

ANNUAL REPORT



Glory to God for all things!

At the end of September, young adults from all over North America gathered for our sixth annual conference—once again in Atlanta, the place of its origin. Taking the big picture into account, we believe this year’s gathering was another successful event. Here’s why:

All about Relationships

Many months ago when Fr. Paul asked the young adult leaders what they thought was the most important strategic focus for Connect—product excellence, operational efficiency, or our relationship with conference attendees—they unanimously responded, “Relationships!” This clear and very Orthodox focus has implications. One is that our gatherings should be smaller in size than other young adult events are.

As things turned out, due in part to a hurricane, this year’s conference was the smallest we’ve ever had—and our guests *loved* it! One participant

wrote, “The conference was incredible beyond words. Friendship, spiritual talks, the fun—I knew it was going to be amazing, but I didn’t know it would be one of the best weekends of my life. THANK YOU!” What wonderful validation it was to hear from participants that they appreciate our relatively small gatherings, where they can meet and get to know others more easily than they could at larger events, at which the natural tendency is to gravitate toward the people we already know.

Sacrificing for Sustainability

The Connect Conference continues to be a 100% volunteer effort. While this has its benefits, one of the resulting challenges is sustainability from year to year. It takes considerable effort to plan and operate a conference well, and the time and energy of volunteers is limited. Given that reality, the collective sacrifice of the young adults on the planning team was another factor in our success

this year. We were “lean” (to borrow a word from Lucas, last year’s coordinator)—or if you prefer, “small but mighty.” From Josh, who helped take care of our guest speakers; to Sophia, who designed the program book; to Chris, who shot video during the weekend; to Rania, who managed food and beverages; to Maria, our operational lynchpin—everyone on the local operations team contributed meaningfully to the event.

Such sacrifice contributed to sustainability not just this year but into the next one. By bringing the conference back to Atlanta, where we had some social memory and experience with these events, we were able to give next year’s planning team more than a year to prepare for the 2023 event. Without the pressure of a constricted timeline and with the collective knowledge we’ve gained over the past few years, the team in Minneapolis will be able to work in a context that will give them more possibility than any Connect planning team has ever had.

Trying New Things

In a year when we focused on “renewal” as a theme, we tried many new things! Inspired by Priya Parker’s book *The Art of Gathering*, we found and selected a venue that aligned with our theme, a renovated building from the 1920s turned into an event space. This was the first time we did not use a hotel for both lodging and event space; this challenge and the result were both gratifying.

Because we did not find as much local willingness to help organize as we’ve had in the past, we took a page from the “pandemic playbook” and experimented with a remote, distributed planning team. Zoë did some graphic design for our digital messaging; Becky and Katya helped with outreach and registration; Claire managed communications remotely; and a former coordinator, Nick, flew into town a week early to manage check-in. While our distributed planning team functioned well, we have to acknowledge that a completely local planning team makes for a better experience. When we try new things, it’s an opportunity to “live and learn!”

Another new thing we’re trying is the cultivation of a partnership with the recently formed agency of the Assembly of Bishops that is focused on youth and young adult ministry. In addition to speaking regularly with Christian Gonzalez, a director of Orthodox Youth Ministries, Fr. Paul has submitted a grant proposal to Leadership 100 for Connect’s integration with OYM and further development, and he is taking a class on fundraising, the knowledge and skill gained from which will help support Connect.

An Invitation to Support Relationships

When you give to Connect, you’re supporting relationships between Orthodox Christian young adults, with the speakers we bring to nourish and challenge them, and with yourselves, who are supporting these young adults to act on behalf of the Church of which they are members. As the year draws to a close and you consider the causes to which you’d like to give, we hope you will be inspired by what we’re doing and consider a gift to Connect. For more information, please contact Fr. Paul at fr.paul@connectorthodox.org, or donate online at connectorthodox.org/give

Connect 2022 by the Numbers

Attendees	68
Jurisdictions Represented	7
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Balance from 2021	\$10,897
Variable Expenses	\$11,799
Fixed Expenses	\$20,164
Total Expenses	\$31,963
Registration	\$17,979
Donations	\$14,156
Total Income	\$32,135
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<u>Per Person</u>	
Actual Cost	\$467
Registration Fee	\$225 - \$275
Donors’ Subsidy	\$208
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Balance for 2023	\$11,069