve the Church.

## **Accountability**

To adequately serve the needs of the Church, the *Resource Handbook*, *The Orthodox Church* newspaper, parish ministries conference resource materials, All-American Council luncheon forums, and mail or email correspondence are means by which we raise awareness of the needs of others and provide witness and service information. We ask that clergy and laity alike encourage greater communication with members of the department to exchange ideas and resources, thus providing mutual encouragement in the very important area of witness for the Church.

The 2004 Parish Ministries Conference provided an excellent opportunity for us to interact with the Saint Vladimir's Seminary community and with OCA departments represented at the conference, including: the Departments of Chaplaincies; Christian Education; External Affairs; Pastoral Life; Youth, Young Adult, and Campus Ministry; and the Offices of Humanitarian Aid and Institutional Chaplaincy, some of whose representatives served as workshop leaders. We have an ongoing collaboration with the Department of Communications and an interest in future work with the Department of Evangelization.

## **In Conclusion**

Administrative reports are necessary. But they are meaningless unless we have before us an ever-present image of the faces of men, women, and children suffering from hunger, homelessness, neglect and abuse, illness and disability, addictions, grief, and loneliness. The Church is called to minister to their needs, to provide care for their bodies and comfort for their souls. This is possible through the charisms given by the Holy Spirit, the graces received in the Sacraments, and the knowledge of and obedience to the living Gospel of Jesus Christ. The flame burning in the hearts of the faithful will lead to the fulfillment of the commandment of the blessed Mother of God, "Whatever He says to you, do it."