

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **BACKGROUND**

**The Challenge Liturgy Program (Ministry) was co-founded in April 1990 by Rev. Fr. Dennis Strouzas, Protopresbyter, Archangel Michael Greek Orthodox Church, Roslyn Heights (Long Island), New York and Marina and Emanuel Katsoulis**

**It is directed to a segment of the Orthodox community that has been underserved**

**It is a liturgy-centered program that enables mentally and physically challenged Orthodox Christians and their families to meet monthly and to participate in the Divine Liturgy at a pace that is appropriate to their needs**

**The Challenge Liturgy Program, a regional program located at the Archangel Michael Church, presently serves families from eight (8) Long Island parishes**

**The Program is celebrating its 14<sup>th</sup> year of monthly liturgies and gatherings**

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

**To reach-out to mentally and physically challenged Orthodox Christians and their families and to welcome them into the full life of the Church.**

**Acknowledging their special circumstances and special needs, to offer religious and social programs that embrace them and that permit them to participate in accordance with their abilities.**

**Participation in the Divine Liturgy is to be the cornerstone of such offered programs. To facilitate participation, a regularly scheduled liturgy followed by catechesis, to be called The Challenge Liturgy, shall be offered that is to be conducted in a supportive and accepting environment and in a manner that is appropriate to their needs.**

**Activities that promote socialization & social service programs aimed at enhancing the quality-of-life will be an integral part of our endeavor.**

**These special religious and social programs are to comprise and be known collectively as THE CHALLENGE LITURGY PROGRAM ( 2 )**

## **PROGRAM HISTORY**

### **SCOPE OF PROGRAM**

**The Challenge Liturgy program is a liturgy-centered program for mentally and physically challenged Orthodox Christians and their families**

**Once a month (on the third Saturday of the month) they attend a liturgy that is conducted in a supportive, accepting environment in a manner that is appropriate to their needs**

**A reception following the liturgy provides families an opportunity to develop friendships, socialize, and exchange information. Group members assist each other by serving as advocates, information gatherers and translators**

**Invited speakers on topics of mutual interest, such as guardianship, group home placement, estate planning, Medicare/Medicaid, occasionally address the group. The program addresses only quality-of-life issues and does not compete or interfere with the professional assistance individuals require & receive elsewhere**

## **PROGRAM HISTORY**

### **PROGRAM PARTICIPATION**

**About forty (40) challenged individuals, accompanied by parents and/or siblings, regularly attend the monthly liturgy**

**Eight (8) Long Island parishes are represented by the participants**

**Challenged individuals range in age from 4 years to 43 years**

**Sixty-five percent (65%) are male and thirty-five percent (35%) female**

**All either attend school (under 21 years old) or day programs**

**All, except three (3), reside at home with family**

## **PROGRAM HISTORY**

### **PROGRAM MILESTONES**

- Apr 1990 First Challenge Liturgy (three (3) families attended)**
- Dec 1990 First Christmas party**
- Jan 1995 Started car pool service to Astoria, NY**
- May 1995 Bishop Alexios of Troas celebrates 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Liturgy**
- May 1995 Senior choir sings at Liturgy**
- Sept 1997 Started bus service to Astoria, NY**
- Sept 1997 Archbishop Spyridon celebrates Liturgy**
- Oct 1997 Patriarch Bartholomew gives Communion to Group at  
Patrtiarchal Liturgy**
- Dec 1998 Expanded bus service to include Corona**
- May 1999 First Annual Spring picnic**
- May 2000 Fr. Gabriel Karambis celebrates 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Liturgy**
- May 2000 Junior choir sings at 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Liturgy**
- July 2001 Article featuring program ran in NY Newsday Newspaper**
- Dec 2002 First of several visits by Bishop Andonios of Phasiane**
- Apr 2004 Archbishop Demetrios celebrates Liturgy**

## **PROGRAM ACTIVITIES**

### **RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES**

**Monthly Liturgy is core of program**

**Monthly catechism lesson follows Liturgy Topics include: stories depicted in icons, Saint's name day, items used in the liturgy, elements of the liturgy, etc.**

### **SOCIAL ACTIVITIES**

**Limited to monthly reception and annual Spring picnic and Christmas party**

### **SOCIAL SERVICE ACTIVITIES**

**Self-help group. Participants exchange information concerning problems, experiences, case management issues, etc.**

**Participants assist each other and serve as advocates and translators, when required**

### **LEGAL SERVICES**

**Parishioner lawyer provides pro-bono legal services for guardianship matters**

## **PROGRAM BENEFITS**

### **BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS**

**Family members and challenged individuals experience spiritual fulfillment**

**Family members enjoy camaraderie, friendship and acceptance as they socialize with others in similar circumstances**

**They give and receive advice, assistance and guidance on the many difficult issues and decisions they face**

**Challenged individuals receive communion regularly (most receive monthly)**

**They, too, have opportunity to socialize among themselves and with individuals (volunteers) they would not otherwise meet or know**

