

“External Affairs” – Brief Summary for the 2018 Archdiocesan Assembly:
Participation of the Archdiocese of Pittsburgh in the activities of
Christian Associates of Southwestern Pennsylvania

For a good number of years, the Archdiocese of Pittsburgh (together with the other Orthodox Churches who have a presence in the Pittsburgh region) has had a membership presence in Christian Associates of Southwestern Pennsylvania. This organization (which about forty years ago came to replace the Pittsburgh council of churches) has membership including Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Byzantine Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, United Methodist, AME, AME Zion, Baptist, Presbyterian, UCC, and Disciples of Christ church groups, among others, church groups which have a presence in an 11-county area of Western Pennsylvania. The phrase “external affairs” is utilized because this is the terminology utilized by the Central Administration, and is consistent with that utilized by other Churches world-wide (for example, the Russian Church). The presence in Christian Associates is certainly not the sole external affairs function for the Archdiocese; but it is a significant effort.

Given the structure of the organization, the Archdiocesan Hierarchy, Archbishop Melchisedek, is positioned as a member of the “Council” of Christian Associates; the Council is the highest-ranking body which is responsible for policy-making and direction. Fr. William Evansky, as Chancellor, currently serves as the Archdiocesan “proxy” representative to the Council (for meeting purposes, in the occurrence of the absence of our Diocesan Hierarchy). Currently, Fr. George Johnson serves as Board of Delegates representative for the Archdiocese of Pittsburgh; and he is the Chairman of the Theology and Education Committee, having served in this capacity for some time.

The Theology and Education committee has the task of the “doing of theology”, as it presents itself. Classically as regards inter-church group activity, the Orthodox Church has consistently seen the cultivation of the serious doing of theology to be of paramount importance, and it remains at the lead of our Archdiocesan participation in Christian Associates (again, consistent with the vision and direction of the Orthodox Church world-wide).

There are a number of activities engaged in within the Christian Associates organization; and some of the activities of the previous years have been “spun-off” to other sponsoring organizations (ex.: the Jail Chaplaincy project). In years past, there was Archdiocesan participation in the several aspects of those activities; in the more recent years, participation has been mainly within the Theology and

Education Committee (in addition to, of course, the direct participation of Archbishop Melchisedek at the level of the organization's "Council").

Speaking broadly and over the years, our diocesan methodology for approaching inter-faith work of any and all kinds, including Christian Associates' work, has been fashioned by the consistent direction taken and methodology delineated and employed by the late Fr. Georges Florovsky, and then those who were contemporary with and followed him in that work. A survey of the specific writings and reflections expressed by Father George Florovsky in the course of all the years of his various participations will well serve to adequately summarize that vision, those approaches, that methodology, that motivation, and those actions which direct and shape those activities in which the Archdiocese of Pittsburgh has been involved during its time within Christian Associates.

Participation at the level of the "doing of theology" has also produced involvement by our Archdiocesan representation in a number of special efforts, over the years. The Theology and Education Committee is often called upon to study and present for the CA "Council" membership, and to encourage serious theological reflection (this in addition to its own internal study and work). A major focus more recently has been the Christian interaction with Islam, Islamic culture and beliefs, as well as the broad subject of Muslim immigration into the region. However, the topics have ranged widely in scope (as one might imagine).

By participation in such efforts, we today have the opportunity to make the same kinds of contributions as were made by Fr. George Florovsky and others in their era (and to continue to employ that tried-and-true methodology utilized and promoted by Fr. George Florovsky and the others); we come to meet and discuss with those who are our neighbors. The Scriptural understanding of "neighbor" is the ultimate motivating force for participation in inter-faith activities of any kind. That is: where we find ourselves on this earth, we find that we also have neighbors. The structure of Christian Associates of Southwestern Pennsylvania serves to encourage communication, fellowship and cooperative efforts among the various "neighbors" of the region.

[Forwarded by Fr. George Johnson]