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Youth Project Coordinator's Report to the Metropolitan

DIMITRIOS RENTEL
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By Dimitrios Rentel
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General Introduction. In the summer of 2018, at the All-American Council, a significant amount of money was raised to fund a full-time youth director for the Youth Department, in response to the youth presentation at the end of the Council. However, the money raised was not large enough to fund this position, and this person would have no resources to work with in the Chancery. Furthermore, there was the even larger problem about what exactly was needed: What is desired by and beneficial for the youth of the OCA? Would a full-time youth director even be helpful? The Chancery devised a plan to do a needs-based assessment of the youth (and in some instances young adults) of the Church.

The Plan Itself. The Chancery hired and directed me to travel across the country and speak with the youth, youth workers, parents, priests, and young adults about youth ministry in America. I traveled primarily to camps and youth programs to speak in person with large groups of children and teenagers about their own churches, thoughts on the Church and the Faith, and what they wanted the Church to do differently. All questions asked were designed to answer one single question: what should the OCA's National Youth Program look like? The advantage of traveling to camps was twofold. Obviously, camps simply had a large amount of youth concentrated in one spot; furthermore, everyone on the camp grounds was forced to think about Orthodox youth ministry as a result of being there. The summer schedule was devised by Archdeacon Joseph, with one exception (detailed below).

Timeline of the Summer. The following were visited this summer:

- 1.** CrossRoad Institute, Boston, MA—32 young adults. 6.19–6.23. Director: Kyra Limberakis, overseen by Dr. Ann Bezzerides, Director of the Office of Vocation & Ministry (Hellenic College Holy Cross).
- 2.** St. Vladimir's Camp, Farmdale, OH—48 youth. 6.30–7.6. Directors: Dn. Daniel and Catrina Kovalak.
- 3.** FOCA National Junior Summer Sports Tournament, Farmdale, OH—64 youth. 7.7–7.12. Directors: Dn. Daniel and Catrina Kovalak.
- 4.** St. John's Summer Camp, Mitchell, IN—86 youth, 6 young adults. 7.14–7.20. Director: Jon Beechan
- 5.** Diocese of the South Convention Youth Program, Jupiter, FL—32 youth. 7.23–7.25. Director: Fr. John Cox.

In addition to these five camps, I also traveled with His Beatitude and the Chancellor to Kodiak, AL, on the St. Herman's Pilgrimage (8.7–8.9), where I met with the youth who had come on the pilgrimage and had an informal chat with them concerning the state of youth ministry in Alaska (8.7). I continued these conversations throughout the pilgrimage. We also traveled to St. Paul's Island, where I met with the young faithful (8.10–8.11). Leaving Alaska, I went straight to the OCF Summer Leadership Institute at the St. Iakovos Retreat Center in Kansasville, WI (8.14–8.17). The final official data-collecting travel was to Holy Apostles Mission in Mechanicsburg, PA, under Fr. Timothy Hojnicky (8.24–8.25), where I met with his church school attendees and anyone else who was interested. This last visit was planned by me and Fr. Timothy, given that he reached out after the project began.

The Survey. Within days of starting, I realized the summer had a finite amount of weeks, and that any attempt to travel everywhere and meet with youth in the Orthodox Church in America would be folly. I crafted an online survey with input from Fr. Sergius Halverson, who works at the DMin program at St. Vladimir's Seminary and has experience in research and developing models of ministry. I also met with Mrs. Cora de Leon, NYU Clinical Assistant Professor and Assistant Coordinator, who has 20 years of clinical and research experience, to make sure this survey would be optimally helpful and productive. I also created an online social media presence using the OCA's Youth and Young Adult Ministry Facebook page and a new Instagram page, and used them to promote the survey, as well as to update people on the project, where I was going next, and, occasionally, bits of data. The survey, ran by Survey Monkey, had different questions for: youth, young adults, priests, parents, laymen, and youth workers. St. Tikhon's Summer camp emailed me when they found out about the survey, and requested to have a PDF of the survey so they could print it out and distribute it to their campers, resulting in 78 paper copies. I do intend to keep it open, as it is a valuable resource in simply assessing sentiment among the faithful about youth ministry.

Structure of Report. The remainder of the report is split up into two parts. Firstly, I will discuss and analyze the findings of the summer camps. Secondly, Matushka Jenny Haddad Mosher and I will analyze the online survey. Matushka Mosher works for the Office of Vocation & Ministry and is the director of the Telos Project, a program of the OVM which works with pilot parishes seeking to understand and engage better with young adults in the Orthodox Church, a program with goals and methodology remarkably similar to this report.¹ She generously offered time to help analyze the survey. Steve Christoforou, the Youth & Young

¹ For more info, see their website: <https://www.teloscommunity.org/>

Adult Ministries Director of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, has also generously spent some time to read the findings of this report, supplementing and offering even more insight from his vast experience and knowledge of youth and young adults in the Orthodox Church.

The Summer

Questions Asked. At the beginning of the summer, I determined with Fr. Sergius what sorts of questions I would ask every camp. Obviously, as time went on when I was presenting, new and different responses would lead to new and different questions, but for the most part the same sorts of questions were asked at every camp. When necessary, I will note where responses came from.

We hypothesized that asking people what should be done with youth ministry in America would not generate a great response (a hypothesis later proven correct), given that it is too general a question and few people have a basis for what OCA Youth Ministry could be. Thus, questions were narrowed down and made more specific. The easiest question to ask was what was great about the camp that everyone was at, and what wasn't so great. Every camp I went to was well liked and I wanted to know why. After discussions about the camp, we later moved onto what was great or enjoyable about their churches and priests, and then what was not great.

Types of Responses and Things to Note:

What People Like About Camp (and Church). The first question I always asked at camp was what the participants liked about it. At St. Vladimir's Camp (ages 7–11) the kids responded with activities. The three most popular activities, in order, were the pool, sports, and the concession stand that gave out sweets. When asked why they liked these two activities (I will not delve into the motivation behind the concession stand), they responded that they simply liked playing with their friends. They were fun group activities they could not do normally at home, and they enjoyed it.

