



# GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA

## CENTER FOR FAMILY CARE

### REPORT TO THE 43<sup>RD</sup> BIENNIAL CLERGY-LAITY CONGRESS JULY 2016

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#### OVERVIEW AND MISSION

The Center for Family Care is the ministry to marriage and family for the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

#### MISSION STATEMENT

In collaboration with the metropolises and parishes of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, the mission of the Center for Family Care is to equip families with the resources to “affirm the importance of the family as a blessed gift of God and to address the specific needs of families as they try to live in a very challenging culture and world” (Archbishop Demetrios of America).

#### WHAT IS FAMILY?

In the traditional sense, family is composed of the parents and children of a household all brought together by divine grace—the “domestic church.” Additionally, it must be understood that the Church—the Body of Christ—constitutes a broader dimension of family through the very real spiritual relationship established by baptism that unites all of its members. We are all one family in Christ!

#### THE VISION FOR FAMILY MINISTRY

Sound family ministry is, in reality, a systematic ethos of how a parish understands ministry. It is people-centered—not program-centered. The church community that embraces a family-ministry approach reaps the following benefits:

- engages people at all ages and stages of life
- empowers all members of the Orthodox Christian family to become active participants in the life of the Church
- encourages families to ‘drive’ the Church home so that their faith is lived out in day-to-day life
- nurtures parishioners’ relationships with Christ and His Church as well as one another
- utilizes community resources that assist parishioners in need (mental health, elder care, social support, etc.)

Ministering to families is, at times, difficult because it is a reflection of life’s pervasive challenges. These inherent difficulties are to be acknowledged and, in a sense, embraced as opportunities for healing and reconciliation. The concerns and struggles of our families (emotional, physical, and spiritual) are, likewise, shared by the Church. Family ministry creates an infrastructure within the parish that facilitates its parishioners’ most critical needs—directly or through referral. It is not the goal of family ministry to create ‘perfect’ families; rather, it is to promote church communities whose members are welcomed with unconditional love, support, and fellowship for the purpose of their spiritual growth and salvation—to foster an environment where our people look to the Church as the primary of restoration.

## **ARCHDIOCESAN COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON MARRIAGE AND FAMILY**

We are grateful for the support of our Archdiocesan Council Committee. They assist us in providing direction and focus helping connect our ministry to the faithful of our Archdiocese. We meet with them in person twice a year at Archdiocesan Council meetings but also communicate with the entire committee via email, mail, and teleconferences as needed. Our committee consists of:

### Chairperson:

His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos of San Francisco

### Vice Chairman:

Dr. Nicholas Loutsion

### Members:

V. Rev. Constantine Moralis

Michael Kavourias

Andrew Manatos

Michael Psaros

Georgia Skeadas

Evellyn Tsiadis

Rev. Fr. Nicholas Anctil

Alexander Maillis II

Peter J. Pappas

Rockey Sisson

Mark Stavropoulos

George Tsunis

## **CENTER FOR FAMILY CARE STAFF**

Fr. Constantine L. Sitaras, Director\*

Melissa Tsongranis, Associate Director

Presvytera Kerry Pappas, MA, LMFT, Coordinator Clergy and Seminarian Couple Care\*

George Tsongranis, Special Project Coordinator\*

Maria Diveris, Media Coordinator\*

Angelike Giallourakis, PhD, Resource Coordinator\*

\* *Indicates part-time or contract status*

## **HISTORY**

In his keynote address at the 2002 Clergy-Laity Congress in Los Angeles, His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios presented a bold initiative for the Greek Orthodox Church of America. He announced that the Archdiocese would begin an intense effort of focusing on the needs of families. Through generous financial grants from Leadership 100, the Center for Family Care has developed printed and online resources, conducted retreats and seminars, and worked to create an infrastructure for family ministry in the Archdiocese. In 2011, a *Clergy and Seminarian Couple Care* ministry was launched and continues to steadily grow. Since its inception, this ministry has sought to create a vision and action plan for an intentional and self-sustaining network of love, support, and care for clergy and seminarian couples. The objective is to offer tools and resources for healthy, holistic personal, and relational living.

At the 42<sup>nd</sup> Clergy-Laity Congress in Philadelphia in 2014, it was resolved:

- 1) That family issues will be a priority of the Church—especially when families are experiencing turmoil;
- 2) That the Congress supports His Eminence's exhortation to fully develop the current services offered by the existing department for the care of the family by creating a broader one that can more comprehensively address urgent family issues and provide pastoral care to our families and clergy families; and
- 3) That Sunday is restored as a day of sanctity in which the Orthodox Christian family gathers to worship at the Divine Liturgy.