**Some engage in activities they would not ordinarily experience, for example, a few boys serve as altar boys or just give out andidoron, and a few girls often serve as Epistle readers**

## **PROGRAM BENEFITS**

### **BENEFITS TO PARISH**

**The benefits to the parish are manifold**

**The program gives individuals and parish organizations an opportunity to serve less fortunate individuals and to be involved in activities they would not otherwise engage in.**

**A cadre of volunteers along with a few parents, cater the monthly reception and the annual parties. They donate food and solicit food donations from the parish for the annual events. They do the barbecuing at the picnic. One volunteer plays Santa Claus at the Christmas party.**

**The volunteers have become an integral part of the program**

**Our Joy/Hope program buys them gifts for the picnic (monogrammed tee-shirts, shorts, caps. etc)**

**The Junior and Senior choirs often sing at the Liturgy and always sing at the Christmas party**

**Our young Greek folk dancers perform at the Christmas party. Along with these youngsters come their parents multiplying the number of people who are brought into the circle of the Challenge Liturgy Group** ( 8 )

## **PROGRAM BENEFITS**

### **BENEFITS TO PARISH**

The annual picnic, now in its sixth year started as a young man's Eagle Scout project. He needed to do an original project, without any assistance, to earn his pin. He volunteered to host a picnic. It was a huge success and has become an annual event. The young man, now entering Law School, returns every Spring to help his parents, who have assumed primary responsibility for the picnic.

Indications of a successful program.....

- Inclement weather, especially in winter, does not deter attendance
- Siblings and fathers of challenged individuals who rarely showed now frequently attend. Entire families frequently attend liturgy together
- Several challenged individuals are enrolled in Sunday School. Others sing in our Junior Choir on Sundays
- The Challenge Liturgy Program and its participants have become part of the fabric of parish life. The challenged are visible and welcomed
- The parish has spent much money retrofitting the building with ramps to accommodate wheelchairs

## **PROGRAM FUTURE**

### **EXTEND PROGRAM REACH**

**Invite clergy of neighboring parishes to celebrate the liturgy  
Invite neighboring parishes of other Orthodox jurisdictions to participate.  
(There are approximately 12-15 other Orthodox parishes on Long Island.)**

### **LIFE PLANNING**

**At the request of several families we are exploring the possible availability of a six/seven bed Group Home. Indications are that we can achieve this goal, within 2 –3 years, with the assistance of agencies already operating Group Homes in our area.**

### **EXPAND SOCIAL SERVICES ASSISTANCE**

**Near term - we are having positive talks with Fr. Constantine Sitaras, Executive Director, St. Basil Academy, Garrison, NY on establishing a Respite Program and a Summer Camp program for our families.**

**Long term- we will consider any project so long as it is within our scope and range of competency. We have and will continue to focus on quality of life programs. We look to supplement, rather than compete or interfere with, the excellent professional training and assistance our families receive. ( 10 )**

## **SUMMARY**

**This presentation has attempted to highlight the Challenge Liturgy Program and its value to the Archangel Michael parish.**

**It is an established program with a fourteen year history of service to an under-served segment of our parish family.**

**Its continued growth and expansion underscore its relevancy and success in meeting the needs of many Orthodox Christians.**

**This program, with the celebration of the Divine Liturgy as its core activity, fulfills a fundamental need and, as such, enriches both the person who fulfills the need and the person who is fulfilled.**

**This makes the program worth replicating throughout our Archdiocese.**

**The rest of this presentation shall delineate the tasks required to start such a program and shall identify the attitudes and approaches that, if adopted, will result in a successful program.**

## **CHALLENGE LITURGY PROGRAM WORKSHOP**

### **PLANNING AND ORGANIZATION**

**A few caveats before you decide to initiate a Challenge Liturgy Program:**

- **It is a long-range program and everyone involved must be committed to its continuance**
- **Initial enthusiasm must not wane**
- **It is a liturgy-centered program and the Priest is pivotal to its success. He must be an enthusiastic supporter and active member of the program**
- **To initiate a program that does not succeed is much worse than not to have started at all**

**To avoid this happening we offer suggestions, borne of experience, to guide you in planning and organizing your program**

**( 12 )**

**CHALLENGE LITURGY PROGRAM WORKSHOP**  
**PLANNING AND ORGANIZATION**

**FORM A STEERING COMMITTEE**

- **Form a steering committee that will plan and operate the program**
- **A committee of three or four individuals is all that is needed**
- **Include a parent or sibling of a challenged individual as he/she can give you some insight or perspective that would be most beneficial.**
- **Avoid creating a formal organization and using formal titles. These are not necessary. Keep the organization informal and the relationships loose.**

**FORMULATE NEAR-TERM PLAN**

**Keep the plan simple. Focus on key policy matters. For example:**

- **Decide on the frequency of the Liturgy, its start date and start time**
- **Plan the reception following the Liturgy and decide who will host / cater**
- **Consider transportation needs. Car pools needed? Make arrangements**
- **Consider the need for and roll of volunteers**
- **Consider the need and availability of chanter**
- **Designate individual(s) who will interface with the families**

