

## O. N. E.

## ORTHODOX NEW ENGLAND

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**Right:** Fr. Moses, Director of Youth Rally, also volunteered at Three Saints Vacation Church School. Sophia Cole's article is accompanied by a collection of scenes from VCS, which is supported by a Diocesan Grant.

*Reflections on Youth Rally 2022***Sophia Cole**

In 2018, I finally got to join my brother and the other “big kids” of the Diocese of New England at the annual Youth Rally. It was my first Rally, but it was also the last before camp took a three-year hiatus. In that time, my parish transitioned to new leadership and our new pastor, Father Moses Locke, became the Youth Coordinator for the Diocese. This year, Youth Rally was back in full swing at the Saint

Methodios Faith and Heritage Center in New Hampshire!

When we arrived, we were greeted by our counselors, many of whom had attended Rally when they were younger. We were welcomed to our cabins — one for the girls and one for the boys. Each cabin is separated into a room for the Alphas (the older campers) and a room for the Omegas (the younger ones). After we got set-

*“Youth Rally” continued on page 4*

# Love, Loss and the Holy Spirit

Michelle Thornton

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My daughter, Bethany was very ill when she was four days old. For twenty-four hours, we were not sure if she would make it. But she did. I remember feeling afraid and uncertain about the future after bringing her home from the hospital after a month in the NICU (neonatal intensive care unit). She had brain damage from her illness and the doctors couldn't say what her special needs would be. What now? During this time, I turned to God and asked for strength to be the best mom I could be for her. I loved her no matter what her abilities were, but I also wanted her to know that she was loved. I asked, "Please, God, help her know

how much she is loved." This would be enough.

As each day passed, Bethany grew and changed. She couldn't do everything the other children could, but she could do a lot of things that the doctors didn't think she would. Every little accomplishment was a celebration for her and for us. Most importantly, she showed everyone love and everyone loved her. From the beginning, Bethany knew she was loved, which was clear by her enthusiastic interactions with others, and I believe that that is why she was able to do more than anyone expected. This was the Holy Spirit working in our lives and in her life.

I knew early on that Bethany was here to teach us important lessons. Lessons about loving unconditionally, being patient, kind, and joyful. She spread so much joy during her life to

**I knew early on that Bethany was here to teach us important lessons. Lessons about loving unconditionally, being patient, kind, and joyful.**

**Right:** Bethany with her mother Michelle.



**Left:** Bethany Anastasia Thornton.



**Right:** Fr. Mircea Geana praying at Bethany's funeral.



everyone she met. Her smile, her enthusiasm, her singing, and her pure innocence were things that everyone admired about her. She touched so many lives in such important ways. The Holy Spirit was working through this beautiful girl. I realized how blessed I was to be her mother. Yes, it was hard, there were difficult days for sure, but I learned the lessons she was here to teach, and I saw how everyone else was learning from her, too. She was a gift to us all.

Bethany passed away in the spring of this year. When she passed, I felt the same fear and uncertainty about moving forward in my life that I did when we brought her home from the hospital. For almost 28 years, I had poured my heart and soul into caring for her.

What now? I turned to God once more and asked for strength to carry on without her. The only difference was that this time, I felt some level of peace through the whole thing because I was looking back at her life knowing how richly I had been blessed by her. I knew that I would

continue to be blessed by her. We all would.

It is this peace and certainty from the Holy Spirit that has given me strength to trust in what is to come. The trust to know that even though she is not in the physical world anymore, she is here with me and will continue to bless me as she did during her life on earth.

Thank you, Bethany, for the lessons you taught during your life with us and the lessons you continue to teach. I love you, my beautiful angel in heaven! We all love you, and I know that you know this! Glory be to God!

*Note: Bethany (Anastasia) Thornton, 27, whose sweet soul and cheerful personality touched everyone who met her, passed away unexpectedly on April 4, 2022, just a few weeks before her 28th birthday. Bethany and her mother Michelle belong to Holy Trinity Orthodox Church, Springfield, Vermont.*

**ONE** †



## *Youth Rally continued from page 1*

**Above: Fr. Mose Locke and Fr. Patrick Burns** (organizer of Three Saints Vacation Church School) concelebrated services at the camp this July. Fr. Patrick later participated in Youth Rally as well.



tled in, we hung out in the dining hall before orientation with Father Moses and Father Patrick Burns. It was amazing to reconnect with the friends I had made at Rally '18 and to meet other Orthodox kids from all over New England.

