

MORE FULLY INVOLVE OUR HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE AGE MEMBERS IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH



MATERIAL IN PREPARATION FOR THE 16TH ALL-AMERICAN COUNCIL YOUTH WORKING GROUP, SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

The purpose of this “Read-Ahead” is to provide participants in the All American Council (AAC) with the benefit of the initial thinking that has been done to date on this important issue in the life of the Church. It is meant as **STARTING POINT FOR YOUR OWN DISCUSSIONS AND DELIBERATIONS** and does not represent *official* Church positions. Please feel free to add to, modify, take away, correct, or challenge any of the ideas in here. It is through your collective inputs and the guidance of the Holy Spirit that we will be able to discern the best path forward in this area for the life of the Church during the next decade.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND.....	p. 3
II.	WHAT IS YOUTH MINISTRY?.....	p. 4
III.	SOME YOUTH MINISTRY EFFORTS TO-DATE.....	p. 4
IV.	SUMMARY OF THE WORKING GROUP'S PROPOSED STEPS FORWARD.....	p. 6
V.	AND NOW IT'S YOUR TURN FOR INPUT.....	p. 10

1. INTRODUCTION

Early on in the strategic planning process, it became clear that one of the key goals for the next decade should focus on “How to more fully involve our youth and young adults in the life of the church”. In fact a recent survey of Orthodox clergy and laity in the United States¹ found that when asked to identify those issues that were very important – the number one issue by far was the “Issue of youth and young adults leaving the Orthodox Church”. 77% of Orthodox Church in America respondents identified this as a very important issue. In the number two spot was “The relationship between mainstream American culture and the traditions and requirements of the Orthodox Church” with 54% of the OCA respondents identifying this as a very important issue.

To get a better initial understanding of some of the issues involve in more fully involving our youth in the life of the Church, what has been done on this to date and what still needs to be done, the Strategic Planning Committee formed a Working Group involving past and current youth leaders, educators and young adults. This Working Group consisted of:

V. Rev. Michael Anderson (chair) – full time Youth Director for the OCA from 1994 – 2005; currently Youth Director for the Diocese of the West

Subdeacon Luke Beecham: currently part-time Youth Director for the OCA

Maria Proch: member of the OCA Department of Religious Education

Kimberly Metz: associate director of St. Tikhon’s Camp and a member of the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania’s Office of Young Adult Activities

Ben Safchuk: young adult and former participant in ‘Real Break’ and Antiochian Village

Andrew Smith: young adult and seminarian

Andrew Boyd: young adult and seminarian and managing editor of *Wonder* (the OCA blog for Youth)

Rev. John Vitko: liaison to the Strategic Planning Committee.

Some of the key initial recommendations of this Working Group were summarized in the draft Strategic Plan and are more fully discussed in the Section IV (Working Group Report) of this report. At the highest level, three major themes stand out:

¹ Alexei Krindatch, *Orthodox Reality in America* (2010), Slide 17
<http://hrr.hartsem.edu/research/orthodoxindex.html>

1. What the youth and young adults want is no different than anyone else in the Church: they need a place where they can experience community and be with somebody who loves them.
2. Therefore the single greatest need is not for new resources materials but for people who are trained in communicating and interacting with youth and young adults – for they form their own micro-culture.
3. The best way to know what aspects of Church life the youth need better addressed is not to presume to know it but simply to ask them – we got a number of surprises in this regard.

II. WHAT IS YOUTH MINISTRY?

There can be a number of answers to this question – but the one that seems the clearest and is consistent with points 1-3 above is the one given by Fr. Michael Anderson, the OCA Youth Director from 1994-2005. Speaking of youth ministries he says: “It seems so complex sometimes, and yet it is really so simple. We think we need numerous programs or retreats, and wonder how we can get it all together. Actually, it's really as simple as looking at what Jesus did. He didn't save the world by having programs and events. He entered into people's lives and developed a relationship with them. In the same way, all we are really called to do, is be the Christian we are called to be, and share our lives and faith with young people. **All our educational programs, service projects, and fellowship events are there for the sole purpose of building these Christ-like relationships.**(emphasis added) Get to know them. Talk with them. Show them how you live your life as a Christian. Be a role model. It's as simple as loving them so much that you want to bring Christ into their lives. More accurately, it's wanting them to bring their lives to Christ.”²

III. SOME YOUTH MINISTRY EFFORTS TO-DATE

Much groundwork has been laid over the past two decades by the OCA and other Orthodox jurisdictions in the providing the worship experiences, educational programs, service projects and fellowships events that help build these Christ-like relationships.

