

SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN NORTH AND SOUTH AMERICA
Serbian Orthodox Teachers, Youth and Young Adult Association
S. O. T. A.Y. A. for the 21st Century

With the Blessings of the Episcopal Council of the Serbian Orthodox Church in North and South America and the support of the Central Church Council, we announce the reestablishment of the Serbian Orthodox Teachers and Youth Association. The purpose of this ministry is to unite the teachers, young adults, and youth members of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the Dioceses throughout North and South America. It is a special forum through which people will be brought closer together through a ministry of faith and fellowship.

MISSION AND GOAL OF SOTAYA MINISTRY

The world is constantly changing and every day seems to introduce a new trend and movement of youth culture. Most everyone agrees that growing up in today's society heavily influenced by media and pop culture, is a much more difficult task than it was in previous times. They are also unprecedented technological developments and fundamental economic change. As a result, we live in a world which is more interconnected, more volatile, and more complex. In the process, our youth are being shaped by many negative and destructive influences, ones that can and will define who they are and who they will become. For this reason, we have the sacred responsibility to do all that we can to ensure that the positive teachings and traditions of the Orthodox Church become a living presence in their lives. The local church, its worship experience, education and fellowship opportunities are vital to the spiritual well being of all of us, most especially our younger generations.

What or who is most influential in ones faith journey? While there may be different responses to this question, there is one overriding commonality: the power and significance of relationships for forming and nurturing faith. Parents, grandparents, spouses, caring bishops and priests, teachers, family and non-family faith mentors and friends are important persons whose faith "rubs off" onto others in the daily interactions of life together.

Therefore, the mission and goal of the SOTAYA ministry provides a forum for our young people and our parish school teachers as they are led into experiencing the Holy Orthodox Faith. By developing a closer relationship with our Lord, His Church, and one another, members of SOTAYA will become more active sacramental members of the living Church and thereby better equipped to meet the challenges of our time.

The Serbian Orthodox Teachers, and Youth/Young Adult Association, or SOTAYA, is the ministry to teenagers, young adults, and teachers of the Serbian Orthodox Church in North and South America. The three-fold purpose, orientation, and implementation of SOTAYA is designed to (1) reflect the Orthodox Christian Faith, Tradition and Life in today's society, (2) offer members opportunities to nurture and enhance relationships within this framework; and (3) encourage one another as collectively "commend ourselves and all our life to Christ, our God."

Members of S.O.T.A.Y.A. will be brought together through church-related as well as social and cultural events. Each chapter of SOTAYA will work closely with the parish priest to fulfill the four main goals of SOTAYA which can be summarized as: Worship, Fellowship, Service and Witness.

HISTORY OF SOTAYA

In 2012, we are reestablishing this important ministry, with the addition of new elements that are designed to meet the challenges of our 21st century . The Serbian Orthodox Teachers and Youth Association was first proposed at the conclusion of a Sunday School Teacher's Conference held on August 26, 1961 at Shadeland, Pennsylvania, and soon thereafter, a National level and local parish chapters of the ministry were formed. Among the new elements added in the reestablishment and restructuring of SOTAYA, is a Facebook and internet presence and the formal administration of the organization by the Standing Committees for Christian Education, Youth and Young Adult Ministries established by the Serbian Orthodox Church in 2003.

THE THREE BRANCHES OF SOTAYA

Parishes in the Serbian Orthodox Church in North and South America are encouraged to form a chapter of each branch of SOTAYA on their local level.

JUNIOR SOTAYA

We all must recognize that the home is the most important spiritual arena for Orthodox Christian formation and practice, and expresses what has long been part of the church's self understanding. The New Testament epistles contain a great deal of references relating to the practice of faith in the context of the household. Saint John Chrysostom called the home, the "little church."

Alongside and in support of family homes, our parishes are called to give children and young people experiences of faith. However, no family, in and of itself, has sufficient perspective, resources or capabilities to nurture children into life long commitment. For children and young people to grow into Orthodox Christian maturity, they need to learn what it is to practice their faith within their bigger and equally important family, the family of the baptized, the family of the Church.

Membership in JUNIOR SOTAYA is open to all high school students in the parish. During regular meetings, in a friendly, fun atmosphere, JUNIOR SOTAYA members will have the opportunity to discuss matters of faith, opportunities for educational and social events and community service. The officers of JUNIOR SOTAYA will be appointed by the local parish priest and will consist of a President, Vice-President and Secretary and Treasurer. The priest will also select a parent coordinator to assist the youth in planning and organizing their activities.

Local Chapters of JUNIOR SOTAYA will be able to network with other chapters established in their respective diocese as well as throughout North and South America. The Standing Committee for Youth Ministry is ready to assist each local chapter of JUNIOR SOTAYA in

reaching its goals and will conduct an annual youth conference that will include discussions and activities specifically for JUNIOR SOTAYA representatives.