With this new commission from His Eminence, we are aiming to address each of these resolutions in a very tangible way for the faithful of the Archdiocese. As the process begins, we are seeking guidance from exemplary professionals in the field of family development and mental health. We are also planning to expand our office in order to meet the needs of the faithful of our Archdiocese.

## **WHAT'S NEW**

### CLERGY-COUPLE CARE WEBINARS

As a result of the findings and recommendations of the Danielsen Institute Study, webinars exclusively for priests and presbyteres are now being offered to address some of the issues raised. The first of these webinars aired in May 2015.

- *Findings and Recommendations of Danielsen Institute Study*  
George Stavros, PhD and colleagues
- *Passion-Bearing Doesn't Have to Ruin Your Health and Marriage*  
Dn. Stephen Muse, LMFT
- *Health-Joy-Progress: Reflections on the Priest and Presvytera*  
Fr. Vasileios Thermos, MD, PhD
- *Where Do We Find Energy for All the Demands?*  
Bishop John Abdalah
- *Storms in the Vineyard: Clergy Family Resilience in Times of Stress*  
Fr. Alex Goussetis, PhD and George Stavros, PhD, MDiv

Each webinar is archived on the clergy couple website, so those unable to participate during the live broadcast can view it at their convenience. Thus far, an average of roughly 70 people have registered for each webinar. Combined with those who have viewed the archived version, each webinar has approximately 200 views.

### PRIEST AND PRESVYTERA STUDY

*Stress and Resilience: A Study of the Impact of Ministry on Priests and Presbyteres* is the first of its kind in our Archdiocese. In collaboration with the Danielsen Institute of Boston University and under the leadership of George Stavros, MDiv, PhD, this study assessed the stressors of the priest and presvytera and how these stressors impact both their personal life and marriage. About 200 priests and presbyteres participated in this study; the results are being used to inform the specifics of the ministry to our seminarian and clergy couples.

### CLERGY COUPLE CARE WEBSITE

This site presently has about 200 priests and presbyteres registered. New materials and resources are periodically being added.

### FAMILY MINISTRY WEBINARS

Our monthly webinar series continues to have a strong following. We regularly receive positive feedback and direction for future topics. Our hope is that parishes will use these webinars as a tool for small-group discussions. Recent workshops include:

- *Challenges in Infertility*  
Panelist: Rev. Dr. Christopher Flesoras, Dr. George Koulianos, MD, and Allena Barbato, LMFT
- *Say What?! Words Matter in Our Relationships*  
Fr. Jim and Presvytera Donna Pappas

- *Preparing your Family for Great Lent*  
Fr. Evan Armatas and Elissa Bjeletich
- *Golden Rules for the Golden Years: Resources to Help Reduce Symptom Burden and Caregiver Burnout in Older Adults*  
Dr. Evgenia Litrivis, MD
- *Potholes on the Road To Bethlehem: Navigating the Stress of the Nativity Season*  
Fr. Alex Goussetis, PhD and George Stavros, PhD, MDiv
- *The Church and Families of Children with Special Needs*  
Fr. James Kordaris, Presvytera Melanie Distefano, MDiv, and Angie Giallourakis, PhD

#### PHILADELPHIA: A MINISTRY OF BROTHERLY LOVE

The mission of Philadelphia is to provide men of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America with a platform in the parish setting for spiritual formation through multifaceted programming. It aims to foster the basic characteristics of the Orthodox Faith and its praxis as men intentionally engage their roles in Church, home, and society. The social media portion of the ministry has recently launched on Facebook and through an email listserv. Additionally, the third annual Archbishop Michael Memorial Men's Retreat at of St. Basil Academy is being scheduled for this November. For more information visit [www.philadelphia.goarch.org](http://www.philadelphia.goarch.org).

#### FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Families of children with special needs have encountered many barriers in Church life. We have conducted two focus groups with these families as well as individual interviews to find out their needs and how the Archdiocese can better minister to them. More focus groups are planned in the fall, and we will use this information to create support for these families and resources for their parishes.

#### FLAGSHIP FAMILY MINISTRY PROGRAM

This program operates in conjunction with the metropolitans of the Archdiocese, asking them to identify one parish in their respective metropolis that has shown excellence in ministry to families. We are cooperating with these parishes over the next couple of years to offer additional training on family ministry with the intention of sharing the resources and methods they successfully implement to share with other parishes in the Archdiocese.