**Other decisions, especially programming ones, can be made later on ( 13 )**

**CHALLENGE LITURGY PROGRAM WORKSHOP**  
**PLANNING AND ORGANIZATION**

**CONDUCT NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

- **Consider accessibility matters; ramp availability, manpower (muscle power), bathrooms, parking. Make the necessary accommodations**

**RECRUIT VOLUNTEERS**

- **Form a cadre of volunteers to augment the committee**
- **Tell them how they can serve the program**

**PROGRAM COST**

- **The cost of a Challenge Liturgy program is nominal and can be covered by private donations or a small grant from the Parish Council**

**(Our annual costs are approximately \$2000 because of the bus service we provide. The bus cost and all other miscellaneous costs are covered by donations.)**

**CHALLENGE LITURGY PROGRAM WORKSHOP**  
**COMMUNICATIONS PLAN**

**After key policy decisions are made and operational plans are developed it is time to get the message out**

**PREPARE AND DISSEMINATE PRESS RELEASE**

**Prepare press release announcing program and send it to:  
local print media; Greek & English newspapers  
local broadcast media; local access TV channel and local radio stations  
neighboring parishes**

**ANNOUNCE PROGRAM TO PARISH**

**Ask priest to announce program from the pulpit  
Announce program in monthly and/or weekly parish newsletter**

**NOTIFY POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS**

**Send announcement letter to families you may have already identified as candidates for the program  
Maintain communication with families that have come to, or that have expressed interest in, the program**

**( 15 )**

**CHALLENGE LITURGY PROGRAM WORKSHOP**  
**PROGRAM OPERATION**

**With all the preliminary work completed the program is ready to roll.**

**IMPLEMENT PLAN**

**If planning was complete and thoughtful, relax, everything will proceed well.**

**MODIFY PLAN AS REQUIRED**

**Don't be discouraged or disappointed with the attendance at your first meeting(s). More than likely it will be less than you expected.**

**There are reasons for this and it is important to the success of the program that you understand and appreciate these reasons.**

**These reasons and how you should react will be discussed next.**

**CHALLENGE LITURGY PROGRAM WORKSHOP**  
**OPERATING PRINCIPLES**

**Persons associated with challenged individuals, whether they be parents, siblings or children of these individuals, are by virtue of their circumstance, fearful, wary, cautious and overly protective**

**They fear exploitation by those who offer to help and will not respond fully until they are convinced the offer is genuine**

**In order for your program to succeed you must, through your attitude and conduct, convince them that you respect their vulnerability and that you are sensitive to their concerns**

**This requires that you discard much of what you have learned about running successful programs and adopt new attitudes and approaches**

**CHALLENGE LITURGY PROGRAM WORKSHOP**  
**OPERATING PRINCIPLES**

**SUCCESSFUL ATTITUDE**

- **Numbers -Size of group is not important. This is not a program where success is measured by number of participants. By the program's very nature you will not have many participants. Learn to measure your success by the reactions of the few who are present**
- **Patience - Be patient! Acceptance & comfortableness come slowly**
- **Commitment – You must convey a commitment to stay the course. Once you start this program you must strive to make it an integral part of parish life. Anything less is unacceptable.**
- **Expectations – Do not raise hopes or expectations that you cannot or will not satisfy. Avoid disappointments arising from unfulfilled promises.**
- **Constancy – Once a pattern or routine is agreed upon try not to deviate. Change is very difficult, and often inconvenient, for many challenged individuals. A large measure of stability comes with constancy.**
- **Behavior – all behavior is acceptable. Do not be judgmental. In time, socially appropriate behavior will be learned and will emerge. ( 18 )**

**CHALLENGE LITURGY PROGRAM WORKSHOP**

## **OPERATING PRINCIPLES**

### **SUCCESSFUL APPROACH**

**Operate at a pace that is acceptable to the participants. Be guided by their wishes and abilities. In this case, haste and swiftness are not virtuous qualities**

**Moderate program advertising. Appreciate the paradox that the very advertising that is aimed at attracting them may keep prospective participants away. Challenged individuals or their families do not like to be singled out and will avoid any situation that draws attention to them. ( This is one reason they do not come to church and one reason for this program.)**

**Regarding photos, obtain their permission before you use any photographs of the group.**

**In conclusion, be honest, be relaxed, be open in your relations with challenged individuals and their families. Be sensitive to their circumstance. Do not be condescending or patronizing. Nothing is more offensive to them**  
**CHALLENGE LITURGY PROGRAM WORKSHOP**

## **PLANNING AND PROGRAM ASSISTANCE**

**We would be most happy to help you get started. Don't hesitate to call on us.  
You can reach us at:**

**Emanuel & Marina Katsoulis  
Seven Mora Court  
Manhasset, New York 11030**

**Tel: 1-516-627-0580**

**Fax: 1-516-869-9712**

**E-mail: [Mannykat@aol.com](mailto:Mannykat@aol.com)**

**If you decide to start a program on your own, we ask that you notify us so  
that we can create a network of programs for mutual benefit and assistance**