At other camps, which all had higher age groups, all answers were unanimous. Without fail, every single person, when asked what they like about camp, said that they loved being with their friends and counselors that they loved. Any other good thing about camp came second. The deeper the relationships formed, the more participants loved camp.

When asked what campers like about church, the most common answer was their community in it. If someone was to enjoy church (not everyone did), they liked the people who went there, having worked with them, sang with them, and prayed with them. This is the same pattern as to why youth like camp.

There are also a common thread of activities people like doing in church or with their church communities. In particular, many liked singing and serving communities with their

church communities. Many boys also like being able to serve in the altar.

What People Dislike About Camp. This was a relatively easy question to get responses to, but at the outset of this section I would like to point out how potentially meaningless they all were. It was unrealistic to expect participants to voice concerns about the camp at camp surrounded by camp people. Every single camp solely complained about physical comforts (showers were gross, too many mosquitos, not enough dessert). Despite best intentions and the fact that no one would have gotten in trouble had they spoken honestly and carefully, the real possibility of problems with camp going unmentioned exists. Of course, physical comfort is a real problem, and it no doubt matters to people, but I suspect that was not all there was. For a better study of camps, we will look at the online survey, where answers could be made anonymously and privately. Of course, the other explanation could be that the campers had no problems with camp.

What People Dislike About Church. People talked a little more freely about this question—it was clear they had grievances and problems, and furthermore they were not in their churches. At St. Vladimir’s Camp, some campers complained about not being able to sit in church, but this was not a recurring pattern among campers older than 10.

In general, the most common problem people had (both campers and counselors) was with religious education, which will be discussed later. However, the second biggest problem was a feeling of helplessness. Many expressed a desire to help out in their church, only to be blocked by older adults denying them the ability, an event a camper at FOCA’s Junior Olympics attributed to a superiority complex. I do not know if it is due to feelings of superiority among older adults that restrict youth from helping out at their churches, but it must be noted youth do feel a generation gap in parishes. There was also a persistent request to focus more on Christ and less on Orthodoxy. Some campers wanted more Scripture education or a deeper understanding of where Jesus Christ is the Liturgy, and were unhappy with how Orthodoxy seems to dismiss every opinion that is not Orthodox.

Whenever I would talk one-on-one with campers, I noticed those who could not name their priest at their home parish would say they disliked church. This seems obvious, but over the course of the summer, I met 23 campers who claimed to go to church every weekend but did not know their priest’s name. All of these campers were over the age of 11.

Christian Education. At St. John’s Camp, a young man brought me aside and told me the one thing he would do for youth in America is teach sex education from the Church, particularly how the faithful are supposed to interact with the LGBTQ+ community. I then asked

him if he thought he was alone in this request, or if he thought other people wanted this. He did not know, and told me he would ask around and then get back to me. Word must have gotten around that we were trying to figure this out, because the entirety of the older male cabin began to express interest in such a thing, then the older female, then the whole camp, to the point where the camp held a special session on the Church's teachings on the LGBTQ+ community and how they affect everyone's spiritual lives.

It became evident that most campers were not hostile towards the Church's teachings—they simply did not know anything about them beyond the idea that homosexuality is a sin. People were willing to agree with the Church, but they had never heard a philosophical or theological argument in favor of marriage being solely between a man and a woman—they had only ever heard the argument that love is love, and that the Church does not love everyone like it claims it does. Most of the campers loved the Church, and did not necessarily want to condemn it, but they simply did not know how to proceed, for secular society seemed to be more moral than the Church, and was able to actually walk people through its argument.

The conversation at St. John's then shifted away from the LGBTQ+ community, and more onto a general focus on Christian apologetics. Kids did not have a way to explain their faith to other kids. Most could not intelligently and concisely explain core tenets of the Orthodox Faith. I became curious, though, how youth would explain the Faith when asked. At the DOSC, I asked a room of 19 campers how they each would explain what the Orthodox Faith is. One 11 year old girl talked about Jesus Christ, and how we try to follow Him. The other 18 talked about how we are different from Catholics, are the original Church, and have the Divine Liturgy, but never mentioned Jesus Christ. In general, the desire for the ability to explain the Faith to friends was a common request. Youth and in general people can feel something at Church, and can be tied to it for multiple reasons, but it seems they are unable to articulate what the Church is about or even why they stay. The youth want the Church to make sense, so that they can make sense of it to others.

I did not meet a single person who told me they enjoyed church school this summer. Not everyone disavowed it, but no one liked it, apart from people whose church had the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (a program Matushka Mosher whole-heartedly recommends). Some churches have an excellent church school program, like St. Mary's Cathedral in Minneapolis, but it is supplemented with many other youth programs. St. Mary's Cathedral also has a full-time youth pastor, Fr. Benjamin Tucci, which seems to be exceptional. As it stands, the youth want and seem to need a different sort of church school program to learn about the

Faith.

Music. Music is an unusual facet of the study, because apart from St. John's Camp, it very rarely came up, not even in the online survey. No one requested more of it, or suggested it brought people closer together. However, throughout the summer, I observed—or rather, heard—a lot of music. Without phones, children had to entertain themselves somehow, and as a group activity, music worked extremely well. Whenever there was a bus ride or any free moment at any of the camps I attended, it was common to see people singing with each other. People always looked for songs that everyone knew, be it Orthodox hymns or Disney musicals. In Alaska, it was not just the children who sang frequently, but also adults. (I noted furthermore that Alaskan clergy did not need a pitch to start singing in church but rather just started the hymn, often hitting the right harmonies on the first try, suggesting to me they sang a lot.)

