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Department of Religious Education Sees New Leadership, Revival of Ministries Across In-Person and Digital Platforms



The Department of Religious Education (DRE) was one of the numerous Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America ministries to participate in the Centennial Clergy-Laity Congress– and it was everywhere. From the Congress Exhibition Hall, where newly appointed Manager Maria Klonaris and new summer contractor Andrew Roushdy were ready to welcome delegates to the Department's booth with religious and educational gifts; to the Philoptochos Convention, where the new DRE Director, His Grace Bishop Athenagoras of Nazianzos, PhD, was the daily spiritual speaker; to the YAL National Conference, where His Grace spoke with young adults.

Meanwhile, at the final Plenary Session of the Congress, Bishop Athenagoras also shared a glimpse into one of the DRE's busiest years, full of numerous new initiatives and resources for clergy, educators, and the faithful across America.

Though the DRE is one of the first Departments of the Archdiocese, officially founded in 1927, this is its first Clergy-Laity Congress under the leadership of its new director. The new DRE team has successfully revived and bolstered the three ministries within the Department: Religious Education, Orthodox Marketplace (the

official online store of the Archdiocese), and the St. John the Chrysostom Oratorical Festival.

1. RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

• Sunday Sermon Series, launched November 2021: Easy-to-download weekly sermons based on the upcoming Sunday Gospel with insights and analyses. Each sermon (under 1300 words) provides inspirational material for sermons for clergy, as well as catechetical and educational material for educators and the faithful to understand the essence of the Gospels.

• Holy Week Sermon Series, launched April 2022: In response to the highly positive feedback to the Sunday Sermon Series, this spin-off was created in collaboration with Archbishop Elpidophoros of America to support the journey to Holy Week. These easy-to-download mini-sermons provide insights and analyses (under 600 words) about a central hymn for every day of Holy Week. They are paired with unique digital icons created by American Orthodox Instagrammer Andreas Alexander @liveorthodoxy for this Series.

• Speaker Series, launched December 2021: Live webinars featuring distinguished speakers in the Orthodox Christian World to explore some of the Major Feasts in the Church to prepare clergy, educators, and faithful for a deeper spiritual journey into the theology, teachings, and heart of the Church. They are followed by fascinating question and answer periods.

• Speaker Series: Orthodox Scholars Preach, launched for Great Lent 2022: In collaboration with the Orthodox Christian Studies Center of Fordham University, each 10-minute video features a different and diverse Orthodox Scholar. They reflect on the spiritual themes of each Sunday's liturgical calendar while drawing on their expertise. Through this Series, one can encounter the depth and richness of the tradition through stimulating, theologically-informed preaching. Given the tens of thousands of views and positive feedback, a BONUS EDITION of the Series was launched until Pentecost.

2. ST. JOHN THE CHRYSOSTOM ORATORICAL FESTIVAL

This year's Oratorical Festival saw a national increase in participants, despite a hiatus due to the pandemic, and a significant increase in scholarship donations. The Nationals were hosted by the Metropolis of Denver at Holy Trinity Church in Dallas, Texas. It was a weekend centered around faith, education, and fellowship.

Chris Zouras (Junior Division) and Evan Anagnostopoulos (Senior Division) placed

first in the National Festival. The St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival Scholarship Fund and the FAITH: Endowment for Orthodoxy and Hellenism generously donated $40,000 worth of scholarships. This resulted in the scholarships presented more than doubling in value, with the 1st place speakers receiving $5,000.

Next year's Nationals is set to be hosted by the Metropolis of New Jersey.

3. ORTHODOX MARKETPLACE

A new user-friendly version of the online store launched in the fall of 2021: Orthodox Marketplace is the online store for all materials created by the numerous ministries and departments of the Archdiocese. They also offer a variety of books, gifts, and religious items from other publishers and suppliers. Orthodox Marketplace even has its own publishing arm within the Department.

Three successful Sale-Seasons held since the fall, with the first constituting the most successful sale since the inception of Orthodox Marketplace when it was just a catalog. The Department is in the early stages of doing a full review to transform Orthodox Marketplace into a one-stop online shop for the faithful and parishes across America.

THE DRE REPORT

To learn more about the DRE's work, how to subscribe, and what's next for them, read the full user-friendly Department Report here: www.clergylaity.org/documents/618298/7086247/Religious+Education

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