CHALLENGE

THE PULSE OF ORTHODOX YOUTH

Rise to the Christian Challenge

by Eva Kokkinos

Being a Christian goes beyond "saying" you're a Christian. That probably seems like an obvious statement. But are we truly living up to the title we have accepted? We must remember that Christians are given a challenge… to stand up and actively participate in the life of the Church, modeling our lives after Christ Himself.

This May, we celebrate the Feast of the Ascension of our Lord on the fortieth day after His Resurrection.

As we commemorate Christ's Ascension into heaven, rising up above even death itself, how does one begin to actively participate in the Christian Challenge? What are some of the ways we can "rise up" above the temptations and challenges of the world and live a life in Christ?

BE PRAYERFUL

Jesus Christ always found time to pray and give thanks. For example, Christ went to the desert for 40 days to pray. He also prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane prior to his betrayal and arrest. Prayer is a very simple, but important way you can emulate Christ. Prayer is also an active way in which you can build and strengthen your relationship with Christ. You can pray virtually any time and anywhere.

BE KIND

Jesus Christ showed mercy and kindness, even to those who were outcast by society. There are many examples in Holy Scripture that show the importance of reaching out to your neighbor. Look up the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).

You can also look at the life of someone like St. Basil the Great. So whether you encounter new students, old friend, or even an enemy, we are called to be kind and serve ALL of our neighbors.

Remember, we have all been created in God's image.

Most importantly, Christ was sent by God for all mankind… friends and foes.

BE AN EXAMPLE

Jesus Christ talked the talk AND walked the walk. He showed us how to be all of the things that God wants us to be. The Saints are also incredible examples of people who, through piety, faith, love for God, accomplished the extraordinary. If you see someone being bullied, stand up for them.

If your friend is struggling to make the right decision, be a role model. If you have talents, make sure to use them! Your example can help people see that it IS possible to live a Christian life.

Eva Kokinos is a 2003 graduate of Holy Cross School of Theology. She currently serves as the director of Youth and Young Adult Ministries for the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Detroit.

Why Choose a Summer Camp?

Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am in the midst of them.
Matthew 18:20

Soon school will be out for summer break. Most kids are already thinking… "Where are we going for vacation?" or "What am I going to do with my friends?" Out of all of the places in the world, why should I choose to attend summer Church camp? It is a question that some young people ask their parents, youth workers, and friends. But talk to any young person who has attended an Orthodox Christian summer camp. Chances are they will tell you that there is nowhere else they would rather be than at camp. Ultimately, summer camp can be a transformative experience in the life of a young person. Orthodox Christian summer camps offer young people the unique opportunity to live in an Orthodox Christian community of their peers...worshipping, learning, sharing, and having a great time.

So why would anyone choose to go to an Orthodox Christian summer camp? Here are a few reasons why it can be a positive, transformative, and life-changing experience:

• Campers learn about worship. More importantly, campers actively participate in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church. Campers learn about and participate in Orthodox Christian Worship, like morning/evening prayers, prayers before meals, Divine Liturgy, and participation in the Holy Sacraments of the Eucharist and Confession.

• Campers learn how to confidently and effectively express their faith as an Orthodox Christian. Expressing one's faith to others can be a difficult aspect of being a Christian. So it is important to learn how to Witness your faith as an Orthodox Christian. Camp provides a safe and educational environment for campers to participate in sessions about Orthodoxy, Team-Building Activities, and Leadership Activities.

• Campers learn how to serve God, serve each other, and to serve all of their "neighbors." From daily cabin clean-up to local and international philanthropic projects, campers truly learn how and why we Serve and take care of our neighbor.

• Campers are able to live in an Orthodox Christian community of peers and HAVE FUN. Orthodox Christian summer camps are filled with incredible activities that are enjoyed in Fellowship; canoeing, sports, arts and crafts, music, hanging out with friends, making new ones, and much more. For a list of Orthodox Christian camps in the Archdiocese, visit *www.goarch.org/archdiocese/departments/youth/camping.*

Spring Spiritual 'Tune-Up'

Spring is typically the time of the year when many people feel motivated to make changes and improvements. As the weather begins to improve and we aren't confined to our homes, we start those long-overdue projects we couldn't take care of in the wintertime.

Many of us make home improvements or get our landscape ready for our gardens. We also get rid of things that we don't need… simplifying and organizing our lives.

