Current Activity – Year in Review

1. **Support Groups** – To date there are four active Support Groups established that utilize the material and format established by Saint Anastasia’s Fellowship (SAF) – three of these groups operate independently outside of the Archdiocesan District. All four continue with regular meetings and a stable base of participants. Two groups which began at the start of 2023 were suspended over the summer.

   *Findings:* The efficacy of a group seems dependent on localized administration and interest. For this reason, mobilizing a training program for future interested group leaders is necessary.

   a. **Group Leaders Training Seminar** – As a result of these findings, SAF met with the Clergy Syndesmos of Suffolk County in late 2023 to initiate a Group Leaders Training Seminar. *Material is in development* – SAF is working with these participating priests and parishes to determine what format will be most effective to communicate the core principles of SAF. This initiative is set to begin Fall of 2024.

2. **Awareness** – Since the last AD Clergy-Laity meeting SAF facilitated two Awareness events.

   a. **Regional GOYA Lenten Retreat, Annunciation GOC (Stamford) – March 12, 2023 – Topic: ‘Fasting’ and Technology Addiction** – This was a segment of the retreat that challenged the youth to consider their usage of technology, and how it may distract from the purpose of Lent. The group was receptive to the presentation, and many seemed to be open to the challenge of limiting their ‘screentime’ during the Lenten journey.

   b. **Addiction Awareness Forum, Saint Nicholas (Flushing) – May 4, 2023 – Topic: Panel-based Discussion on the Prevalence of Addiction** – Organized by SAF with the clergy and Philoptochos of the parish. In addition to SAF personnel, the Forum brought in a locally based psychologist and family lawyer to share their combined experiences of addiction and how it presents in the individual and the family. The discussion concluded with a question-and-answer session. The event was well received, with an expressed desire for similar events at the parish in the future.

   c. **Various Homilies – Most Recent: March 22, 2024 – Topic: The Theotokos as Mother to Addicts**

   *Findings:* Events such as these are effective in bringing about awareness of addictive behaviors, and possible preventative techniques. Ultimately, the goal of these events is to
eliminate/diminish the harmful elements of *stigma* and *denial*. An emphasis on encouraging AD parishes to sponsor/incorporate SAF Awareness events is recommended.

3. **Outreach** – This aspect of the Ministry remains open, but currently is established through two aspects: media and pastoral counsel.
   a. *Pastoral Counsel* – Individual or Family counseling appointments have been made on a case-to-case basis concerning the needs of the individual and the recommendations of the Pastoral Counselor. These appointments have been held over the phone, zoom, and in-person. Should professional and/or psychological treatment be required, the Pastoral Counselor has assisted the individual/family seeking out local treatment options. Through the request of the Archdiocese, the Counselor served as a similar resource to clergy/clergy families in need as well.
   b. *Media*
      i. *YouTube Live-Streaming Paraklesis – @propheteliaschurch* – Whenever the Support Group meets at the Yonkers campus, the Paraklesis of that evening is Live-Streamed through the parish YouTube Channel and Facebook page. As a result, SAF is connected to individuals who are not in the locality of a Support Group but benefit from both the worship opportunity and the summarizing homily that are offered. This has also resulted in connecting some of these individuals/families with more localized support.
      ii. *Center of Family Care – Family Matters Podcast (April 19, 2023) – An Orthodox Perspective on Addiction & Healing* – Fr. Alex Goussetis speaks with SAF personnel on the impact of addictions on families, as well as resources to educate and support the faithful.
      iii. *Digital Media Initiative* – SAF has taken on a volunteer Creative Director who has begun a branding campaign through digital media. Thus far, an Instagram account has been established (@saintanastasiafellowship), with integration of the homilies offered at the end of the Live-Streamed Paraklesis services.

*Findings:* There has been/continues to be an overwhelming amount of support for this Ministry through the various sources of Outreach – this support is consistently accompanied by an expression of urgent need for the Addictions Ministry. Recommendations have ranged from creating an independent ‘hotline’, to a website with SAF content, to a virtual support group. Given the limitations of current SAF personnel, the latter of these recommendations seems most viable. SAF will begin exploring the possibility of a virtual (perhaps, Zoom-based) platform, with the advisement of the Chancellery, and provided blessing of His Eminence.

**Looking Ahead - 2024**

1. **Smoking Prevention and Cessation, Westchester County Department of Health** – The Office of the County Executive has allocated funds for community organizations to implement programs that target the use of tobacco/nicotine products amongst youth and young adults. Through the auspices of Prophet Elias Greek Orthodox Church, SAF submitted a proposal and, with the blessing of His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros,
was approved to be a part of this program. SAF personnel is receiving training through the American Lung Association. Following the training, SAF will establish county-sponsored prevention and cessation programs based out of the parish. The first cohort is set to begin in May of 2024.

2. **Core-Curriculum and Program Development, Leadership 100 Grant** – The primary aim of initiating the Group Leadership Training Seminar within the Archdiocesan District is to standardize the curriculum for SAF groups by combining successful methodologies from non-clinical support groups (like AA and SMART Recovery) with Orthodox Christian principles, aligning with 12 Core Competencies for clergy identified by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This effort seeks to develop a specific Core Curriculum, establish a digital platform for easy access and distribution of this curriculum, and broadly promote it to facilitate the formation of SAF groups across the nation. To achieve this, the project will involve drafting key documents to guide principles and moderation, under the supervision of a Program Manager with clinical credentials, ensuring the curriculum’s clinical integrity and effectiveness through expert consultation and review.

3. **Support Group on Virtual Platform** – SAF is currently researching how this is done with other clinical and non-clinical support groups.
Join 1 of 3 Cohorts
In-Person or Virtually!

Freedom from Smoking

This program is facilitated by Father Nikolas at Prophet Elias Greek Orthodox Church, with extensive experience in addiction counseling. The program is sponsored by the Westchester Department of Health in collaboration with the Center for a Tobacco-Free Hudson Valley and the American Lung Association.

Program Details:
- 8 sessions over 7 weeks of FFS curriculum.
- $10 incentive for each session attended.
- Non-pharmaceutical quit kits provided.
- $50 pharmacy gift card to support your journey to quit smoking.

Referral Incentive:
- Refer someone addicted to tobacco and receive a $50 incentive.
- The referred individual must complete the entire program to qualify.

Join us and take the first step towards a healthier life!

For more details, here is our contact information:
- Email: AddictionMinistry@gmail.com
- Phone: (914) 963-3638
- Address: 15 Leroy Avenue, Yonkers, NY 10705

- 1st Cohort Starting in May 2024
- 2nd Cohort Starting in August 2024
- 3rd Cohort Starting in November 2024