SENIOR SOTAYA

SENIOR SOTAYA is a ministry to young adults, ages 18-35 towards their greater integration into the life of the local parish. Often, young adults feel isolated or overlooked in their own parishes. The impact of rapidly-advancing technology, and particularly the rise of social media opportunities, cannot be discounted, as young adults begin finding their way, discovering their gifts, wondering how or if they fit into society and, for that matter, the church. SENIOR SOTAYA is an opportunity to reach out to our young adults and give them a chance to connect with their peers as well as their faith. It is the spiritual arena where they have the opportunity to explore how to belong and participate more fully in the life of the Church in worship, in a deeper and fuller knowledge of faith, in various ministries of the Church, and in camaraderie with one another.

SENIOR SOTAYA is sub-divided into two age groups: 18-24 and 25-35 year old. Members of SENIOR SOTAYA will gather for regular meetings to discuss regular educational and fellowship opportunities for young adults within the parish. The officers of SENIOR SOTAYA will be appointed by the local parish priest and will consist of a President, Vice-President and Secretary and Treasurer.

Local Chapters of SENIOR SOTAYA will be able to network with other chapters established in their respective diocese as well as throughout North and South America. The Standing Committee for Young Adult Ministry is ready to assist each local chapter of SENIOR SOTAYA in reaching its goals and will conduct an annual conference of all chapters of SENIOR SOTAYA. This annual conference will allow for the opportunity of greater education in the faith, as well as sharing and networking with other youth throughout the region. The 2013 Conference is being planned in Chicago.

TEACHER'S SOTAYA

We all understand that the teachers in our parishes are not substitutes for parents who take their role as teachers of faith seriously. The single best predictor of whether a young person will remain a member of the Church is the level of involvement of his or her parents.

However, the school teacher can have a tremendous influence on a child's development. Parish school teachers are part of the great heritage of discipleship, called to teach as Christ Himself taught. A key component of any Christian education program is the teacher. Good resources and curriculums are not enough. Teachers with knowledge of the Faith are essential to every parish.

Membership in TEACHER'S SOTAYA is open to parish school teachers and administrative staff who will regularly gather for meetings and fellowship, assist their parish priest with the organization of the school curriculum, share ideas, organize opportunities for teacher training, and promote the furtherance of Christian education at their local parish.

The SOTAYA ADMINISTRATORS as well as the Standing Committee for Christian Education is ready to assist each local chapter of SOTAYA in reaching its goals. Conferences and Teacher fellowship opportunities will be encouraged and developed on the diocesan, regional or national level. The first nation-wide conference for TEACHER'S SOTAYA is being planned for 2014.

ROLES IN THE SOTAYA MINISTRY

EPISCOPAL COUNCIL AND CENTRAL CHURCH LEVEL

The Episcopal Council of the Serbian Orthodox Church in North and South America has blessed the reestablishment of the Three-Chapter SOTAYA PROGRAM. The Central Church Council has given its support and endorsement for the organization of SOTAYA to be led by the Standing Committees which are funded by the Central Church Treasury.

The Standing Committees work together with each Diocesan Office to coordinate national and regional youth and young adult ministry events and activities and teacher conferences.

PARISH PREISTS

As we know, the Parish Priest is responsible for the spiritual well being of the entire parish. Under the direction of the diocesan hierarch, the parish priest ministers to all of the parishioners and groups of the parish. He is not a youth worker or youth director *per se*, however, SOTAYA ministry is a part of his overall ministry. It is imperative that the priest be active in SOTAYA ministry by working with, and guiding the youth group, young adult fellowship and parish church school teachers and administrative staff. The parish priest should attend SOTAYA gatherings, as he can be an excellent resource when planning activities and should always be consulted for guidance. In addition to his pastoral duties, the priest needs to relate with the teenagers, young adults and teachers by listening to them to find out where they are in their spiritual development. The parish priest appoints the President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer of all SOTAYA Chapters in his parish.

CONGREGATION EXECUTIVE BOARD

The Executive Board represents the congregation as a whole. It is important that they be kept informed of and support all activities of the local parish SOTAYA Chapters.

SOTAYA ADMINSTRATORS

The appointed SOTAYA ADMINISTRATORS are responsible for encouraging and overseeing the initial organization of all SOTAYA Chapters. If you have any questions regarding the SOTAYA ministry, how to form a Chapter or for further information, you may contact one of the SOTAYA Administrators:

Fr. Dragan Petrovic, priest in the New Grachanica-Midwest Diocese
Fr. Christopher Rocknage, priest in the Eastern American Diocese
Fr. Bratislav Krsic, priest in the Western American Diocese
Fr. Nikola Ceko, Administrator of the Standing Committees