St. John's Camp provided a unique study for music. The camp itself came into Orthodoxy along with its associated parish, St. John's, in the movement of Evangelical Orthodox Churches coming to the OCA. They have a unique music tradition, apart from any other Orthodox Church I have seen. (Most of their liturgical music was composed and arranged by Fr. David Wey.) Furthermore, as a direct result of EOC roots, they sing praise music at camp as an activity. It is difficult to describe praise music as what it is, for it carries negative connotations in Orthodox circles; but it is essentially Protestant worship music, complete with guitars and drums and monophony. The camp used to do this twice a day, every day, until His Grace Bishop Paul made them cut it down to just once a day. He offered the option to sing Orthodox hymns (thus still incorporating music twice a day), but the camp did not do this. (This was the first year praise music was only sung once a day, so the change may still occur.)

Most campers were not happy with this, and it became a large part of our discussion. Only two people privately told me they do not like praise music, one of which no longer goes to the camp. In both cases, disagreements were on theological grounds. All older cabins unanimously and pointedly told me they wanted praise music to go back to twice a day. This was not due to any theological meaning or comfort they found in the text. In fact, many actually disagreed with the music being sung. My favorite quote from the summer was, "If you can sing it to your girlfriend, you shouldn't sing it to Jesus." After sitting down with the elder boys' cabin, it was clear it was not the text, but the music that resonated, for it was the physical act of singing that people loved. Everyone knew the songs, and since they were monophonic, they were very easy to sing. It was not about the text or even the quality of music—people loved the special bond it created with each other. After a long conversation with the elder female cabin, a

counselor came up to me privately and asked for Orthodox folk songs, thinking it might solve the problem of praise music being amazing to do but theologically unsound.

As stated at the beginning of this section, this is an odd thing to put in a report such as this, because it does not quite call for us to do any one thing. But it is clear music as a common action is powerful and cannot be understated.

State of OCA Youth and Young Adult Ministry Right Now. There is no functional framework in the OCA right now to do any sort of national, Church-wide youth ministry. As it stands, the OCA does not have anyone really working on youth and young adult ministry. The OCA's webpage is outdated, with materials from 20 years ago, dead links, and articles about the 11th All-American Council and the vision the youth there had for the Church in 1999. There is no one person to contact at the Chancery about youth work. Archdeacon Joseph was my point person for the summer, but when his father fell ill and then fell asleep in the Lord, he naturally had to take a step back. Then, I had to contact my father for any dealing I had with the Chancery. The role of helping me facilitate, plan, and organize my travels should not have fallen on the Secretary to the Metropolitan or the Chancellor of the OCA.

Naturally, this lack of any centralized administration, guidelines, or communication available has made people in dioceses, deaneries, or parishes have to constantly reinvent the wheel, a common phrase from the summer. If a parish wants some sort of youth ministry program, it must come with a plan and ideas and people and help by itself. Thus, Youth and Young Adult Ministry (YYAM) becomes almost entirely people dependent, a grassroots movement. This sentiment was echoed by every camp director at every camp I went to—they all had to do their own advertising, meeting personally with parents to build trust, and each fear that when they are gone the camp may dissolve (except for the case of St. John's Camp, which has a strong administration, directly backed by multiple parishes in Indianapolis). Our camps are solely run by charismatic, highly intelligent, hard-working individuals, each of whom is formed in their own unique life. When the individual is removed, another one replaces them or the camp falls apart.

Not everyone is called to be a leader in this way, and even fewer are called to start something from scratch, either for their parish or diocese. I met a man this summer who held a master's degree in religious education, and he admitted to me he did not have any idea how to start a youth ministry program. He was a much-beloved figure, adored by all the members of the camp, but he told me his one gift was to simply follow the orders of others and help where he can. This, I suspect, is typical of most Orthodox Christians (a theme to be explored later)—

people are willing to help and can be very good at it, but very few are leaders. As it stands, with a massive vacuum and no support for youth ministry, leaders are what is needed in parishes and dioceses, given that there often is nothing; but very few people have the gift to do this.

CrossRoad. CrossRoad is the product of a highly educated and charismatic person, Dr. Ann Bezzerides, who has the vision to continually lead people and lead the Office of Vocation & Ministry into new programs, insights, and ways to affect and build up the Church. They invest heavily in their staff: being located on Holy Cross Seminary, they train seminarians during the school year in what is effectively a course on youth ministry. A motto I learned when talking to Kyra Limberakis, director of CrossRoad, is “administration is ministry,” as they believe a strong administration is perhaps one of the best ways to show love and care towards the participants of the program.

Young Adults. Unfortunately, there is not a great way to reach and get in contact with young adults, particularly in the OCA, as there are not many programs for them. As it stands right now, a vast majority of Orthodox Christians who participate in OCF are either from the Greek or Antiochian Archdioceses, and thus I did not get a chance to talk to many OCA young adults at the OCF SLI (including me, there were 3 OCA participants in a pool of about 60).

There were many young adults at the DOSC. They were all friends from previous encounters and the convention was a good opportunity to meet with each other. However, all they could do was spend the day at the beach—there was no program for them at the convention, nor anywhere else in their diocese. They all remembered the 18th All-American Council, and how that had nothing for them either. Naturally, they requested some sort of program for young adults at the next All-American Council.

The Survey

Means of Analyzing the Survey. Along with this report I will submit a full list of all survey responses and graphs, including all open-ended question responses. As Matushka notes, “We could probably create an entire document dedicated to possible intra-OCA structural improvements or clarifications, before we get anywhere near the nitty-gritty of curriculum development, specific kind of activity recommendations, etc.” based on the findings in this survey. Many questions were deliberately left open-ended so as to not bias people’s thoughts, and allow people a platform to talk as much or as little as they wanted. Of course, this does mean that analysis of the data is slightly harder and more time-consuming, but will hopefully continue to give the OCA a source of useful data and information for a few years. I will indicate whether an analysis came from Matushka Mosher or myself.

Due to the interaction with exported SurveyMonkey data and MicrosoftWord picture/text interaction, it was difficult to have all the charts and numbers on this report. As such, I have included them in a separate document and only added to this report supplemental graphs which compared multiple questions.

