

MGOCSM Toronto Lenten Retreat Summary

The Lenten Retreat of the MGOCSM of Toronto/Montreal area took place on Saturday, March 15 at St. Thomas Orthodox Church of Toronto. More than 45 youth participated in the Retreat. The Retreat began with 'Sh'himo Namaskaram' prayers in English, led by Rev. Fr. Dr. P. K. Mathews.

Following prayers, Rev. Fr. Geoffrey Ready our guest speaker, who is an ordained priest of the Orthodox Church in America, spoke on the theme for the Retreat (Why We Fast). Fr. Ready, led us in reflection and discussion as he facilitated a discussion on verses from the Old & New Testament of the Bible, having to do with different principles of fasting. The opportunity to discuss this further was given in pairs, and small groups, to ensure a firm understanding of the importance of the spiritual discipline of fasting. One of the activities during the retreat is we learned how to make a prayer rope. It was a very difficult process, which took much practice and patience. We had a YouTube video, "*How To Make a Orthodox Prayer Rope*" - By Michael Iskander, as a guide. We also had some of our MGOCSM leaders come around to help anyone who needed help. Another important initiative that was taken was to familiarize the youth with the songs that would be sung during the service throughout Passion Week. With three leaders guiding us, we sang the verses in good rhythm and flow while grasping the true meaning of what was being sung.

Later during the day, we were divided in to two groups for discussions about Lent and why fasting is important. There were some good points that came across on why it is important to pay attention to our spiritual life and taking lent seriously. Although some youth were not fasting, many youth wanted to improve the way they were around people and keep in touch with their inner spiritual self by reading the Bible more often and praying.

Overall, this Lenten Retreat was an eye opening experience on what it was like to truly partake in Lent. We learned that preparation and prayer was a direct pathway in communicating with the Almighty and understanding his plan for us. We hope that the youth continues the drive to get closer to our God in faith by attending the retreat next year as well.

Below is an important verse from the Gospel of Saint Mathews Chapter 6, that sums up the Lenten retreat theme and how fasting should be done.

"And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you."