

Plenary Session VII Friday July 26, 2002

Youth Participation

Building upon the statements of the Youth and Young Adult Observers at the Eleventh and Twelfth All-American Councils about their dream and mission for the Church, the representatives from the Youth and Young Adult Observers of the 13th All-American Council presented statements to the Holy Synod of Bishops, and Council delegates and observers about their experience in the Council's youth and young adult activities which centered around the theme "The Parish Community: Our Life in Christ."

During the week of the Council, Youth Observers, who were broken up into four categories: six and under, seven to nine, ten to twelve, and thirteen to eighteen, discussed various aspects of the theme "Our Parish, Our Home" relative to their age group. The six and under playgroup discussed "The House that God Built", identifying the people in the church, the structure of our churches, and ways to draw closer to Christ. The seven to nine year old group discussed "God's Blueprint," describing the ways the person is reaffirmed in the Church and participates in its ministry. The ten to twelve year old group discussed "My Church, Our Home," exploring the ways the Church is built upon the foundation of Christ as well as their place within the Church. The thirteen to eighteen year old group discussed "My Parish: The Journey Home," reflecting on their ultimate "home" in God's Kingdom, and examining their place and role within the Church, how they are fed by the Church, and how they can spiritually strengthen those around them.

Most afternoons, Youth Observers went to theme parks such as DisneyQuest, Wonderworks, Universal Studios Islands of Adventure, Wet-N-Wild, and Fun Spot. This time gave the youth a chance to have fun and build up their relationships with other Orthodox youth. Also, the time spent at the theme parks gave the volunteer staff the opportunity to get to know the youth better and to share in their discoveries about their faith. What was discussed in the "class room" often played out as the youth interacted with each other and the staff on the various excursions.

The Young Adult Observers (eighteen to twenty-seven) attended the Council plenary sessions and several activities designed for them. Young adults were offered a series of discussions, presentations, and workshops geared specifically for them, and throughout the week, if they chose, the opportunity to attend several of the theme parks. Opportunities for fellowship also included the Monday evening Sleuth Mystery Dinner Theatre as well as "The Meeting Place" fellowship room that was available most nights with food and music for young adults to relax and get to know each other better.

Throughout the week, youth and young adult observers expressed the desire to meet before the next All-American Council. In many cases, an Orthodox youth may be the only Orthodox person his or her age in that area. The chance to meet and socialize with Orthodox people their own age means a great deal to them, and perhaps in the time between Councils deaneries will offer them this opportunity.

In their statements to the Holy Synod of Bishops, delegates, and observers of the Thirteenth All-American Council, the youth of the Orthodox Church in America, after considerable reflection, demonstrated in their statements their sincere desire to be fully integrated into the life of the church, to grow in the bonds of Christian fellowship, and to gain and lend spiritual strength from and to the Orthodox youth around them.