

Annual Report

A talented, goal-oriented, and faithful team of young adults led this year's Connect Conference into a new region: the Midwest! Among the goals they set—and with God's help accomplished—are the following:



Goal 1: Fostering Relationships

Building relationships is in Connect's DNA, and the 2023 planning team maintained this focus. One participant said that "[the conference] was a wonderful mix of addressing spiritual issues affecting young Orthodox Christians while also providing a great venue for us to connect socially..." Hoping to help participants learn not just from the speakers but also from each other, the team refocused on opportunities for small group discussions.

Pan-Orthodox Focus

The pan-Orthodox spirit of the Twin Cities attracted Connect to the Midwest, and the local planning team drew from that strength. A diverse planning team welcomed a more diverse group of participants, including a few catechumens and inquirers. Connect had an Antiochian episcopal sponsor, attended liturgy at a Greek Orthodox parish, and included worship services that combined Byzantine and polyphonic music. One of the best innovations of this year's team was the inclusion of optional ethnic dance lessons so everyone could connect with traditional Orthodox cultures and participate during the Saturday night dance. Local clergy supported the conference by leading prayer services and offering confession.

Goal 2: Growing Closer to Christ and the Faith

The team hoped that participants would leave the conference with concrete takeaways. Beginning with registration, participants were asked to reflect on the

questions: "What does Orthodoxy mean to you?" and "What does [our conference theme of] refuge mean to you?" Participants were encouraged to identify their own purpose for attending the conference.

The planning team was also intentional about choosing the conference theme. Asking "What do Orthodox young adults need?", they discerned that young adults are busy, stressed, and that above all else, they need peace, rest, and refuge from the challenges of this busy world. The planning team hoped that participants would find refuge throughout the weekend as well as tools to help them in the future. One participant reflected, "I felt so rejuvenated after the conference."

To help our participants dig into the conference theme, the team selected a diverse group of vibrant speakers: Fr. Seraphim Majmudar, a priest from California who converted from Hinduism; Mother Macrina, a relatable monastic originally from the local community; Dan Christopoulos, a Church leader with deep experience in missions who works for OCMC; and Paul and Cindy Karos, a pan-Orthodox couple with impressive resumes within and outside of Orthodox ministries. Our participants provided nothing but positive feedback and gratitude to our speakers and wanted to hear even more from them!

Goal 3: Connecting with the Greater Community

One member of the 2023 planning team was struck by a reflection from a former participant that this conference was one of the first times he'd had the opportunity to connect with other Orthodox young

adults. The planning team wanted participants to learn and have the opportunity to engage with at least some of the many national Orthodox resources and organizations. Participants were exposed to ministries such as Faithtree, OYM, OCMC, FOCUS, and the Orthodox Volunteer Corp. As Connect has been working on forming a partnership with OYM, an agency of the Assembly of Canonical Bishops, the team had the pleasure of welcoming a member of OYM as a participant of this year's conference.

Participants also had the opportunity to engage in a service project for FOCUS, making tie blankets for their upcoming winter drive. The speakers recommended books that were made available at a booth at the conference. The team also connected with a local artist to provide Orthodox-themed stickers and greeting cards which were available to participants as well as icons made by Mother Macrina.

Goal 4: Operational Efficiency

The planning team hoped that participants would recommend the Connect Conference to others 80% of the time, and survey results show that this goal was accomplished. 21 out of 24 participants said they would definitely recommend the Connect Conference (5/5) with the other three respondents not far behind.

There were opportunities for learning as well as operational successes from the conference. Although the Connect Conference was awarded a grant from Leadership 100, it turned out that these funds would not be available for the 2023 conference; faithful donors filled that gap with their financial support. Shortly before the conference, the team learned about another pan-Orthodox young adult event happening in a nearby city about 4 weeks after Connect. Excited that so many opportunities are now available, the team is also hopeful that collaboration with OYM will minimize this kind of overlap in the future. While a variety of factors made it difficult to estimate the number of participants, the team was pleased with the size of the conference, believing that having about 95 participants provided participants with a variety of interpersonal interactions while also staying small enough to foster engagement. Some of our participants agreed: "it was intimate and welcoming with a lot of great people", a "perfect size".

Despite some of the operational challenges, many participants shared that they appreciated conference organization: "The logistics for the conference were so organized (e.g., pre-planning reservations for Saturday dinner, clear timing, transportation, etc.)...super well

done!"; "I loved how well organized it was". Connect is a very well established conference, which has contributed to its growing success. Each local planning team now has a helpful template from which to work, use, and modify as needed. This year's team learned from lessons from past years—for example, the benefit of having a primarily local planning team—and looks forward to passing on knowledge and lessons learned to next year's conference planners.



Thank You

The 2023 Connect Conference Team wishes to offer a heartfelt thank you to all the past and future donors and volunteers of this conference. This conference is not possible without our loving supporters. This is a truly unique, fulfilling, and vital ministry. Young adults are the present and future of our Church, and we hope to continue growing ministries to help them connect with one another and our faith. As one participant put it: "I'm still reeling in awe of it all"... We are too!

Connect 2023 by the Numbers

Attendees	95
Jurisdictions Represented	6
States Represented	23
Percentage of Local (MN) Participants	50%
Percentage of First Time Participants	74%

Balance from 2022	\$12,913
Income from Registrations	\$23,080
Income from Fundraising	\$16,460
Total Income	\$52,453

Hotel Expenses	\$22,563
Offsite F&B / Social Expenses	\$13,620
Speaker Expenses	\$5,822
Other Expenses	\$7,153
Total Expenses	\$49,158

Balance for 2024	\$3,295
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