

DISCERNING FROM EXPERIENCE

Young Orthodox Women in Russia Today

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When somebody asks me about the particular problems of young women in the Russian Orthodox Church, I am not certain how to answer. In one sense, there does not seem to be much difference between my mother's activity and mine. My mother works on the parish council, I work on the Orthodox students council; my mother is helping our priest to write theological books, I am studying theology and write my own papers; my mother is responsible with some other women for organizing an Orthodox centre for children, I with my friends am organizing a new Orthodox youth centre. In this way, our tasks are the same, but we do them in different ways.

What is the difference between young people and adults? Some youth have had no negative experiences and thus they have more energy. But also they may not have had enough positive experiences or knowledge to work in the best way.

Let me say something about the young women's activities which I know about and in which I as a young woman have taken part.

The first and the most important duty of youth is to study. There are now two theological universities in Moscow, two in St Petersburg and a few in other cities where women can study theology. There is also an Orthodox medical college in Moscow, where young women not only study theology and medicine, but also work in the hospital. Often they explain to their patients what Orthodoxy is, teach them how to pray, bring some books and the like. We also have young people who are working in a similar way in prisons, though most of these are young men, because this work is very dangerous and difficult.

Another very important part of the mission of young women is working with people who have been converted. Women, especially young women, help converted women to feel themselves at home, to study and to live Orthodoxy. They help to prepare women for baptism.

There is one more specific youth mission work. When we meet our friends who are unbelievers (we have many of them), we have to

“preach” in every situation: in lectures, in students' meetings and even at discotheques.

My focus is on this kind of activity. The main aim of our Orthodox students centre is to direct Orthodox students' activities. Eighty percent of our members are women, and they need a ministry in which they can help others. Our activities are extremely varied. On the one hand, there are Orthodox discotheques, in which we use music of Orthodox composers, which sounds like popular music but whose words have an Orthodox meaning, to bring young people to a thinking process. On the other hand, we organize students conferences, where we can discuss and explain our Orthodox views to people who call themselves “intellectual”. We also organize summer camps for youth, restore churches in the summer and arrange pilgrimages to holy places.

Orthodox young women play the main role in organizing all of these events. Nevertheless, our primary duty is to study and prepare ourselves to be teachers, mothers, priest's wives, members and presidents of parish councils, church finance officers, lawyers, journalists, ecologists, doctors, nurses and so on – and what is most important, to be real Orthodox adult women.