We then ate dinner, of course, and Mr. Nick—the head chef—made mealtime fun as he did all week. At each meal, we had a different group of campers helping to serve. During one of the turns the Alpha Girls had, Mr. Nick made sure we let nobody sit down without a helping of pickled onions on their plates! One day while we waited to eat, Father Patrick initiated an impromptu joke session, and Rachel—one of the Alpha Girl counselors—set everybody laughing with her rather unique humor!

Some things stayed the same all week, like services in the chapel, daily Bible lessons, and swimming and canoeing at the waterfront; but others changed from day to day. The daily activity was always different. We had a scavenger hunt (which my team won for the second year in a row), movie night, a Stump the Priest session during Bible study, and, of course, a trip to Canobie

Lake Amusement Park, just to name a few. One of the most memorable parts of Canobie Lake was when we went on the roller coaster Untamed with Father Moses. The people in line behind us turned out to be Orthodox, so we went on a fully Orthodox cart on the ride. Some of my friends didn't go on, they stayed on the ground to film our priest screaming all the way down the roller coaster! Friday night, we had a bonfire where many campers shared their talents with instruments, skits, jokes, and sing-alongs, and we ate a few too many s'mores and cupcakes.

There was a period of electives each day, during which we had sports, crafts, Bible study, and some of us went on a very memorable hike through the Camp! We discovered some of the beautiful trails on the property, looked out over the lake, and met some not-so-friendly ground wasps on our shortcut around a huge puddle (which was more like a small pond).

Mixed in with all of our fun was plenty of church and spiritual growth. We started each day with Matins and ended with Compline. The choir at



**Below: Fr. John Parker**, Dean of St. Tikhon's Seminary visited VCS.

**Right:** Fun and games at camp.

Rally, directed by counselors Mark and Lazi, was beautiful! We had choir lessons and learned many beautiful hymns. Every day, the whole camp did Bible study together. For some activities, we broke into small groups with our scavenger hunt teammates for discussions and to come up with questions for the priests. Our theme this year was “Encountering God” and all of our Bible studies centered around this.

Camp drew to an end on Saturday morning, with Divine Liturgy before we went up to the dining hall for breakfast. Pretty soon, our parents started to arrive and we finally had to say goodbye to our friends. After a ton of hugs, saying “bye” about a hundred times, and our friends waving from the dining hall porch, we



left Rally ‘22, already looking forward to Rally ‘23.

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## *ONE Stewards: “Giving above and Beyond”*

Your “giving above and beyond” to ONE Stewards enables the Diocese to in turn “give above and beyond” to the following essential Diocesan programs:

- Youth Rally and other Youth Programs
- Seminaries and Scholarships for Seminarians
- Support for Diocesan Missions
- Charitable Giving to support programs like IOCC, OCMC, OCA Stewards

2022 saw the return of the Diocesan Youth Rally and it was a major success for everyone who attended. However, the cost of the Youth Rally has increased substantially. Your help is needed more than ever to support the Rally and the other Diocesan programs that ONE Stewards donations help fund.

For the first time in over 10 years the 2022 donations did **not** meet our budgeted goal. Let’s reverse that in 2023 and set a new all-time record for ONE Stewards donations. Be on the lookout for the 2023 ONE Stewards reply envelopes in your mail at the end of February. You can get a head start by donating online at our Diocesan website, <https://dneoca.org>

During our upcoming Lenten journey, let us all commit to prayer, fasting, and charitable giving. Thank you for your continued support.

***Please note the new mailing address for ONE Stewards:***

**Rev. Justin Griffing, St. Nicholas Orthodox Church,  
PO Box 1569, Lanesborough, MA 01237-1569**

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**Right:** Orthodox youth assembled in Poland. Organizer Archdeacon Joseph Matusiak sits at center left.

## *“Go and Bear Fruit”: The 2022 World Gathering of Orthodox Youth (Part 1)*

Rev. Dn. Mark Roosien

This past July, an international group of around 90 Orthodox Christian youth gathered in Suprasl, Poland. Inspired by pan-Orthodox youth movements like Syndesmos and the Russian Student Christian Movement, the 2022 World Gathering of Orthodox Youth came together “to experience the unity and universality of our Holy Orthodox Faith, to be inspired by engaging leaders, stimulating discussion, and tangible ways to continue bearing fruit together, and throughout the world.” Organized by Archdeacon Joseph Matusiak and hosted by Metropolitan Sawa of Warsaw and All Poland, the gathering included participants from the Middle East, Africa, North America, and all corners of Europe, representing 10 of

the world’s autocephalous Orthodox Churches.