The Resurrection of our Lord fills us with hope, joy, and a renewed spirit to live our faith in word and deed. So why not take this time to do a little Spring Spiritual Tune-Up? Here are a few suggestions for taking this springtime (or anytime) to simplify and organize your spiritual life:

1) Organize your schedule: Spring is that time of year that we tend to have a new schedule. It might be a new school semester or a new season of sports. Spring tends to be a news season in our liturgical life as well. After attending the Lenten, Holy Week, and Pascha services, it is easy to "take a break" from worship. But make sure to organize your schedule with worship and prayer as a priority. Making worship and prayer essential parts of our lives will help us keep all other things in order!

2) "Tidy up" your life: Spring is that time of year when people throw out or remove things that tend to clutter up the house. We always feel wonderful when we've cleaned up our homes, de-cluttered our garages and basements, or we have cleaned up the landscape in order that people can see our beautiful homes. Chances are there are some things in our lives that we could "tidy up" to feel that sense of renewal. We can clean up the things we say and way we speak to others. We can also tidy up our actions, thinking about how our actions affect us and those around us. We might even "tidy up" our circle of friends, choosing to spend more time with those who help us grow closer to God.

3) Donate to those who need: After all of our spring cleaning, we might see that we have things that we don't use.

Many people choose to donate extra clothes, toys, and other gently used items to those who are less fortunate. As we de-clutter our spiritual lives, we might realize that we have more time to serve our "neighbor." So, we can donate our time, talents, and treasures with those who are less fortunate than you.

4) Work on your "spiritual" fitness: Winter can take its toll on our physical fitness. There are the few and dedicated who brave the elements to go to the gym or go for a jog. But most of us tend to stay in… Beginning with Great Lent, Orthodox Christians come out of "hibernation" by working on spiritual disciplines like prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. This spring, why not continue working on our spiritual disciplines? We can continue to have a more dedicated prayer life. We can continue to observe the remaining fasting periods of the liturgical year. Of course, we can continue our commitment to service and philanthropy.

Taking God with You After Graduation

Many high school and college graduates have long and detailed lists of all the things they want to take with them to their new dorm room or new apartment. We simply can't forget our favorite pictures, books, or even games. But are we making sure to take God with us? Here are just a few ways that ALL graduates can make God a priority as they transition to a new part of their lives:

1) Find the nearest Orthodox Christian church, pronto!

You would never wait years and years to find a new doctor or dentist or even mechanic in a new area. So why would you put off finding the local Orthodox Christian Church? Speak to your priest to learn about the Orthodox Christian churches in the area of your college/university. Your priest might even know the other priest in that area!

2) The Bible… Don't leave home without it!

It is quite possible you will be in an area that does not have an Orthodox Church nearby. Or, you might not be able to get to Church as often as you would like. This doesn't mean our prayer life has to be put on hold. Make sure to take your Bible and a prayer book with you to school. It is important to maintain and grow in our devotion to prayer and study of the Scripture.

3) Icons… Keeping Christ in our sight, in our minds, and in our hearts.

Iconography is incredibly beautiful and inspirational. It is so much more than artwork. It is yet another way we are reminded about the lives of Christ, as well as the lives of the saints. Use your icons to create a home iconostasis. Select a special place to mount or set your icons where you can offer prayers. Having this constant presence in your dorm or apartment is a wonderful way to keep yourself focused on your commitment to Christ.

4) Find or start an OCF chapter

OCF (Orthodox Christian Fellowship) is the official campus ministries organization of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese. OCF provides college students with that on-campus presence of religious education, worship, service, and Christian fellowship. This is imperative since that connection to the Church can be lost after leaving high school. Find out if there is a chapter on your campus. Visit www.ocf.net. No chapter on your campus? No problem! Be a leader and start a chapter. Speak to the local priest and contact OCF to inquire about starting a chapter!

FOR YOUTH WORKERS AND PARENTS

• Don't forget to sign up for the YOUTH WORKER PULSE! This is the weekly listserv of the Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries. Subscribers will receive valuable tips, tools, and resources for creating a successful and transformative youth ministry experience. Sign up today at www.youth.goarch.org.

• Are you on FACEBOOK? If you are a member of Facebook, you can visit us on our GOYA and Young Adult Ministries fan pages! Search for GOYA – Greek Orthodox Youth of America or Greek Orthodox National Young Adult Ministries and BECOME A FAN TODAY!