A. The OCA has a Department of Youth, Young Adults and Campus Ministry (YYACM). Recognizing that youth and young adults play a vital

² Fr. Michael Anderson, *Youth Ministry: Questions and Answers*, http://yya.o.ca.org/TheHub/LeaderInfo/AboutYouthMinistry/youth_q&a.htm

role in the life of the Church, the Department of Youth, Young Adult, and Campus Ministry works to:

- a. Train clergy, parents and youth ministers
- b. Encourage utilization of existing youth groups and programs at the Church-wide, diocesan and parish levels
- c. Encourage and support regional Orthodox summer camps
- d. Encourage development of campus ministries through Pan-Orthodox efforts such as the Orthodox Christian Fellowship
- e. Publish the young adult Wonder Blog

Additional information may be found at yya.oca.org. Currently YYACM is headed by a part-time Youth Director (1-2 days per month) and has a budget for the year 2011 of \$19,000.

- B. There is a significant amount of relevant, existing, resource materials geared at youth and young adults.** These materials may be found through the OCA website (<http://yya.oca.org/TheHub/index.htm>), the website of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in America (<http://www.goarch.org/archdiocese/departments/youth>), and the website of Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America (<http://www.antiochian.org/christianeducation>) and through other websites. No single pan-Orthodox site for these materials currently exists, but one is planned for the near future. Available materials include leadership and training materials; how-to materials (from organizing youth groups and retreats to ice-breakers); discussions of the faith and teachings of the Church; and study units on contemporary issues such as: Relationships and Choices; Sex, Sexuality and You; HIV, AIDS and You; Matters of Life and Death); and much more. Some of these materials are dated and need to be updated and there are certainly gaps that need to be filled – but it is a good starting point.
- C. There are a growing number of fellowship opportunities for youth and young adults.** Deanery, Diocesan and pan-Orthodox summer camps – such as St. Andrew’s, St. Tikhon’s and Antiochian Village -- continue to combine fellowship, worship and fun to form long lasting friendships with other Orthodox. There are also an increasing number of Pan-Orthodox opportunities for the life transforming experience of actively reaching out with Christ’s love to the needy. These include: serving on an Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC) Mission Team; the Orthodox Christian Fellowship’s (OCF) REAL BREAK, which provides an alternative to the traditional Spring Break partying of college students and has student teams go help the unfortunate in countries around the world; and the Fellowship of Orthodox Christians United to Serve (FOCUS) Youth Enabled to Serve (YES) program which is designed to provide local parishes with the resources necessary to involve junior and senior high students in local community service and short-term missions. We need to continue to support these

activities, increase the awareness of them, and enable participation of a greater number of our youth in them.

D. Involvement in the decision making and vision shaping of the Church. In the past there was significant youth involvement in the 11th through 14th All American Councils. In addition to building fellowship with each other, the youth: articulated “Our Dream for the Church” which was then widely circulated in the Orthodox world (11th AAC); developed a written pledge of commitment to the Church (12th AAC); and gave presentations on some of the major themes of concern to the Church (13th AAC). In fact, some 400 youth participated in the 13th AAC. Neither the 15th AAC, nor the upcoming 16th AAC, have focused youth involvement. This raises the question of what is the most effective way to involve our high school and young adults in the decision making of the Church at all levels from the parish to the diocese to the central administration.

IV. SUMMARY OF THE WORKING GROUP’S PROPOSED STEPS FORWARD

As noted above, the Strategic Planning Committee enlisted a Working Group on Youth comprised of 8 people with experience and/or strong interest in Youth Ministry and asked them to lay out some initial thoughts and possible action steps to “More fully involve our high school and college age students in the life of the Church”. The intent was not to provide definitive plans and answers to these questions – but to provide some initial thoughts that could then serve as seed or leaven for broader based discussions at the 16th All American Council. An abridged form of that summary was provided in the draft Strategic Plan released in July. The full summary is given below.

“If we want our young people to continue to grow in their faith, then we have to do a better job in connecting Christ and His Church to all aspects of their lives. They need a place where they can experience community and be with somebody who loves them. The Church needs to better address the contemporary cultural and moral issues they encounter, to challenge them to change the world in the name of Christ and to provide opportunities for them to socialize and bond with Orthodox of their own age.

In accomplishing this, our model should be one of building relationships between the youth and our Lord, the Church (including the Saints and the clergy and laity in their own parishes), other Orthodox youth, and their ‘neighbors’ as Christ defines them. These relationships are built through worship/prayer, fellowship, education and service. It is these four elements that lead to true Christian witness. Events are held (and need to be held) to develop these relationships. They need to be held regularly and they need to allow adequate time for people to interact so that these relationships can develop and deepen as time goes by.