The survey was split up so that, depending on what the responder answered to Q1 (Who are you?), they would be directed to a different page with different questions. For example, a priest would get different questions than someone in 10th grade. Along with this survey a file containing different parts of the survey was submitted. While reading this report, the reader should have the survey open in front of them online, or can look at the file titled “Supplemental Graphs.” For looking at individual responses, please look at each different file for the different type of person responding. Due to the enormous size of the survey, I could not export the whole survey into one PDF file containing all responses next to each other.

Questions:

Page 1 (Demographics). The survey received 1375 replies, though only 937 people fully completed it. It received a fairly good mix of the different groups of youth, young adults, parents, lay people, and clergy. We did not receive many answers from camp administrators. This may be the result of how few camp administrators there are, or poor advertisement. Most people were from the Midwest. The reason for this is unclear, for when Q2 (What region of North America are you from?) is compared with responses from Q3 (How did you hear about this survey?), there is no clear trend, at least nothing to set it apart from any other diocese. The one thing that perhaps almost everyone filling out the survey shared was that they cared about the Orthodox Church and Youth and Young Adult Ministry in some way, at least enough to fill out the survey.

The biggest thing to note about page 1 is the responses to Q5 (How do you feel about the current state of Youth and Young Adult Ministry in the Orthodox Church right now?): 598 people (56.83%) are either very or somewhat dissatisfied with YYAM. Only 296 people (23.18%) are either very or somewhat happy with it. However, I must suspect the answer to be lower

when considering how most people in the OCA feel about YYAM, for again, most people filling out this survey care about YYAM in some way.

Page 2 (Youth). 118 youth filled out the entire survey. Naturally, more older children filled out the survey than younger children, and less children were homeschooled. Most of them like going to church, at least in some way (119). There are a few interesting themes as to why they would like or dislike church. As Matushka Mosher points out, many like it for the sanity it brings (presumably the outside world becomes crazy at times), spending time with Christ, and the wonderful community it can offer. On the other hand, some feel a sense of isolation, disconnection, or even discrimination emanating from their church. Matushka Mosher notes that many of these problems can be fixed one-on-one pastorally.

Q9 (What is another activity in your life, outside church, that you really like [reading, playing soccer, going out with friends, etc]? Why do you like it?), a really clever question thought up by Fr. Sergius, has many, many responses. Most respondents love socializing, not caring what they do as long as they do it with friends. Other activities include musical involvement (making music or just listening to it), cooking/baking, reading, sports, traveling, serving others, acting in theatre, watching movies, and playing video games. All have either a relaxing element or a social element, and most have both. Matushka Mosher notes that all answers can be fodder for ministry ideas—parishes can care about more than just the spiritual side of parishioners' lives.

Matushka Mosher observed in Q10 (Do you feel like you're able to act like an Orthodox Christian in all areas of your life, not just in church?) an already noted trend is many do not know precisely what the Orthodox Faith is. Even when people said they felt comfortable being an Orthodox Christian, they noted they had a difficult time explaining what exactly they believed to their friends or anyone else who would have questions. On the other hand, there is a sizable proportion of campers who think they know what they should be doing, but just aren't, due to the difficulty of being Christ-like. Q12 (How close do you live to church?) does not reveal anything relevant. Q13 (What do you wish your church community did for you?) has many wonderful answers and ideas that would be worth examining carefully in the future when planning events. Most requests are for an active youth group at their parish, implying many parishes do not have one. There is also a fair amount of requests for communication and openness in order to allow others to join. For people with youth groups, there are substantial requests for local involvement. It seems that many want to be involved in their communities through their church. It must be noted that very few of these requests are for resources or education (though there are several). Most are for opportunities to be in their church and spend time with friends and the faithful.

Q15 (What is one question you have about Orthodoxy that you wish someone would give you a straight answer about?) has the same recurring questions on homosexuality, death, and the difference between the Orthodox Church and other Christian Churches seen from the summer camps. By far, the most popular question is why homosexuality is a sin. As Matushka

Mosher notes, most questions are geared towards taking the Church's tradition and understanding it in contemporary times. However, there are plenty of unique questions, ranging from "What are the different levels of being a nun in the Orthodox Church?" to "Why is it so hard for us to live God's will, even though in our hearts we know that what we truly desire above all else is to be with God?"

Page 3 (Young Adults). 182 young adults completed the survey. The average age was about 22, though most responders were ages 18–20 or upwards of 24. Matushka Mosher believes, given that the majority are 18–20, that the results are good—it shows more younger people are primed for a conversation about YYAM. A shortcoming in how I created the survey was not making this question multiple choice, since I could have then compared age to other answers. This was an oversight I did not realize until too late. 103 are in school (48.58%), the rest either having graduated or just do not attend school. Q19 (Did you grow up in the Church?) does not reveal anything statistically significant when compared with other questions.

Matushka Mosher and I agree that Q20 (Do you currently help out your church [serving, singing, cooking, organizing, etc.]? Are there many opportunities for you to? Do you want to do more? Less?) is incredibly promising for the future of the Church—an enormous majority expressed interest in helping their Church further. They want to do more, spread the Fire, and build up the Church. Matushka Mosher points out that there seems to be a disconnect between the older parishioners' actions, ideas, and expectations compared to those of the younger generation. By far the biggest reason given for not helping out more was having too much on one's plate from other commitments (presumably things like school or work).

The same trends seen in Q15 are in Q21 (What is one question you have about Orthodoxy that you wish someone would give you a straight answer about?). Once again, people want to know how to relate and fit Orthodoxy into the modern world, and how tradition becomes applicable in the modern world. There are more specific questions, however, about what Orthodoxy is (why is baptism necessary, difference between different jurisdictions of Orthodoxy, the role of women). Furthermore, there are more questions about Orthodox politics, such as what is keeping us from Pan-Orthodoxy, where is the OCA's youth ministry, what is the role of women leaders in the church (the person who wrote this answer was fully aware and content with the idea that women could not serve, but rather wanted to know how she or another woman could help build the Church). These are complicated, nuanced questions that trained and educated scholars and priests disagree about, and it is not surprising that they have had a difficult time finding a good answer.

