

CHALLENGE

THE PULSE OF ORTHODOX YOUTH

Being Stewards of Each Other

by Eva Kokinos

Happy New Year!

A new year always makes us reflect on the last year and how we can improve ourselves. A new year brings an excitement and anticipation since we do not know what lies ahead of us. People have made their New Year's Resolutions like joining the gym, getting organized, or making better food choices. Unfortunately, we can get caught up in thinking about what we can do for ourselves and we forget about the bigger picture...caring for our neighbor.

There is a great song by the Hollies... "He Ain't Heavy... He's My Brother." The song talks about the long road that we travel which leads us, unsure of where it will end. But the song emphasizes a sense of responsibility that we should have for each other, regardless of the road or journey that we might encounter. Here are some of the lyrics:

*"The road is long,
with many a winding turn
That leads us to who knows where,
who knows when
But I'm strong, strong enough to carry him
He ain't heavy, he's my brother...
It's a long, long road from which there is
no return.
While we're on the way to there,
why not share?
And the load, doesn't weigh me down at
all...
He ain't heavy, he's my brother."*

In December 2012, we witnessed the unpredictability of this long and winding road. We would be hard pressed to find an individual who has not been deeply distraught and affected by the events that transpired in Newtown, Conn. It never fails that, even in these times of turmoil and despair, we see the true integrity, strength, and faith of the human spirit. Many of us have

been moved by the stories of selflessness in the Newtown tragedy and throughout the past year. There are individuals who accepted the responsibility to help carry and help their fellow human beings, putting their own lives in danger in order to help others to safety.

When it comes down to it, we know that our lives are not meant only for ourselves. It is when we help our neighbor that we feel an overwhelming sense of completion. When we help our brothers and sisters, we fulfill the second part of the Greatest Commandment... to love our neighbor as ourselves. The Holy Traditions and Scriptures teach us, time and time again, about the importance of loving and caring for our neighbor. The Parable of the Good Samaritan, the Parable of the Last Judgment, and the Greatest Commandment are just a few examples of these lessons.

So what is the challenge that lies before us in this New Year? To take a few lines from the song... "It's a long, long road from which there is no return... so while we are on the way to there... why not share?" In other words, we should not merely do for ourselves as we make our Christian journey.

We must give to truly live. We all must become stewards not only to God and His Church, but also to each other. We can be stewards to each other by lifting others up rather than breaking them down with negativity, gossip, and jealousy.

Time and time again, we know that these things never bear fruit. We are reminded of St. Paul's words to the Corinthians... "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal." (1 Corinthians 13:1)

We can be stewards to each other by offering some of our time and resources to help those who are less fortunate than we are. There are many whose lives have been ravaged by war, natural disaster, heinous crimes, and the devastating effects of an

unstable economy. Our Lord reminds us with these words... "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me." (Matthew 25:40)

We can be stewards to each other by serving as an example of faith and discipline to all those around us; inspiring others to follow Christ. Our Lord and Savior teaches us this lesson... "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:14-16).

If each and every one of us makes every effort to be there for others, inevitably, no one will be alone. No one will have to carry the weight of life alone. No one will feel like they are traveling down that winding road alone. No one will feel like they are weathering the storms of turmoil and evil alone. Our Lord reminds us at the end of the Great Commission that, ultimately, we are never alone... "And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)

As we begin our journey into 2013, may our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who willingly gave His life in order that we may live, continue to show us how to be an icon of unconditional love and service to each other. May He give us the wisdom and strength to not only be good stewards to our fellow Orthodox Christians, but also to be stewards and protectors for every person that we encounter so that ALL can be lifted above pain, sorrow, or suffering to eternal life.

Eva Kokinos serves as director of Youth and Young Adult Ministries of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Detroit. She received a Masters of Theological Studies from Holy Cross School of Theology in 2003.

Do Something "REAL" this Spring Break!

The Real Break program provides an alternative to the "traditional" Spring Break. It exists to provide the most authentic experience possible, modeled as a full Christian lifestyle, which includes fellowship, prayer within community, witness and service. OCF organizes both domestic and international trips to give College students the opportunity to serve those less fortunate and to do something "real" for themselves and for God. OCF's Real Break has been running since 2000 with over a thousand students participating in these life-changing trips. Past trips have included: Mexico, Guatemala, Jerusalem, Constantinople, Raphael House, St. Basil Academy, Greece, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Romania, Buenos Aires, Alaska, and more.

INTEGRITY AS AN ORTHODOX

For many, Lance Armstrong was the picture-perfect example of hard work, dedication, and integrity. He was revered as a seven-time Tour De France champion and a cancer survivor. But just this month, Armstrong admitted to Oprah that he regularly used "performance enhancing drugs" to succeed. While we understand that no one is perfect, we might wonder what happened to honesty and integrity. In general, having integrity means being true and steadfast to one's beliefs. But today, we are pressured to "keep up" with reality star families, to break sports records, to get the high profile endorsements, etc. So having integrity can be overpowered by corruption, chaos, and divisiveness as the tools to gain success and popularity. At what cost are we, as Orthodox Christians, willing to be successful? What does it mean to be an Orthodox Christian with integrity?

1) Someone who strives to adhere, or follow, the teachings of the Orthodox Christian faith. A basketball player might not be the best in the league. But they will be respected if they learn the sport, work hard, and do the best they can.

2) Someone who seeks completeness and incorruptibility through Christ! One of the most important ways to restore ourselves is to prepare and participate regularly in the Holy Sacraments.

3) Someone who seeks peace and soundness through prayer and fasting. Our lives are complicated with busy schedules, ringing smartphones, crime and violence, etc. It can send our minds spinning, unable to focus or feel at peace. Having integrity as an Orthodox Christian means being able to step back to and find the true source of peace... through Christ.

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For more information about Real Break or how to help a student take part in the Real Break program, visit www.ocf.net

FOR PARENTS AND YOUTH WORKERS

• Ionian Village, the summer camping ministry of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, is now accepting registrations for its Summer 2013 programs. Visit www.ionianvillage.org or contact the Office of Ionian Village at (212) 570-3536.

• 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! These fan pages have information about GOYA and Young Adult Ministries events from throughout the Archdiocese. Also, fans are connecting and talking about different issues regarding faith and life! Just search for GOYA - Greek Orthodox Youth of America or Greek Orthodox National Young Adult Ministries and BECOME A FAN TODAY!!

Real Break
this spring, be a light to the world

Guatemala: March 1-9, 2013
Honduras: March 2-9, 2013
New Orleans: March 4-9, 2013
Constantinople: March 8-16, 2013
Toronto: March 9-16, 2013
Project Mexico: March 16-23, 2013
LA Skid Row: March 25-29, 2013

OCF
ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP
CAMPUS MINISTRY

OCF Real Break is a popular alternative to the traditional spring break. Each year, hundreds of college students go out on trips across North America and the entire world to serve those in need. This Spring, take a trip that will change your life. More information and registration at www.ocf.net

2013 OCF REAL BREAK

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