I. Past and Current Church Work – Our youth played a significant role in the 11th and 12th All American Councils (1996, 1999) articulating “Our Dream for the Church” and committing themselves to implement it. From September 1994 to August 2005 the OCA had a full time Youth Minister, developed age appropriate discussion guides on a variety of topics, and had plans to bring youth together through regional, diocesan, and Church-wide gatherings. Currently, the Department of Youth, Young Adults and Campus Ministries (YYACM), is headed by a part-time Youth Minister. YYACM encourages the development of campus ministries as part of the Orthodox Christian Fellowships (OCFs); develops resources for Orthodox summer camps; is using social networking (blogs, Facebook) to further develop a sense of community; and, is networking with diocesan and deanery youth leaders. In February of 2011, YYACM played a key role in organizing and hosting a Pan-Orthodox Youth Ministry Conference.

II. What is Currently Working and What Needs to be Improved – Between the different Orthodox jurisdictions, there is a reasonably good selection of already existing resource materials, including tracts, study guides, ice breakers, etc. The current effort to bring these together in a single Pan-Orthodox web site will be a major step forward in making these more widely available. Orthodox summer camps (e.g. St. Tikhon’s; St. John’s, Rocky Mtn. Camp, Camp Vatra, St. Vladimir’s, St. Andrew’s; diocesan and deanery; Antiochian Village) are providing the opportunity to form lasting social networks. And the pan-Orthodox OCFs have expanded their campus ministries to more than 300 campuses in North America. The single biggest remaining need is the engagement and training of youth workers in creating youth welcoming environments and in talking with and relating to our youth in terms and context they understand. We also need to do a better job of identifying the real needs of our youth and not just projecting what they need. Once identified, these needs should be matched against available resources and any gaps filled. We also need to reinstitute national and/or regional youth gatherings. Accomplishing all this may well require a full time Youth Minister.

III. Intermediate Objectives and corresponding Action Plans

OBJECTIVE #1: Better engagement and training of youth workers. (Youth workers often have difficulty in creating environments that attract youth and in relating to them in terms and context they understand.)

Action Steps: Develop training in creating age appropriate environments and communications, including role playing exercises. Also develop needed training on legal and administrative responsibilities associated with youth work. Make this training available through a variety of means: internet postings, You-Tube videos and webinars for dioceses and deaneries to customize for their own use. Internalize this training through live gatherings of youth workers at the diocesan and deanery level, including role playing and problem solving. Develop a Youth Workers Coaching Team that, upon request, can assist at the local level in turning this training into practice.

Owner: Training materials will be developed at the central level (YYACM) with inputs from Diocesan youth leaders. Dioceses will customize, deploy and apply this training locally.

Resources Required: Experts in areas related to youth (education, mental health, social workers); communications and media experts; and funding for periodic gathering of youth workers and for deployment of the Youth Workers Coaching Team. Approximately \$ 12,000 per year in funding to pay for travel expenses for two ‘in person’ working meetings and \$3,000 to support development of the multimedia material on the internet.

Milestones to measure accomplishments: Put together the team and develop a detailed plan (Jun 2012); develop written training guidelines and materials (Dec 2012); develop and pilot test videos, webinars, etc. in at least two dioceses (Jun 2013); deploy to/with/through all dioceses (Jun 2014).

Linkages to other OCA efforts: Department of Christian Education; diocesan youth leaders; and the Working Group on Clergy and Lay Continuing Education.

OBJECTIVE #2: Make available the needed subject material resources

Action Steps: Begin with identifying the real needs of our youth. The best way to do this is ask them directly rather than assuming we know what they need. Collect inputs from parish groups as well as through the OCA Facebook site. Develop model curricula for addressing these needs, where possible using resources materials on the Pan-Orthodox website. Ensure that there are adequate instructional materials/guides for youth workers in each of these areas. Where suitable materials are lacking, upgrade or develop them. Pilot test the model curricula in at least two dioceses and revise based on the feedback.

Owner: The Department of Youth, Young Adults and Campus Ministries has the overall lead for developing the resources. It is up to the dioceses and local parishes to tailor the model curricula to their particular needs.

Resources Required: Educational, mental health and counseling professionals to identify and develop resource materials. Since this is likely to be the same team as in Objective 1, no additional funding will be required...