The top answers to Q22 (Which of these sound good to you?) are all so close in range that there is no statistical significance between them. It is interesting to note the highest two answers involve traveling, either to Orthodox countries, or across the country.

Q23 (Without naming names [seriously, please don't name names], what challenges is your church facing?) was phrased in such a way as to avoid legal trouble. Some of the answers given are very indicative of real frustration and anger, as respondents have very real problems

in their churches. A large proportion are concerned with outreach, and feel their particular church is not doing enough to reach out to the world and evangelize. Furthermore, there is a general consensus that we are losing the youth we do have. The other two main problems are how people seem to be injecting politics into church (there is actually one reply asking for more politics in church, but this is an anomaly), and how their church needs funding. Q24 (What problems does the Orthodox Church face in general right now? How should it tackle these problems?) is directly related to Q23. The same problems come out (feelings of poor evangelism, losing youth, money problems). People are concerned about worldliness, ethnophyletism, how women are treated, lack of Orthodox education for the laypeople, parish council politics, and much more. There are many unique responses to this question and the preceding one.

Page 4 (Camp-going Youth and Young Adults). As stated earlier, the anonymity and privacy of the survey yielded new results not seen in the summer listening tour. Yet, the patterns remained the same. Questions 27 and 28 were the same questions I asked in-person at the camps (what is good about camp, what is not good, respectively). We see the biggest reason, though by a slim margin, for going to church camps or retreats is to see friends they do not normally get to see (154). Learning about God is second (152). Then comes the third top answer—it makes them feel like they are part of the larger Church (149). The fourth biggest answer is learning more about the Church (146). These top four answers have two things in common—connecting with other people, forming bonds and feeling part of a group, and deeper Christian education. Matushka Mosher notes: “The education and the experience of connecting with others run neck-and-neck.” Children want to learn more about the Faith.

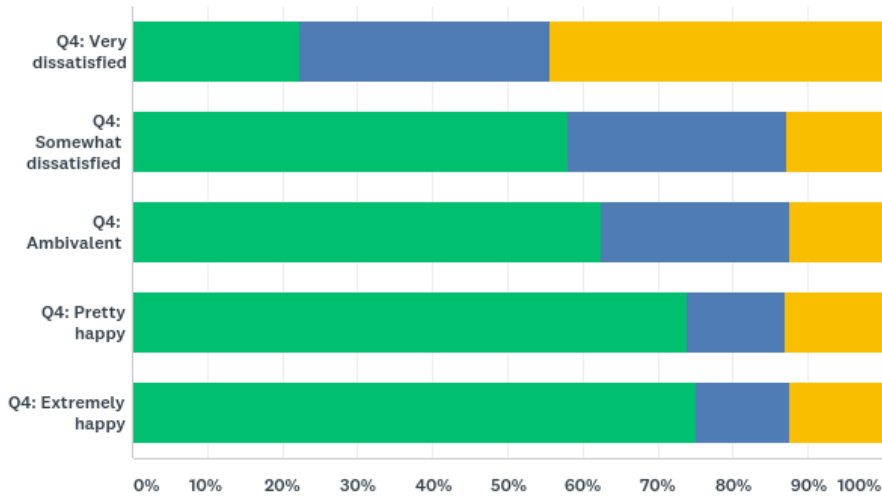
Conversely, with question 28, the biggest problem (besides having to leave, at 115) with camps are problems people have with other campers—dramas and cliques (92), and the fact that others don’t seem to care about camp (42), are the biggest problems youth and young adults have with camps. Very few participants dislike camps because they are boring (the lowest response at 6); the main problems they have are people problems. Dramas, cliques, and apathy undercut group cohesion, and get in the way of bonding with people. Matushka Mosher suggests that these problems could potentially be solved with tighter staff training and management, and that perhaps post-camp withdrawal could be potentially helped with post-camp mini-retreats, though this is an idea that we both know is perhaps difficult to implement.

Reading the comments asking people to explain why they like and dislike camps (Q29), it becomes clear that OCA camps have positively affected many children. Phrases like “second home” and “all my best friends are there” are common. People form a bond at camp that is unlike other things in their lives, and most attribute it to the bonds they formed with the other children. When they talk about being able to be themselves at the camp, they are talking about being able to totally relate to other children, be vulnerable with them, and form instant connections and relationships that can carry them through their teenage years. By far the only thing they complained about was how other campers didn’t care, were fake, or were simply

mean. Camps are by no means perfect, but it seems that what children want are bonds and, quite frankly, love. Read the comments in Q30—children miss their friends, and would do anything to see them again. Unsurprisingly, camps that were most often praised were camps that I had been in contact with or visited (St. Mary’s in Minneapolis, St. Vladimir’s, St. John’s), though other camps like Antiochian Village and St. Mary of Egypt came up frequently.

The Connection Between Friends and Church. SurveyMonkey has handy analysis tools, in that questions can be compared to one another. Given that there is an emerging trend of the desire for friends and connections and its direct impact on camp experience, I paired question 4 (How satisfied are you with youth and young adult ministry right now?) with question 11 (Do you have friends at church? Are they good friends?). This is the chart SurveyMonkey produced:

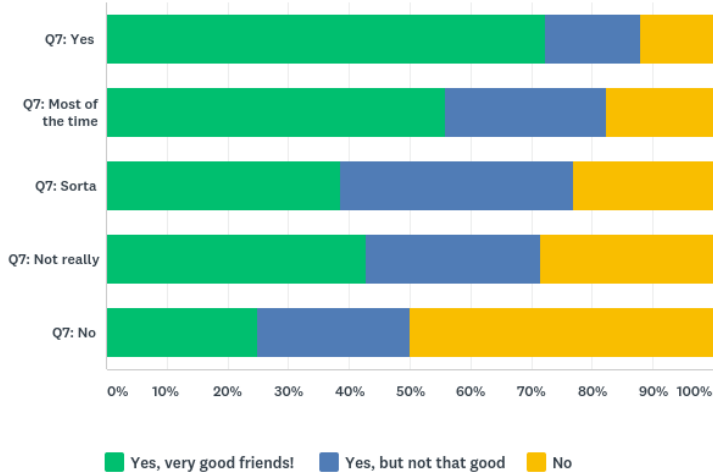
Q11 Do you have friends at church? Are they good friends?



