

Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America
53rd Convention, Miami, Florida July 23-30, 2017

Department of
BECOMING TRULY HUMAN

Very Rev. Michael Nasser, Chair

Executive Summary

Becoming Truly Human is the first national outreach ministry, by any jurisdiction, which empowers parishes in their local communities to make the Orthodox faith available to people of all religious backgrounds, with an emphasis on those in the category of being a “none” (checking “none of the above” when asked about their religion).

It is guided by the last commandment given by Jesus Christ to his followers, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8). Becoming Truly Human helps parishes witness to their local community.

Becoming Truly Human is a five-week course. Each week begins with a meal, and then is followed by a short video presentation, and then concludes with a discussion of fundamental questions by the participants.

The video presentation that the guests watch is the first American Orthodox feature film, commissioned by His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, of the same name as the program. The feature film is 85 minutes long, and is intended to be watched over the entire five weeks.

The response to this new film has been a wide range of tears, joy, and excitement. Numerous priests have commented on the brilliance of the film. The overwhelming positive response to the feature film has been more than encouraging.

In 2016 we offered two public webinars for both clergy and laity to watch the film before its release, both on August 11 and September 22. Both webinars were met with good attendance and positive feedback.

The film became available for parishes to use in October of 2016. His Eminence was gracious to announce the launch of our new materials in a letter to the Archdiocese in December of 2016. Since our launch, nine parishes have run the program internally for their parish. Five of those parishes have already hosted a public course and have reported 100% positive feedback.

Since November of 2016 Sdn. Adam Lowell Roberts, full time administrator of the program, has been visiting deaneries and sharing the new feature film along with updates at deanery meetings. This was done to ensure that all of our clergy were aware

of the new feature film and the availability of this outreach ministry to their parish. So far we have presented the film to at least 80 clergy at various clergy gatherings, and have several more screenings scheduled for deanery meetings in 2017.

In closing, I want to share an unexpected blessing. Many of the churches have personally thanked Mr. Roberts for visiting, and have expressed how rare it is to receive a visitor from the Archdiocese.

Becoming Truly Human
Written Presentation to the Archdiocese
General Assembly
July, 2017

- I. Changes Since The 2015 Archdiocese Convention
 - A. On September 7th, 2016, Metropolitan JOSEPH decided to remain the Overseer for the time being.
 - B. Leadership: Fr. Michael Nasser, of Pastor of St. Nicholas Antiochian Orthodox Church in Grand Rapids, MI replaced Charles Ajalat as the Director.
 - C. The department produced the first American Orthodox feature film, per film industry standards in the United States (Feature=a film at least 70 minutes in length, Standards=documentaries typically cost between \$300,000-\$500,000). The Becoming Truly Human documentary should have cost \$400,000. Through a series of miracles and sacrifices (mostly by the filmmaker Nathan Jacobs), the Archdiocese secured the film for approximately \$80,000.
 - D. The mission was expanded to evangelize all people, whether currently Orthodox or not, with the understanding that we all need to grow in Christ for our entire lives. Under our previous policies, only non-Orthodox were allowed as guests to the discussion groups. Now everyone is welcome to be a guest.
 - E. Truly Human LLC was established under Ancient Faith Ministries to protect the Archdiocese, due to the nature of evangelism work and exposure. All operations and financial transactions are intended to go through the LLC. We hope this will be a permanent location for the department.
 1. The Directors of Truly Human LLC consist of Fr. Michael Nasser, Fr. John Finley, and John Maddex.
 - F. The first non-Antiochian parishes purchased the program. A total of seven parishes purchased the program in the 2016/2017 year.
 - G. The course length and the training length were shortened based on parish feedback. The new course is five weeks long, with an optional sixth week. The new training is three hours, with an optional 2 additional hours for review of the film.

II. The Mission of Becoming Truly Human

A. Becoming Truly Human is a program at the parish level which exists to:

1. "provide an opportunity for the unchurched living around our churches to hear about and discuss the understanding of what it means to be "truly human" [St. Athanasius] in a safe, open, and loving environment, from the perspective of the Orthodox Church."

