



Our Orthodox youth today are growing up in a very difficult world. With a countless number of harmful influences and increasing pressure from the media, they are living in a society which is much different than that of previous generations. Faced with these influences and pressures, we have an obligation as Orthodox Christians to pass on to our young people an understanding of Christ and His holy Church that will ultimately lead them to the Kingdom of Heaven. St. John Chrysostom points out the importance of this obligation saying, “With us everything should be secondary compared to our concern with children, and their upbringing in the instruction and teaching of the Lord.”

Today’s youth are growing up with the same physical and psychological changes that all young people of past generations have had, but their life experience, however, is drastically different. Considering the incredible number of technological advancements in the last twenty years alone, we can start to realize that our children are growing up in a world much different than the one in which we spent our formative years. Young people today have no concept of life without VCRs, cell phones, or personal computers.

In addition to the advantages gained through modern technology, over time a great number of negative influences have arisen that conflict with the message of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. For example, our American society has become increasingly more materialistic. We see an ever growing stress placed on the needs and desires of this life, with decreased emphasis on our spiritual well-being and the eternal life to come. Many people become overly concerned with accumulating material and financial wealth, while at the same time disregarding their calling to be imitators of Christ.

Each and every day we are bombarded with images and messages that attempt to influence us. The media is constantly trying to tell us what should be important in our lives. Different types of media promote what products and services we should buy, what to consider entertaining, and what to deem acceptable and unacceptable. In a great number of cases these media pressures do not coincide with Orthodox Christian teachings and many times directly contradict them. Taking advantage of our weaknesses, these influences are incredibly effective on all of us, but especially on our young developing children.

Compounding the problem created by our materialistic society, we also see an increase of dangerous factors that our children can come into contact with. In our society we see Internet pornography, greater accessibility to drugs, and school shootings, along with a myriad of other destructive influences. Most adults are surprised and appalled when they hear of the realities that our kids face each day. It is truly a different and foreign world in comparison to that of their own experience.

All of these negative powers can certainly seem overwhelming. For this reason we must always keep in mind the great love and power of Jesus Christ. It is through Him that we are able to face and defeat these influences that threaten to harm our children. With His guidance and protection we can help our young people become healthy Christian adults. We must remember, however, that their education in the Orthodox faith is not the sole responsibility of the clergy and Sunday School teachers.



With such a formidable challenge we must work as a team, parents, priests, advisors and teachers, for the benefit of our children. Together we must teach our youth that their belief in Jesus Christ should not be expressed only between nine and noon on Sunday mornings. Rather, we must show them how to live their Orthodox Christian faith every single day of their lives. By doing this we equip them with the tools that they will need to successfully combat the pressures and dangers of the world around them.

It may seem strange to think that we all are called to help teach our young people about the Orthodox faith. Obviously the clergy and lay teachers of the Church are trained to instruct our children about the teachings of Christ, but it is important to remember that we all play a vital role in their Christian development. It is imperative that we take an active role in our kids' lives now, so that they will have a proper foundation to build upon in the future. Learning at an early age how to truly follow Christ, our youth will be better prepared to deal with pressures that will attempt to turn them away from the Lord.

We have all been given valuable gifts from God which we must use for His glory. Since we all are distinct individuals we each have something unique to offer those around us. It is through a combined effort that we can hope to teach our children how to become faithful, active members of the Body of Christ, His holy Church. We must utilize our talents in a way that is pleasing in the eyes of God so that the young people of the Church can learn to do likewise.

Young people search out role models in their lives. They desire to have someone to admire and follow. If we do not supply for them role models that are positive and close to them, they will look elsewhere. Often our children begin to emulate famous members of society such as athletes and entertainers. This is not a bad thing in and of itself, but many times these figures do not offer a healthy Christian example for our kids. It is important for us to identify positive and negative characteristics in prominent figures and to discuss them with our young people.

More importantly, we must act as role models ourselves. Being human we all are sinners, but we must do our very best to live faithful Christian lives. We do this for the sake of our own salvation, but also to give an example to those around us. If we attempt to express our love for one another in all of our words and actions, we can teach by example. Impressionable children watch and learn their behavior from those around them. When we provide a positive, healthy, Christian lifestyle, they are given the opportunity to assimilate it into their own behavior and identity.

Our world has changed a great deal over the years making the current society much different than that of the past. Today's Orthodox young people face difficulties and challenges that were previously unthinkable. Our sacred duty then, is to transfer to them the faith of Christ's Church amidst a world of negative pressures and influences. Chrysostom tells us, "everything should be secondary compared to our concern with children." It is imperative that we take this advice and put it into practice through our devotion and love for our youth.