	YES, VERY GOOD FRIENDS!	YES, BUT NOT THAT GOOD	NO	TOTAL
Q4: Very dissatisfied	22.22% 2	33.33% 3	44.44% 4	6.57% 9
Q4: Somewhat dissatisfied	58.06% 18	29.03% 9	12.90% 4	22.63% 31
Q4: Ambivalent	60.47% 26	23.26% 10	16.28% 7	31.39% 43
Q4: Pretty happy	73.91% 34	13.04% 6	13.04% 6	33.58% 46
Q4: Extremely happy	75.00% 6	12.50% 1	12.50% 1	5.84% 8
Total Respondents	86	29	22	137

Unfortunately, the data for those who are extremely happy and extremely sad is small, but the trend holds very firm in relation to good friends, especially for those in the middle – the fewer good friends someone has at church, the more dissatisfied they will be with youth ministry. The same pattern is seen when comparing how people like church and what sorts of friends they have in it:

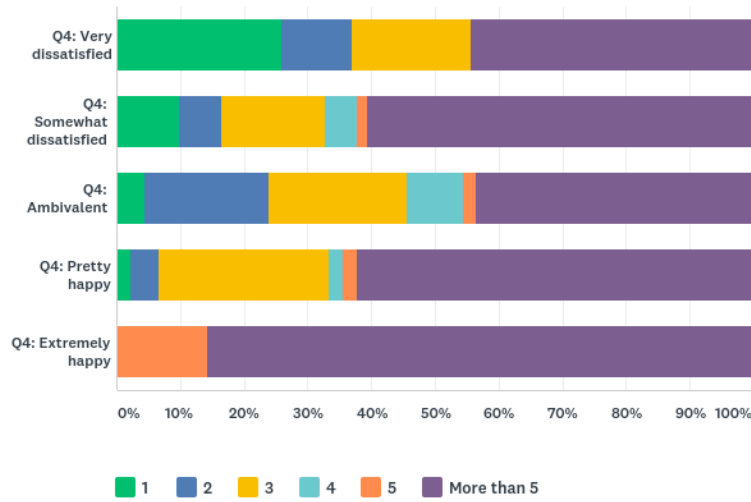
Q11 Do you have friends at church? Are they good friends?



	YES, VERY GOOD FRIENDS!	YES, BUT NOT THAT GOOD	NO	TOTAL
Q7: Yes	72.29% 60	15.66% 13	12.05% 10	58.87% 83
Q7: Most of the time	55.88% 19	26.47% 9	17.65% 6	24.11% 34
Q7: Sorta	38.46% 5	38.46% 5	23.08% 3	9.22% 13
Q7: Not really	42.86% 3	28.57% 2	28.57% 2	4.96% 7
Q7: No	25.00% 1	25.00% 1	50.00% 2	2.84% 4
Total Respondents	88	30	23	141

Things like distance to church (Q12) had absolutely no effect on enjoyment of church, but friends did. Now, granted, there are people who are very happy with church who do not have close friends at their church, and vice versa. However, this can be overcome by looking at Q19 (How many role models in the Church do you have whom you actively look up to?):

Q19 How many role models in the Church do you have whom you actively look up to?



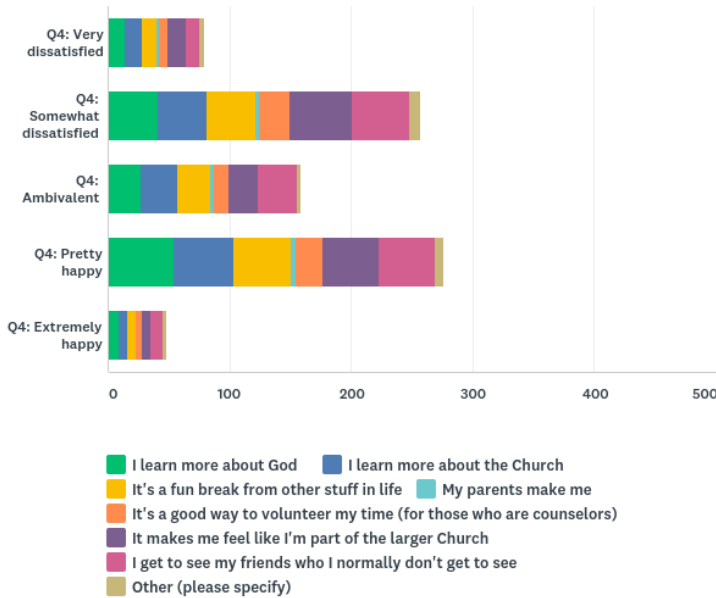
	1	2	3	4	5	MORE THAN 5	TOTAL
Q4: Very dissatisfied	24.14% 7	13.79% 4	17.24% 5	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	44.83% 13	15.34% 29
Q4: Somewhat dissatisfied	9.84% 6	6.56% 4	16.39% 10	4.92% 3	1.64% 1	60.66% 37	32.28% 61
Q4: Ambivalent	4.35% 2	19.57% 9	21.74% 10	8.70% 4	2.17% 1	43.48% 20	24.34% 46
Q4: Pretty happy	2.17% 1	4.35% 2	26.09% 12	2.17% 1	2.17% 1	63.04% 29	24.34% 46
Q4: Extremely happy	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	14.29% 1	85.71% 6	3.70% 7
Total Respondents	16	19	37	8	4	105	189

Thus, friends are not the only relationships youth and young adults need—role models also play a large part in church enjoyment and being satisfied with YYAM. Again, the data is not perfect, as more responses could confirm or disprove this theory, but as the data stands right

now, it seems that relationships are what are affecting people the most.

