

Church Ministries / Departments

Department of Christian Education

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Accomplishments/Progress Since the 13th All-American Council

During the past triennium, changes in leadership, budget, and ministry organization forced a reevaluation of the ambitious goals put forth for our department in the report to the 13th All-American Council. As a result, the Department of Christian Education (DCE) began work on a new web site and undertook the task of converting the existing FOCUS units into lesson-plan form. This action was taken in response to requests from church school coordinators, teachers, and parents who had difficulty using the many valuable tools on the site as it had been previously organized.

The department approved a lesson-plan format, similar to one used by the Orthodox Christian Education Commission (OCEC), in order to remain uniform with what our teachers might already be familiar with, and several department members took on various aspects of the existing FOCUS units. This process became more time-consuming than initially anticipated, and involved some trial and error in the use of computer programs for editing and submitting material, but at this writing the project is largely complete.

In addition, work on the actual web site continued, and our problems mirrored some experienced by the Department of Communications in readying the larger site at www.oca.org. On March 2, 2005, the new DCE web site (<http://dce.oca.org>) "went live" along with the expanded OCA web site. The OCA home page contains a link to the DCE web site. Visitors can also navigate to the site from the DCE information page.

A new FOCUS unit titled *The Theotokos* has been written in the lesson-plan format, at all five levels, and appears on the site. The *Champions of Faith* curriculum for the Orthodox Church in America Youth Movement (OCAY) theme was completed and sent to parishes in January 2005. We are currently working on a unit about *Monasticism*, scheduled to be available in time for the 14th All-American Council. The DCE web developer maintains a web portal where material is submitted for editing before it is uploaded to the public site.

Other projects include the posting of previously written lessons for OCA appeals and several *All Parish Education* sessions piloted at Holy Trinity Orthodox Church, in Parma, OH. Department members have also been "on the road" collecting names for our database, conducting teacher training sessions with the OCEC, and encouraging those who are working in Orthodox Christian education to submit their ideas and concerns to the department. We look forward to posting lessons, plays, programs, and activities on our web site that have been "road tested" in parish life.

In January 2005 we reviewed and scanned more than 650 pages of material from the Archives at the OCA Chancery in

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Syosset, NY. These materials included previously distributed lessons, out-of-print publications, and partially completed lessons that are being cataloged and classified by a member of the department who has worked in library cataloging. As this work is completed the materials will be uploaded to our site.

The department has also been actively engaged in planning for the 14th All-American Council. We see the All-American Council as a tremendous opportunity to interface with clergy and laypeople. We have endeavored to provide an appropriate and meaningful display and materials to invite members of the Orthodox Church in America to visit our web site, make use of the provided materials, and submit materials for review and posting.

Plans for the Future

Future plans for the DCE include the development of additional FOCUS units, encouraging those working in Orthodox Christian education at the parish level to submit material for inclusion on the web site, ongoing development of our database and web site, and establishing and maintaining a greater degree of connectivity with parents and educators.

In an effort to provide outreach to parishes, while still working within the limited budget of the department, members have been visiting parishes while on their vacations or during travel for business to find out what educators and parents are doing successfully and where the department can be of assistance. We also hope to increase the number of writers in the department so that more material can be produced and made available.

A number of valuable department publications that have been distributed by the Orthodox Christian Publications Center require review and updating for republication at this time. These include some of the basic service texts printed in the late 1970s and the widely used *The Orthodox Faith* series, written by Fr. Thomas Hopko. The department has been reviewing these publications and discussing format changes in response to information provided by a number of individuals, both clergy and lay, who use the materials extensively.

Accountability

The department receives a budget from The Orthodox Church in America, and this source of funding provides for our web site development and administrative expenses. The members of the DCE are mostly educators who are involved in many areas of Church life and are generally not paid for their work for the department. We work in conjunction with the Department of Communications on our web site and in providing articles on Christian education for *The Orthodox Church* newspaper. We have provided consultation and review to the Department of Youth, Young Adult, and Campus Ministry and the Preconciliar Commission when requested. We worked with the Department of History and Archives to access and scan material for our web site.

There seems to be no end of ideas and projects that can be undertaken by the Department of Christian Education, but the resources for projects are extremely limited. Although expanding membership in the department might lighten the load for the relatively few, extremely hard-working members who currently develop materials, expansion would also bring an increased administrative and editing load, and a heightened need to coordinate projects and make certain that they are consistent in both form and theological content. The department needs to expand to include those working "in the field" who can contribute at a greater level, but there also needs to be a core group with increased responsibilities, appropriately remunerated, who can devote time and talent to coordinating projects and providing leadership.