

2018 Philoptochos Convention
Small Group Breakout Sessions – July 4, 2018

Discussion Topic: St. Basil's Academy Break Out Session

Facilitators: Fr. Moralis, Joanne Stavrakas, Evan Scurtis, Aspasia Melis, Philippa Condakes (scribe)

Perception of the Academy: most members knew that it was an orphanage at a one time but no longer is. At one time, there were summer camp programs offered there as well. Most know that there are beautiful grounds and many facilities for the students. There was an actual school at the Academy but that does not exist anymore.

The Academy is under the direction of Fr. Constantine L. (Costas) Sitaras, Executive Director, and the Board of Directors.

The Academy is supported financially from the Philoptochos (Vasilopita and Sisterhood) and other private donations. Even though it is under the Archdiocese, they do not receive any funding from them. The Academy grounds and buildings are owned by Philoptochos. There is no state funding for the children.

Most members were unaware of how children are placed at St. Basil's. Also, all children are Christian but not necessarily Orthodox. There must be some connection to someone who is Orthodox in order for them to be referred to the Academy. Usually the referral comes through a parish priest. The Academy currently has 21 children but could house 60 to 70. Children can stay as long as they need and are monitored on a case by case basis depending on the family situation. Parents must give consent for the children to come to the Academy. Some children are not accepted to the program as they need more specialized services than the Academy is equipped with. Families can and do visit.

Most members not aware that the children attend regular public or private schools in the area. St. Basil's must pay for education as they are non-profit and therefore pay no taxes to cover tuition. Tuition is approximately \$15,000 per student. They attend schools in Garrison, the same district as West Point.

Fr. Costas and the staff make it as close to a normal home life as possible. They provide a place that is safe for the children. Children are involved in afterschool activities: sports, Greek school, student government, music school, and attend summer camp. They also attend proms and learn to drive when the time comes. Some have even attended Ionian Village. Children attend services and after Sunday Liturgy, they all have a family dinner together. The children are being raised by the Church.

Children live in dormitories with a Dorm parent for each group. They have meals together and attend Chapel services. Clothing is provided by the Academy, they are cared for and loved.

Children at St. Basil's are from all over the country. At times there have been children from Florida, Alabama, Illinois and California. Parents must give permission for children to come to the Academy. Currently they youngest child is 6 years old.

Bridge Program is available for the teenagers after they graduate from High School to attend college or transition to life beyond the Academy.

Fr. Moralis strongly urged everyone to visit the Academy at some point. Christmas and Graduation are the times that the children put on special programs. Visits at other times can be arranged by contacting Fr. Costas. It was also suggested that you take your youth groups and Philoptochos chapters. Another way to educate your parishes is to invite a speaker – usually one of the students or a graduate – to come to your Vasilopita or other event and have a face to face connection. This can also be arranged through Fr. Costas.

The staff consists of social workers, psychologists, dentists and doctors who come to the Academy and family law professionals. The dental clinic at the Academy is current state of the art. Many of the staff live on campus.

Also, Presbytera Baker stayed there for several years after the death of her husband with her family until they were back on their feet.

Other ways that people can help the Academy is through the Adopt a student program, purchasing items on the wish list, and other donations of gift cards, etc. that can be arranged through Fr. Costas.

Questions were brought up:

- Why not lease parts of the property for income? – Must be careful who rents as there are restrictions because of the children are on the campus.
- Why did we not move the National Philoptochos offices there? – too far away and hard to get there from NYC.