It is also worth noting that, despite anyone’s level of dissatisfaction with or enjoyment of youth ministry, everyone felt the same way about camp. The proportionality of what children liked or disliked about camp remained the same despite feelings towards YYAM:

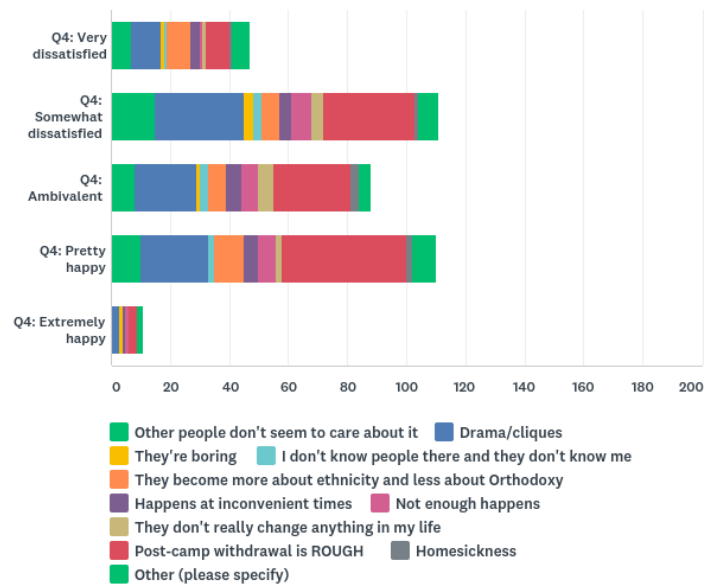
Q27 Why do you go to church camp/retreats?



Thus, it must be concluded that friends and role models—meaningful relationships—play a direct role in keeping children in the church, and as Matushka Mosher notes, “It would behoove us to pay attention!”

A desire for connections and relationships is not just isolated to Orthodox Christian youth. Many psychological studies have been performed across the US, and estimate that about half of all Americans feel isolated and lonely. Furthermore, the younger someone is, the more likely they are to feel alone.² Loneliness is now thought to be the equivalent of smoking 15 cigarettes a day, and is more dangerous than obesity. Now, the results of this survey may be disputed, but it is clear that many in America’s younger generations feel alone, potentially explaining why youth and young adults desire these

Q28 What do you not like about church camps/retreats?



² For further reference, see Lardieri, Alexa. “Many Americans Report Feeling Lonely, Younger Generations More So, Study Finds.” U.S. News & World Report. U.S. News & World Report, May 1, 2018. <https://www.usnews.com/news/health-care-news/articles/2018-05-01/study-many-americans-report-feeling-lonely-younger-generations-more-so>; and health company Cigna’s study, which is hyperlinked in the article and also included in the file with the responses to the survey.

personal, meaningful, and loving connections they make at camps.

Page 5 (Parents). 239 parents completed the survey. Parents were the largest demographic to respond to the survey, potentially out of concern for their children. Assuming people drive at a rate of 60 miles an hour, the average amount of time parents are willing to spend driving children to a good camp is about 3.6 hours based on the 207 usable answers from Q32. This is a fairly good estimate, given that the median is also about 3–4 hours. Of course, though, given the range of answers, some were willing to drive over 8 hours, while some parents about half an hour—averages are not comprehensive of the populace. However, it is still a useful number to know. Based on the 217 usable answers from Q33, using conservative estimates again, the average amount of money a parent is willing to pay for a good week-long program is \$383. Numbers are a bit variable, with some people able to pay over \$1000, while others spoke about barely having \$100.

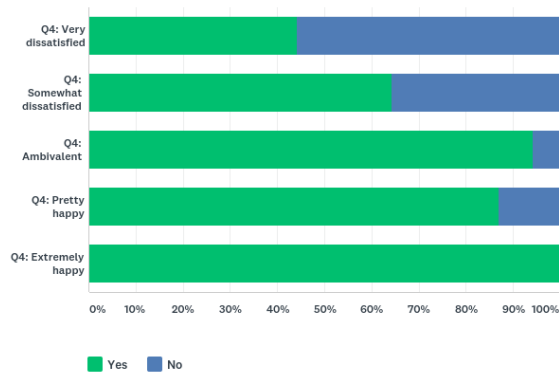
Q34, which asked how parents wanted their children to grow up and what sort of person they wanted them to be, was rather straightforward, as parents wanted their children to grow up with good morals, rooted in the Church. Interestingly, as Matushka Mosher noted, not a single parent talked about an ethnic identity, but rather almost all were focused on raising a child in the Faith.

Q35 (What challenges do you find trying to raise your children in the Orthodox Faith?) had many, many opinions and unique challenges, which supports the idea that parenting is a complicated and difficult task. However, many parents did have an underlying concern, which was that the Orthodox Faith isolated their children from society. Most parents complained about the difference in culture of the Orthodox Church from American society, and how their children didn't have other Orthodox friends to hang out with. Orthodoxy makes children different, and this, for obvious reasons, can increase the difficulty in raising children as Orthodox Christian. Looking at this question and Q36 (Does your Church help you at all in raising and forming your children? What more could they do? What resources does your church provide?), it becomes clear that parents do not view their church's help and YYAM in just a positive or negative light, but have complicated relationships with it. Out of the 240 people who answered Q36, only 82 answered with a yes or no. Matushka Mosher notes that most simply want improvements on all levels, from the parish to the Church. She also notes many want to be educated themselves, as many struggle with talking about the faith to their children, and notes the benefit family-based ministry would be. Given how deeply relationships affect children's faith lives, this could be a very good idea.

There is not an observable pattern concerning Q37 (How often do you and your family go to church?) when comparing it to other questions.