Throughout the week of July 18-24, young people sang in services, participated in workshops and lectures, and collaborated on creative projects. The organizing theme for all of these activities was John 15:16, where Jesus says to his disciples, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit.” Presentations focused on practical, youth-related topics, including guidelines on how to organize pan-Orthodox youth camps, activities to address the climate crisis, and exercises for understanding the role of creativity in the life of faith. Workshop presenters included missionaries Steve and Theophani Sargianis of OCMC (Orthodox Christian Mission Center), Nicholas Sooy of OPF (Or-



thodox Peace Fellowship), and psychologist Fr Vasileios Thermos.

One of the high points of the gathering was a pilgrimage to the Monastery of Sts. Mary and Martha on the Holy Mountain of Grabarka. There, participants planted a two-meter-tall cross amidst the monastery's famous forest of crosses. Earlier in the week, artist and author Davor Džalto painted the cross, and the participants signed their names on it. Another highlight was the Cultural Evening, held on the first day of the gathering. Youth from each of the 22 countries represented at the Gathering shared songs, folk dances, stories, and treats from their respective cultures.

But perhaps the most imposing presence at the Gathering was the figure of St Maria of Paris. St Maria, a Russian who emigrated to Paris after the Bolshevik Revolution, made it her life's mission to serve the poor and give up her life for others. Taking monastic vows in the early 1930's, she started a mission center in the slums of Paris called Orthodox Action, which expanded from there to other locations in France. Within this organization, St Maria and her co-laborers ministered to the neediest, not only by providing food and temporary shelter, but also

**Top:** Orthodox youth plant a cross.



**Upper Middle:** The cross was inscribed with the names of participants.



**Lower middle:** Metropolitan Sawa of Poland visits the Gathering.



**Bottom:** Singers at the Cultural Night.



**Above:** Another scene from the Cultural Night.



through liturgical services and lectures on religious and philosophical topics given by clergy and scholars within the Russian Orthodox émigré community. After the Nazi occupation of France, Orthodox Action dedicated itself to protecting those most vulnerable to Nazi violence, especially Jews. St Maria's life of sacrifice and service culminated in her death in a gas chamber in the Ravensbrück concentration camp, after reportedly taking the place of a Jewish woman who was set to be executed.

St Maria's feast day fell during the week of the Gathering, and on that day a local theater troupe performed an original play based on her life titled "No One can Be A Number," written by playwright Joanna Troc. You can view part of the performance here:

<https://youtu.be/gEHq9k2LTdU>

The young actors gave a moving performance that showed both the full drama of St Maria's remarkable life and work, and also inspired viewers to consider the ways they could use their own talents to serve God and serve others, to "bear fruit" in the vineyard of the Kingdom.

**Below:** Nicholas Sooy speaks at the Gathering.



My own participation in the World Gathering of Orthodox Youth was also related to St Maria. As part of my ThM degree program at St Vladimir's Seminary, I am currently researching the history of Orthodox Action and translating written works by St Maria and her co-laborers in the movement. Archdeacon Joseph asked me to present some of this material about St Maria's life and work (over Zoom). In the next issue of ONE, I will offer some of my comments from the Gathering in hopes that her witness and her words will inspire us, too, to think of ways we can "bear fruit," offering ourselves in service to God and our neighbor, here in our own Diocese of New England. **ONE** †



## *What Are the Characteristics of Effective Parishes?*

Mka. Jenny Mosher

The Telos Project is an ongoing research and ministry design project exploring how Orthodox parishes and young adults engage with one another. Funded by the Lilly Endowment Inc as part of their wider Young Adult Initiative (YAI), it was originally based at Hellenic College and is now hosted by the CrossRoad Institute in Cambridge, Mass.

The Telos Project is an intentionally pan-Orthodox effort; the original cohort was made up of twelve Orthodox parishes of varying jurisdictions and included three OCA parishes.

Last issue, we looked at “Congregational Culture,” the second category in the Lilly Endowment's “Characteristics of Effective Congregations.”

This month, we examine the final two categories: “Congregational Engagement with Young Adults” and “Religious and Spiritual Life.”

