



ASSEMBLY OF CANONICAL  
ORTHODOX BISHOPS  
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

September 24, 2023  
Orthodox Youth Ministries Sunday

Dear Beloved in Christ,

God bless you!

This year the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America has designated September 24<sup>th</sup> as Orthodox Youth Ministries Sunday. On this occasion, we seek to raise awareness of the importance of passing on the Orthodox faith in a way that all of our young people have the opportunity to encounter Christ, become fully engaged members of His Church, and engage our communities, neighborhoods, and world with the life of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is what our youth workers seek to ignite and support in every Orthodox parish throughout North America, as they partner with clergy and parents.

As the Episcopal Liaison of the Orthodox Youth & Young Adult Ministries ([www.theOYM.org](http://www.theOYM.org)), I encourage everyone to observe this day and reflect on the importance of young people in the life of the Church.

In every generation, there are unique challenges we face which seek to lead us away from the fullness of the Orthodox Church and towards a life of empty self-indulgence. The difference between a life of faithfulness and a life of failure is often perseverance. One example that we have received comes from the early fourth century when co-emperor Licinius sought to rid his portion of the Roman Empire of all Christians. Among his soldiers was a group of forty brave and distinguished men from Cappadocia who were Christians. When they were ordered to offer a sacrifice to the pagan gods, they refused. Neither threat nor flattery could persuade them to deny Christ and worship the idols. While sitting in jail, praying and praising, these men heard a voice say, “persevere until the end, then you shall be saved.”

This kind of perseverance is what is being called for from our young people as well as our parents and youth workers. Stick it out. Don’t give up. Remain faithful to Christ no matter the cost. It is to each one of us that our Lord says, “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” (Rev. 2:10) The 40 Martyrs of Sebaste (OYM’s patron saints) stayed in the lake through the night, enduring freezing temperatures and rejecting the temptation of a warm fire on shore, because their love for Christ far exceeded the trials that they faced. This is my encouragement to you as well, “Stay in the Lake,” for through patient endurance we too shall receive the crown of life.

Yours in Christ,

Bishop Thomas (Joseph)  
Episcopal Liaison to Orthodox Youth Ministries