

History of the Youth Choir

Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church

962 East Ave., Rochester, NY 14607

By: Youth Choir Director, Christine Kerxhalli

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The seed for the Youth Choir was planted 20 years ago. Fr. Jerry Tasikas was dedicated to teaching the children of the Catechism and Greek School classes about Liturgics and Hymnology. On Saturday of Lazarus each year, Fr. Jerry would call all the children up to the Solea and give each of them a copy of the blue Divine Liturgy book that was in the pews and coach them throughout the entire service to sing the hymns while he explained along the way. I remember thinking as I observed Fr. Jerry, how this training was never given to me as a child in our Catechism school. At the time of my childhood, the church services here at the Annunciation were entirely in Greek and having a limited understanding of the Greek language; I quite often did not know what was going on in church as a child. What a shame to come to church every Sunday and not understand what is going on! Now, of course, we use a great deal of English in church to help our young people and those with a limited understanding of the Greek language, but even the English of the service can be difficult to understand. What is the English teaching us? The Theology of the church is simple yet quite complex at the same time. Even the English can be difficult to understand if it is not properly explained. As an adult, in order to better understand my faith, I sought this information from Orthodox Seminaries in order to learn about it. With my search for better understanding of my faith, it became important for me to help our children learn about the church hymns and the liturgics of the church so they would not grow up 'not knowing', like I did.

Inspired by this vision and having a musical and liturgical background in the Church, I approached Fr. Jerry with the idea of going to the Sunday School Classrooms on a rotating basis with the blue Divine Liturgy books and an electronic keyboard to actually teach about the liturgical practice of the church and its sacred hymnology. That idea also expanded to the Greek School where once a month, the Greek School classes were all called into the Chapel and given training on the Divine Liturgy and the Hymns in the church.

Fr. Jerry arranged for me to have a rolling cart and I brought an electronic keyboard I had from home. I put the keyboard on the cart, stacked blue Divine Liturgy books on it and every Sunday, visited one or two classrooms from grades 1 through teen on a schedule established by Father and the Sunday School principle. I taught the children the hymns in both Greek and English. Those children who didn't read Greek, I taught them how to read the phonetics that were written in the blue Divine Liturgy book. Then I explained the meaning of each hymn to the children.

About 14 years ago, I realized there were children who really enjoyed it. They looked forward to my visitations to the Sunday School classrooms and singing the Church hymns. They were often quite fascinated with the explanation of the Hymns and the Liturgical practice in the church. Their faces would quite literally glow with such love and passion for the Lord while they were singing, with such depth of feeling, that I was often moved to tears observing their expression of Love for the Lord.

At that point, I proposed to Father Jerry starting the Youth Choir. It met with resounding acceptance in the Sunday School. The Youth Choir continued to grow and eventually I had as many as 26 children all at once coming faithfully to every rehearsal and every service we were scheduled to sing at. It was time for our church to understand that the Youth Choir had grown to the point where we were a real youth organization of the church and should have choir robes as well. The children of the Youth Choir had a fundraiser and baked chocolate chip cookie cakes then held a raffle at church to raise money for the robes on Valentine's Day, February 14, 1999. It was a huge success, and with the help of many generous donors, we were able to raise enough money to buy the beautiful ivory and burgundy robes that are still used to this day. Refer to image on page 3.

Of course, none of this would have been possible without the undying commitment and support of Fr. Jerry Tasikas and all of the families of the children who were interested in the Youth Choir. Moms, Dads, Aunts, Uncles, Grandmothers, and Grandfathers too all patiently brought their children in all kinds of weather and under many different family circumstances to rehearsals and to sing when they were scheduled. The families of the children enthusiastically listened to their children practice at home the hymns of the church and also helped them with the Greek and English words while they were learning to chant the prayers to the Theotokos and the Lord for the Salutation Services to the Theotokos during Great Lent. Without this love and support of the families for their children's wish to learn about and to be part of the Liturgical practice in the Church, the Youth Choir would have never come to be.

So it is with grateful thanks to Father Jerry Tasikas and all of the parents, aunts, uncles, grandmothers and grandfathers, who made every effort to encourage their child's interest in the Liturgical practice of the church that I write this historical perspective of the Annunciation Youth Choir in Rochester, New York. God bless all of you and your families for your dedication to the Church. ✝

Christine Kerxhalli
December 27, 2009

ANNUNCIATION YOUTH CHOIR WITH THEIR NEW ROBES!

Image Below: Taken March 24, 1999 in the Children's Chapel just before we sang at the Annunciation Vespers with our new Robes that we had earned from our Cookie Cake Raffle on Valentine's Day, February 14, 1999! Fr. Jerry Tasikas is shown in the center image.

Top (left to right) : Christine Kerxhalli, Director; Giorgio Dell'Aiera, Stephanie Wendt, Kenneth Pink, Amanda Marou, Maria Soures. **Center (left to right):** Alexandra Pink, Children together with Fr. Jerry Tasikas, Christina Gallis. **Bottom (left to right):** Biagio Dell Aiera, Alexandro Dell Aiera, Allison Dumm, John Yannas, Dan Gallis.

