

Western Region Joint Organizations Meeting
July 1, 2004
Anaheim, California

President Irene Saigh called the meeting to order at 2:47 PM.

Bishop JOSEPH led us in opening prayer.

Bishop JOSEPH addressed the assembly.

The theme of the conference is children. We are little children, not in age, but in spirit. This theme is important, inspiring, and full of wisdom. My focus is on education. "Let the little children come to me, and do not forbid them, for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Mark 10:14). The theme is about approaching Jesus Christ as children would and is about examining ourselves. Are we helping people come to God or not?

children are simple and transparent, innocent. They are not distracted by life's worries. They are the backbone of the church. Adults are prisoners of distractions. As we get older, we acquire more and more distractions. We go to church but do not focus and do not pray with focus. We force our children to live this distracted life. We feel that we are giving them something better. We think that a good college is the key to happiness, right?

To all parents and clergy: desire to be simple. Love without requirements or complications. Forgive without reservations. One cannot love self and God. When our children see our real and transparent love, they learn how to be with God.

Education gives children the tools to be with God. Education is the key to salvation. There once was a flag in front of the iconostasis at a church. The priest moved the flag from the iconostasis to the social hall. Soon after, a parishioner complained that the flag had been moved, so the priest moved it back in front of the iconostasis. Sometimes we compromise our faith and holiness just to please people. We are not against culture, but cannot let it interfere with salvation.

We cannot worship without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit or with ignorance. Ethnic disputes stem from ignorance.

We must be living examples of Christian Education. Turn off the TV and read a spiritual book. If you train your children to watch TV, they will. Or if you train them to read, they will. Do this. Try it. If your spiritual life does not improve in 90 days, call me at the chancery and we will talk.

In December I flew to New Jersey for a meeting of the Local Synod. The other bishops were telling me about their experiences at Christmas, how few people were in attendance at services on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. I had the joy of telling them about my Christmas in Alaska. I love being there for Christmas even though it is dark and cold because I love the people. What is Christmas like in your home? If it is focused on Jesus' birth, then it will help your children remember the truth of the Incarnation. If it is focused on materials and shopping, then Christmas won't mean anything. True peace comes from God, not materials. It is a gift from God. So if you lack materials, then rejoice because rich men live in fear of losing their stuff.

Priesthood and ministry are not about business. Priests and Khourias choose to live a life of modesty and martyrdom. The priest's wife helps her husband by bringing joy to the church community. Failed clergy marriages occur when the Khouria forgets her role and distracts the priest from ministry.

Education is not about memorizing facts. It is about getting information that shape actions. It lets our spiritual life grow wings and fly. We can soar above mountains of doubt and despair. Isaiah 5:13 reads: "Therefore my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge; and their honorable men are famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst." We can either be free of ignorance or live in captivity. So let us repeat the gospel, not gossip. Listen to your priest as he brings words of healing, not idle chatter. People will meet God through us first. Are we ready to represent Him?

Christ is the Divine Logos. We are in constant exchange of words. Just as our words connect us to each other, Christ the Word connects us to God. Let our words be pure and kind to each other. Worship is the first action of faith. Listen to the hymns, and let them educate you.

These meetings are not about paperwork but are about meeting God. The purpose of each organization is not to be successful itself, but to serve the Church. Remember that service and ministry are synonymous. If we join an organization but do not serve the Church, then we put ourselves out of the Kingdom of God. Christ served us that we might serve each other. Remember that the Kingdom of Heaven is pure, transparent, and selfless love.

Teen SOYO President Krystal Saigh said that the teens have three projects in which they are participating.

1. Support seminarians who want to be youth directors. NAC Teen SOYO has a fund set up.
2. OYO - Orthodox Youth Outreach. They have participated in three trips so far in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Washington D.C. There are more trips planned for the fall and winter.
3. Support a booklet called "Key to Parish Youth Ministry" which will be mailed to all churches.

Teen SOYO President Krystal Saigh also announced the election results.

President - Amanda Haddad
Vice President - Lauren Babba
Treasurer - Lauren Malouf
Secretary - Simon Abraham

AOCWNA President Widad Tirazi gave the AOCWNA report. She said that they are close to reaching the \$1 million mark for the orphanage project. They are exploring the possibilities of starting and/or supporting grade schools at our parishes. And they are doing well on various projects in each parish.

Bishop JOSEPH made the Very Reverend Father Nicholas Speier talk about St. John of Damascus Academy in Goleta, CA. He said that starting a grade school at St. Athanasius Church is a trauma in process, but that it is essential and no longer an option. Their curriculum is broken into three parts: memorizing in grade school, arguing in junior high, and rhetoric in senior high. He stated that Orthodoxy fits like a glove into classic and

integrative curriculum. They need support financially and spiritually.

Bishop JOSEPH then addressed the assembly. He said that the city of Los Angeles changed the seal of the city to remove the word "God" from it. Teachers cannot mention God in the public schools. He asked where are the Christian people defending God in the school. He wondered why people have not spoken out against God being taken out of the public schools like they did against gay marriages, and he asked if we are tired of church.

President Irene Saigh gave the Fellowship of St. John the Divine report. She said that the Fellowship has a New Focus, in which the Fellowship exists as a resource to help the local church minister to its young adults.

Lew Malouf gave the Conference Planning and Coordination Committee presentation. He gave a history of the CPCC, how it was formed, to whom it is accountable, what its responsibilities are, and who the committee members are. He explained what the CPCC manual is: a detailed and comprehensive guide for hosting a Parish Life Conference. He said that the PLC scheduling is on a five year rolling basis, so that each host parish has five years to plan their conference. He then announced that Holy Resurrection in Tucson, Arizona will host the 2009 Parish Life Conference.

The Reverend Father Nicholas Borzghol and Tony Karam gave the report for the 2005 PLC hosted by St. Nicholas, San Francisco, California. Hotel rates will be \$109 per night for a regular room and \$209 per night for a suite. The ticket books will be in the range of \$150 per book. The keynote speakers will be Tony Vrame and John Klentos.

The Very Reverend Father Hanna Sakkab and Ed Malouf gave the report for the 2006 PLC hosted by St. George, San Diego, California. The hotel contract has not been signed yet, but they are looking into booking the Town and Country Hotel.

Michael Habib and The Reverend Father Silas Ruark reported on the 2004 Fall Delegates Meeting hosted by St. Timothy in Fairfield, California. They announced that a barbeque will be held the Saturday night of the delegates meeting at St. Timothy for Teen SOYO and the Fellowship in lieu of their outings.

Bishop JOSEPH addressed the body of delegates. He said that matins and vespers services are full of education, and that we *have* schools at church and home. We should focus on these until we have enough money and resources to get our parish schools going.

President Irene Saigh adjourned the meeting at 4:23 PM.