

ST NICHOLAS CONVENT WINTER YOUTH RETREAT 2011

Anchored by the presence of Archbishop Andronik and a cadre of supportive priests (Fathers Daniel Meschter, Nikita Grigoriev, Nicholas Chernyavsky and Anthony Gunin) the Convent of St Nicholas held a youth retreat from December 23-27, 2011.

Twenty-three young people gathered on Friday evening for an introduction and brief discussion with mother Agapia centered on the purpose of the Convent and the significance of having young people attend such an event at the Convent. The main message was that a life of repentance and prayer was essential not only for a monastic but for all faithful Orthodox Christians, young and old.

Following that lead a moleben (prayer of intercession) to Saint Nicholas was held on Friday evening and a pannikhida on Saturday morning with all participating and taking care to write names of those they wished to pray for. It was understood that while molebens and pannikhidas are an important element of Orthodox worship they do not replace the power of prayerful intercession that comes from celebrating the Divine Liturgy.

To that end and knowing that Archbishop Andronik would be serving the Liturgy on Sunday the sessions on Saturday were primarily devoted to preparing for a hierarchal service. Reader Daniel Olson kindly attended the retreat and gave a talk to the group outlining what takes place and the meaning of the prayers that are said as a bishop is vested. Later that day the participants were divided up into practice sessions for those who would sing in the choir and those who would serve in the altar. While Fr. Daniel Meschter and reader Daniel worked with the altar servers, choir director Nikodim Buryakov rehearsed the singers. The preparation paid off and the young people did a beautiful job both in singing the All-night Vigil and in attentively serving and prayerfully singing the hierarchal Divine Liturgy on Sunday.

Besides the services a lecture on reading the Scriptures was presented by Fr Daniel Saturday morning. He noted the tremendous differences in the various English translations of the Bible, and how important it is for us not simply to casually read Scripture but to delve into its meaning and apply it our daily life. In between lectures and services, deacon Dimitri Dobronravov reminded all that we are made up of not only mind and spirit, but body as well, as he led the group on a vigorous walk and workout.

Fr Nicholas and Fr Nikita rounded out Sunday afternoon and evening with informal “fireside chats”: Fr Nicholas started out the conversations by asking what separates or distinguishes Orthodoxy from other religions, while Fr Nikita centered his discussion on free will and the fallen nature of man. More informal in tone these talks with the priests challenged the young people to think more deeply about how they could more seriously live out their Orthodox way of life in a world that in so many ways is contrary to such a path.

One realization of how this challenge could be met was by the beginning and renewing of relationships with other Orthodox youth. Coming from different cities and parishes some were meeting for the first time while others had come to know each other well already from previous gatherings. Judging from the reluctance all had on parting on Monday and their eagerness to organize another retreat in the future gives one hope that the time spent at the Convent was worthwhile and will serve to strengthen the faith of all who participated.

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