### Characteristic 3: Congregational Engagement of Youth Adults

Like every relationship, Congregational Engagement of Young Adults (YAs) is a two-way street, with some elements the responsibility of YAs and some the responsibili-



**Above:** Holy Trinity, Springfield, Vermont, hosted the first day of the Diocesan Assembly this October, 2022.

ty of the wider parish. The best results are seen when both YAs and the parish do not wait for the other to “fix themselves,” but step up with generosity to enact the change they want to see.

**Below:** Holy Resurrection, Claremont, New Hampshire, hosted the second day of the Assembly.



**YA commitment plays a role.** Effective parishes may be of any size and have a YA presence that may be small but is committed. It's enough to start with a small handful of YAs—even just two or three—who want to reach out to others and commit to building community together. A YA peer group can be contagious and attractive to other YAs especially if they feel cared for by priests and other recognized leaders and members of the congregation.

**Integration:** Effective parishes integrate YAs into all facets of parish leadership and life. YAs tend to resist ministries that seem like an extension of youth activities and are frustrated when they encounter arbitrary barriers to serving and leading in the parish in substantive ways.

**Social Issues:** Effective parishes are engaged in one or more social issues that concern YAs. They nurture cul-

**Young adults tend to resist ministries that seem like an extension of youth activities and are frustrated when they encounter arbitrary barriers to serving in the parish in substantive ways.**

tures that welcome dialogue and engagement both within the parish and with those outside of the parish. Effective parishes also are aware that when YAs encounter others who disagree with them, they experience tension between their moral ideals and their pluralistic values; this can

create challenging dynamics for priests and leaders, but should be welcomed as a sign of necessary personal development and growth.

**Life-Stage Challenges:** Effective parishes find ways to help YAs who feel unprepared for the challenges of life.

Many young people face economic instability (exacerbated by student educational debt, joblessness, low incomes, etc.) and are often discerning major life decisions about careers, marriage and children.

#### Characteristic 4: Religious and Spiritual Life

The final characteristic of effective congregations has to do with religious and spiritual life. As might be expected, Telos' experience of this characteristic diverged from the experiences of our Protestant and Catholic colleagues—*but the importance of religious and spiritual life in supporting Orthodox YAs proved just as critical.*

**Below:** John Skrobat stepped down as Diocesan Treasurer at this year's Diocesan Assembly. He was given a copy of the diocesan icon in thankful recognition for his exemplary service.





**Right:** John and Joan Skrobat were awarded a Gramota at the Divine Liturgy during the Diocesan Assembly. Both have devotedly served the diocese for many years.



**Theology and Spiritual Formation:** Effective parishes nurture open dialogue regarding theological questions and issues. Clergy and lay leaders welcome YA questions and YAs find especially inspiring exploring Orthodox traditions beyond those of their home parish, broadening their sense of the breadth of Orthodoxy (when they can otherwise feel isolated). Many YAs do not feel adequately prepared to engage others from the standpoint of a theological tradition, and so when parish leaders help these YAs learn how to draw from their theological traditions in pluralistic environments, YA engagement increases.

**Spiritual Practices:** YAs have deep spiritual longings, but they do not necessarily see the relevance of the Christian tradition for their personal

**When parish leaders help these young adults learn how to draw from their theological traditions in pluralistic environments, their engagement increases.**

lives. Effective parishes frame religious practices in ways that help YAs connect them with everyday experiences. Some parishes are skilled at connecting theology to social issues, but this alone is insufficient. YAs also

long for experiences of God and transcendence.

In summary, there are many ways our parishes can improve the practices by which we engage YAs. But ultimately, we must remember

that Orthodox faith and practice is a banquet meant to feed our souls and give us strength for our earthly journey. Telos work is meant to ask in an ongoing way the questions with which the project began: Do your young adults feel fed? If not, why not? And what can you do about it?

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## Upcoming

- Feb. 10**                      **Deadline for next issue of the ONE**
- Feb. 22**                      **Diocesan Council Meeting online**
- March 5**                      **Sunday of Orthodoxy Vespers at Holy Ghost, Bridgeport**
- Mar. 12:**                      **CT Deanery Vespers at Christ the Savior, Southbury**
- Mar. 26:**                      **CT Deanery Vespers at Sts. Cyril and Methodius, Terryville**
- Apr. 2**                         **Holy Unction Service at Three Saints, Ansonia**
- Apr. 9**                         **CT Deanery Bridegroom Matins at Holy Trinity Church, New Britain**