#### MARRIAGE MINUTE AND BECOMING ONE

The *Marriage Minute* is a short two-three minute audio clip that couples can listen to and discuss to enhance their marriage. Likewise, *Becoming One* challenges couples to read a brief excerpt about marriage and discuss. These two programs have been received with enthusiasm on our Facebook page.

#### FAMILY BIBLE

In collaboration with the American Bible Society and other Archdiocesan departments, this project will consolidate relevant material and present it in the context of a family Bible. This project is in its final stages of completion.

#### SOAK UP THE SON: A SUMMER PROGRAM FOR FAMILIES

Summertime is a wonderful break from school and many other activities, but there is no such thing as a vacation from Church or our spiritual lives! This summer, weekly challenges, activities, and

inspiration will be used to help families stay connected to Christ and His Church. Tune in to our Facebook page and website for updates #soakuptheSON.

## **ONGOING PROGRAMS**

### WEBSITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The Center for Family Care's website ([www.family.goarch.org](http://www.family.goarch.org)) strives to be a clearinghouse of Orthodox family ministry articles, resources, and general information to help parents raise their children in the Church and to assist parishes in their ministry to families and individuals.

In addition, we have the *Family Link* Email Ministry which keeps families and parishes informed of current Orthodox resources in family ministry and offers guidance to parents and married couples. We have expanded our Facebook page which allows us to share information more immediately. We provide a inspiration and information through this page several times a week. Most recently, we have set up a marriage and family section on [www.blogs.goarch.org](http://www.blogs.goarch.org).

### RETREATS, CONFERENCES, WORKSHOPS, AND LECTURES

The Center conducts family retreats, seminars, and parent workshops throughout the Archdiocese. Staff members are available to assist with planning as well as with leading these events on a variety of topics. In addition, staff members give lectures on marriage and family ministry at Hellenic College/Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology (and other institutions of higher learning), in Metropolis settings, and at our local parishes. With the success of our first several national conferences, the Center plans on to hold these events every other year.

This past year we have collaborated with the Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries in offering *Bee-treats*. These day retreats have been offered monthly at locations throughout the country. This is pan-Orthodox event and has offered sessions for teenagers, youth workers, and parents and—over the course of the year—has had over 1000 participants.

### PERIODICALS

*Family Connections* - The aim of this page in the Orthodox Observer is to help Orthodox parents educate their children in the faith.

*Other Publications* - In addition to our *Family Connections* page, our staff contributes different articles related to family life to the *Orthodox Observer*. We also contribute regularly to *Praxis Magazine*, published by the Department of Religious Education, and other publications at the request of the publisher.

## **GOALS FOR THE NEXT TWO YEARS**

### FAMILY CRITICAL CARE PROGRAM

Through collaboration with professionals in the mental health field as well as with legal council, a program to assist families in critical need will be developed. This program will create training resources that promote healthy marriages and family life. It will also provide training and resources for clergy and pastoral care workers to help them deal with these issues. Finally, a plan to provide immediate response and referral for those in crisis throughout the Archdiocese is in development.

### CLERGY COUPLE CARE

As the ministry to our clergy and seminarian couples has evolved, the needs have become clearer, paving the way for a sharper vision moving forward. This vision includes both continued and growing preventative and crisis-centered care as well as education of the faithful on the unique challenges the priest and his family encounter as they seek to faithfully serve Christ in His Vineyard. To these ends, are hoping pilot reflective peer groups for both priests and presbyteres as well as secure funding for crisis counseling for priest and/or clergy couples in need.

### PHILADELPHIA: MEN'S MINISTRY

We will continue building up this ministry. Increasing resources for men and for the parish programming as well as training for starting programs.

### FAMILY MINISTRY COLLABORATIVE

A new focus of the office is to facilitate collaboration—joining like ministries to make possible that which cannot be accomplished alone. With the tremendous needs of our families, we recognize the necessity to connect with each metropolis in order to work together to offer a more complete set of resources to the faithful of the Archdiocese.

## **IN CONCLUSION**

We eagerly look toward the future of this ministry and ask for your prayers and feedback as we continue to grow and develop. We thank His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios for his continued vision and guidance. In addition, we are grateful to Leadership 100 for its generous support. Their assistance has funded the overall ministry of the Center for Family Care since its inception, allowing us to provide support to parishes as they offer ministry to the faithful families and individuals of the Archdiocese. In addition, they have provided specific grants to aid the development clergy family critical care, outreach to interfaith couples and the distantly-connected parishoners, creation of the *Journey of Marriage* premarital preparation program, development of a unified vision for men's ministry, and the creation of the *Family Bible*. We are thankful for their constant and gracious contributions.