III. Exact Nature

A. Becoming Truly Human is an outreach ministry available to all Antiochian parishes at minimal cost. This is a tool available to parishes wanting to implement or increase their outreach to their local community.

1. The Becoming Truly Human program is a five-week program. Each week, two Orthodox discussion leaders host a group of guests for a meal, watch a chapter of the film, and then have a 30-45-minute discussion on what was viewed.
2. At the end of the week five session, the film naturally makes guests curious about the Orthodox Church, and hopefully creates a curiosity for them to visit a church and learn more about this expression of Christianity most of America is unfamiliar with.
3. Our only full time staff, Sdn. Adam Lowell Roberts, visits churches to train them on how to implement the program and execute the discussion groups. Sdn. Adam also visits parishes to give presentations on the program and its value and benefits in a parish setting.

IV. Specific Measurable Goals for 2016/2017

- A. We desired to train 24 additional parishes.
- B. A training workshop at every PLC: Fr. Michael Nasser desired to make the program readily available to our Archdiocese by offering a training workshop at each of the Parish Life Conferences.
- C. Professional Presentation: The leadership team sought to create and produce the first American Orthodox feature film.
- D. The establishment of a protective legal structure for the film, program, and Archdiocese.
- E. The establishment of a new website for the program.
- F. A new workbook, which included all of the feedback from the 30 parishes who had previously implemented the program.
- G. To have Ancient Faith Ministries handle the distribution of the program materials through their web store.

- V. Assessment of Measurable Goals
 - A. We trained 36 parishes in 2016/2017.
 - B. We held five successful training workshops at five of the seven Parish Life Conferences.
 - C. The first American Orthodox feature film was completed in September of 2016 by the filmmaker and delivered to the Archdiocese. Since then a series of details are being executed, such as insurance and distribution options.
 - D. A protective legal structure was established: Truly Human LLC, a subsidiary of Ancient Faith Ministries. It was incorporated in Indiana under AFMs non-profit status.
 - E. A website was created by the Administrator.
 - F. The new workbook was completed in December of 2016, and has been received from the printer.
 - G. The program will be on sale with the publication of this month's Ancient Faith catalog.
- VI. Specific Measurable Goals for 2017/2018
 - A. We desire to train 24 parishes in 2017/2018.
 - B. To make all parishes aware of the new film
 - C. To make all parishes aware of the updates which have been made to the program, including the change to include all people as guests, whether Orthodox or non-Orthodox.
 - D. Offer a screening of the film at all deanery/clergy meetings so that our clergy are aware of this film and its intended use in a parish setting.
- VII. Action Plan 2017/2018
 - A. To train parishes, we are offering a combination of the following: workshops at specific PLCs in 2017, individual parish workshops, follow up with parishes who had expressed interest but have not been trained. At each parish workshop, the Administrator advertises the workshop to the geographic area to encourage representatives from other parishes to attend the workshop.
 - B. To make parishes aware: A letter was sent from Metropolitan JOSEPH to all parishes announcing the new film and the updates materials this past winter.
 - C. A series of abridged trainings have been scheduled and are being executed with parishes who implemented the old version of the program. Each of the 30 parishes have been updated or will be updated by the end of 2017.

VIII. Department Staffing

- A. Director: Fr. Michael Nasser, volunteer.
- B. Board Member: Fr. John Finley, volunteer.
- C. Board Member: John Maddex, volunteer.
- D. Administrator: Sdn. Adam Lowell Roberts, full time/paid. Handles all day-to-day activity and responsibilities, as well as leading training workshops at parishes who want to implement the program.
- E. Trainer: Sdn. James Blackstock. Hired as needed, on stipend, to lead training workshops.
- F. Trainer: Sdn. Stratos Mandalakis. Hired as needed, on stipend, to lead training workshops in the northeast.
- G. Trainer (pending Metropolitan approval): Dn. Mark Baker. Hired as needed, on stipend, to lead training workshops on or near the west coast.