As would be expected, there is a direct relationship between a priest taking an active role in YYAM and a parent's level of satisfaction with YYAM (Q39 compared to Q4):

Q39 Do the clergy in your parish take an active role in youth ministry?



Page 6 (Laypeople). 165 laypeople completed the survey. The layperson section of the survey almost did not make it into the survey, and is the shortest part of the survey. However, it still offers unique insight into the lives of the faithful. Q40 (Do you wish you could help out at your church more? Are there opportunities for you to do so?) shows that most people are willing to help out at their church (137). Of course, we know the bias in this survey is towards people who in some way care about YYAM, but nonetheless it is an interesting fact.

Q41 (What do you think about the current state of Orthodox youth and young adult ministry in America?) has multiple themes as observed by Matushka Mosher: there is a need for better, updated resources, as well as a desire for Orthodox schools and more parent involvement. The idea of priest involvement comes up quite a bit, as does the idea that the national Church needs to step in more often. Another general trend is simply the idea that YYAM does not exist, sometimes on a parochial level but definitely not on a national level. Almost all want improvement.

Q42 (Were there programs/camps/retreats you attended as a kid? Do you miss them at all?) does not have much to offer this report, given that the goal is to analyze not recommend, but has many good ideas on what the OCA could do, and is worth a read for those considering what next steps should be. Q43 (What sort of programs would you have liked when you were young?) also offers many good ideas as well. There is no one activity that stands out as most common, but all express interest in spending time with friends and building a community. Matushka Mosher made a special note of how some answers express an interest in “adult learning” classes, something that she has found to be in high demand from the Telos Program.

Page 7 (Camp Administrators). 13 camp administrators completed the survey. By far, the smallest demographic answering the survey was this group. Thus, the answers may not be comprehensive of the entire situation of camp administrators in the OCA. Nevertheless, it is the data we have to work with.

The biggest troubles camp administrators face are institutional problems—funding, having staff, and training the staff. Responders to the survey directly attribute these problems to lack of support given by diocesan parishes and clergy, and a general lack of investment in

parishes, dioceses, and the national Church in YYAM. Furthermore, most resources designed to help support camp are now outdated.

Continuing the trend where relationships play a key role in people's involvement in the church, most answers to Q46 (What led you towards the current form of youth ministry? What was the motivation for you to come and stay?) talk about the deep and wonderful relationships these administrators formed with the children, how the children affected their lives, and how that motivated them to stay.

With only 12 responses, Q50 (What help could the Youth Department give your camp?) does not have a discernible trend, which is a shame, given that it could have potentially answered many questions, but merely asks for help in solving the problems mentioned in Q44 and 45 (What is the hardest part of your job? Any comments, elaborations, or explanations of your answer?, respectively).

Page 8 (Clergy). 118 clergy completed the survey. The clergy portion of the survey opens with some demographic questions about the clergy in order to spot trends in other questions. However, there are no discernible trends when comparing what seminary clergy attended to any other question, nor comparing how old they might be to another question.

We know that clergy being involved has a direct link to the satisfaction of YYAM (see above), but it is also important to note that 72% of Clergy, as shown in Q56 (Do you feel seminary prepared you for youth and/or young adult ministry?), do not feel prepared for YYAM. Uncoincidentally, 71.4% of clergy would like continued education on YYAM.

Some of the answers to Q54 (Describe, in your own words, what ministry is and what it means to minister to someone.) are quite beautiful. Some are more interesting, such as "disciplining our own children." When seminary does not necessarily educate seminarians in YYAM, people end up with different ideas of what ministry is. This is not the mark of a bad priest. Steve Christoforou has noted, in his own experience, that priests simply do not know any better, that they simply do not know a more effective way of engaging and ministering to youth or young adults. As noted earlier, many problems that children claim to have with church can be fixed with priestly involvement—priests do play a direct role in spiritual formation of children (as they do with everyone else in their church).

Q57 (Do you feel that you need help creating and sustaining youth ministry? If so, what areas need your help the most?) shows that priests are focusing largely on the same problems that camp directors and administrators are. They feel they do not have support, either from the diocese or other parishes or their own parish. While things like better church curriculum are asked for, most requests are for other people: youth leaders, Sunday school teachers, a youth director, parents who can engage their children, young adults who can engage each other. In short, they are asking for leaders. As Matushka Mosher points out, most priests are not thinking of adult ministry and youth ministry as different. Many connect them both, realizing they are intertwined. There is a general feeling that parishes, deaneries, and dioceses should connect more.

Page 9 (Closing Remarks). There are many, many good ideas to be looked at in Qs61, 62, and 64. People want to be connected more, learn more about the faith, and travel to Orthodox countries and other Orthodox churches in the USA. They also want marriage counselling, more inclusion of women, more outreach, friendlier parishes, online media usage, ministry towards those who are single, and much more. There are many problems and many things we, the faithful, can work on, and thus there are many responses. That is the general trend—there are things to be done, and they should be done soon. The essence of such a statement is captured in Q65 (Final question! Do you think we need more youth and young adult ministry?), where 794, or 95.09% of responders wanted more YYAM. Interestingly enough, many of the people who answered no to Q65 do not want “youth ministry” but rather just ministry, where everyone is ministered to and youth are not taught about the faith in a vacuum, ignoring the reality of how parents and friends and society affect one’s spiritual formation—“What we really need is the focus on the family, and not singling out the youth.”

Conclusion. Connections and meaningful relationships, not just with friends but with priests and older adults, are what keep youth and young adults in the church. Activities that involve multiple people, like singing, are typically the most asked for and cherished activities. There are many things, however, that hinder communities being built in church, the largest problem simply being people do not know how to foster communities or host events. No one is trained in YYAM. Parishes and camps seem isolated and disconnected from other local churches and their dioceses, and have to rely on themselves and the resources around them to make any sort of program work. There is, however, an enormous amount of people willing and wanting to help build up the Church. Youth and young adults are thinking very critically about the Orthodox Church, and want to be able to think through the Faith logically enough so that they could explain it to other people.