Milestones to measure accomplishments: identify youth needs (Jun 2012); develop model curricula and identify any gaps (Dec 2012); beta test curricula in two dioceses (Jun 2013); develop/upgrade materials to fill gaps (Sep 2013)

Linkages to other OCA efforts: Department of Christian Education; diocesan youth leaders.

OBJECTIVE #3: Implement periodic Church-wide youth gatherings

Action Steps: Decide on the purpose, scope, content and overall format of these gatherings, paying particular attention as to how to get the broadest representation/participation. Because OCA parishioners tend not to travel to gatherings, it will be important to give people multiple reasons for being there. Implement the first Church-wide gathering in the summer of 2012, being careful to

de-conflict with summer camps and other activities. Obtain feedback and use to improve the 2nd Church-wide gathering in 20XX.

Owner: Department of Youth, Young Adults and Campus Ministries

Resources Required: Skills in organizing large gatherings. Funding of approximately \$ ___ to organize a gathering and approximately \$ _____ per youth to participate.

Milestones to measure accomplishments: Detailed plan for 1st Church-wide Youth Gathering (Dec 2011); hold 1st Church-wide Youth Gathering (summer, 2012); plan 2nd Church-wide Youth Gathering (); hold 2nd Church-wide Youth Gathering ()

Linkages to other OCA efforts: coordinate/de-conflict with various OCA summer camps

OBJECTIVE #4: Encourage ministering to college students

Action Steps: Actively support the OCF. The OCA should provide its share of the financial costs. Bishops should encourage their clergy to mentor and participate in OCFs and to register their college-bound students in the OCF directory. Priests should help their college-bound students find and ‘plug into’ a parish near their college and periodically check in with them to see how they are doing. Parishes should reach out to colleges in their area – welcoming Orthodox college students to their parish, arranging for rides and inviting them over for occasional meals, feast day celebrations, etc.

Owner: Diocesan bishops.

Resources Required: Time and commitment of clergy to mentor OCFs and keep in touch with their college age students; parishioners to provide rides and reach out in other ways. Approximately \$10,000/yr as the OCA’s share of the OCF budget.

Milestones to measure accomplishments: OCF a budget line on OCA annual budget (2012); Synodal Letter on College Ministry (2012).

Linkages to other OCA efforts: Department of Youth, Young Adults and Campus Ministry

OBJECTIVE #5: Reinstitution of Full-Time YYACM Director Position

Action Steps: Recommend the reinstitution of the position of OCA YYACM Director to full-time paid employee, as once mandated by the 1986 AAC. (The current part-time position provides only for about 10 hours per month and is not adequate to fulfill many of the objectives above.) The YYACM director will work closely with the diocesan/regional youth directors in meeting their needs and will bring them together in meeting at least once per year.

Owner: Holy Synod/MC

Resources Required: Approximately min of \$40,000/yr salary/stipend for a full time (40hrs/wk) youth director and about 12,000 in travel expenses for diocesan youth directors to participate in an annual meeting/workshop.

Milestones to measure accomplishments: Make this a budget line on OCA annual budget (2012)

Linkages to other OCA efforts: Department of Youth, Young Adults and Campus Ministry

V. AND NOW IT'S YOUR TURN TO INPUT

The preceding sections have given you some initial thoughts on how to more fully involve our high school and college age students in the life of the Church. Now it will be your turn to help revise, modify, refine this goal and the top level steps to actualizing it. During the AAC you will participate in two three-hour Breakout Sessions focused on this Goal. Breakout Session I will focus on what the Church as a whole (parish, deanery, diocese, Church-wide all together) should do. Breakout Session II will focus on the specific programs/projects you and your colleagues in the room, networked together could do to advance this goal.

During Breakout Session I, you and your colleagues will be asked :

1. What are the most critical things that need to be done by the Church as a whole to achieve this goal?
2. To list up to four specific objectives/initiatives for achieving the goal.

During the second Breakout Session, you and your colleagues will focus on specific action steps (concrete projects or programs) that you and your colleagues, connected together in networks, can do to actualize the objectives identified in Breakout Session I. Specifically you will be asked to:

1. List up to three specific programs and/or projects that we in this group should commit ourselves to. You will be asked to consider the answers with the context of “What *could* we do with the Lord’s help? What is “impossible with men but *possible with God*?”
2. For each program/project list the specifics of the program/project, i.e. what it will achieve, how will it be achieved, and what people need to be involved.

In preparing for these discussions, you might want to consider the questions below and to solicit input from some of the high school and college age students in your parish as well as from any parish, deanery or diocesan youth directors that you might have:

1. How well are the high school and college age students in your parish integrated into the life of the parish or the diocese or the broader Church? Do they feel involved in the life of the Church ?

