

Orthodox Christian youth invited to “Ring the Bell” for youth ministry



At the 19th All-American Council [AAC] held in Saint Louis, MO in July 2018, college students Dimitrios Rentel and Miriam Sheehan offered an inspiring, three-minute presentation during the final plenary session, in which they implored the Church to take youth ministry and the work of the Orthodox Church in America’s Department of Youth, Young Adult and Campus Ministries more seriously.

“Immediately afterwards—and to the surprise of everyone present—clergy and lay delegates spontaneously rose to make pledges to fund a national-youth program, which raised over \$80,000.00 in ten minutes,” Dimitrios reported. “This sent a clear message to the Church at large, young and old alike, to take better care of her young people through a more active ministry.”

As a first step in developing a youth ministry program that “is the best it can possibly be,” Dimitrios initiated a “listening tour” on July 1 in an effort to gather suggestions and ideas, which he explains in a recently produced video. He will be

visiting several OCA-sponsored summer camps to listen, “in person,” to what our youth have to say.

“I’ll be listening to everyone about the current state of youth ministry in America,” Dimitrios added. “What are we doing now that is really effective? What are we doing now that is really ineffective? What can we do to enhance and strengthen our youth ministry efforts on every level—Church-wide, diocesan, deanery, and parish—to bring our youth closer to Jesus Christ and His Body, the Church?”

In an effort to ensure that youth who may not be attending camps are heard, a survey has been developed and is now available online by which everyone—from youth to youth ministers—can offer their opinions and suggestions.

“We’re asking people to reach into the depths of their imaginations with regard to how they envision youth and young adult ministry,” Dimitrios continued. “Camps and retreats are awesome, and of course the Church will try to host more of them, but they’re only one part of ministry. Do youth want more pilgrimages? More service projects? More travel? Pan-jurisdictional youth events? Of course, nothing is guaranteed, but whatever people find reasonable, ‘do-able,’ and beneficial for the Church will ‘ring a bell’ and be considered.”

In early July, Dimitrios is slated to visit Saint Vladimir Camp in Ohio. Dimitrios also will visit Saint John Camp in Indianapolis, the youth program held in Miami in conjunction with the Diocese of the South’s annual Assembly, and Alaska, where he will meet with youth during the annual Saint Herman Pilgrimage in August. Additional venues are “in the works.”

“I’m not visiting these places to tell others what to do; I’m going to listen, to serve, to ‘ring some bells’ by asking how can a national youth program help youth, parents, clergy, and churches? How can we help and collaborate with everyone we can,” Dimitrios emphasized, adding that he is incredibly excited to serve the Church in the best way possible.

“I grew up with a priest for a dad, in a great community, and attended Orthodox camps every summer, but I still struggle with my faith and the Church,” Dimitrios explained. “And if I struggled, with all these advantages, then I can only imagine what it must be like for a kid who didn’t have what I had. I want to help that kid.”

Through his listening tour and the youth survey, Dimitrios hopes to be “bombarded” with others’ experiences, knowledge, comments, questions, and thoughts about youth and young adult ministry.

“We would love people to fill out our official survey, no matter who they are, and we would also love it if people shared their experiences and ideas by sending emails to [\[email protected\]](#),” Dimitrios added. “We want people to spread the word—the more voices we hear, the more opinions we get, the better the program will be. The project is going on all summer, so this offers a two-month window for being heard. We will read each and every response.

“We want people to spread the word by taking the survey—the more voices we hear, the more opinions and fresh ideas we can gather and the better the program will be,” Dimitrios said. “And we hope everyone will follow us on Facebook, which already features photos from Saint Vladimir Camp.”

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