



*The Metropolis of Atlanta's First Week of Saint Stephen's Summer Camp commenced with a special visit from our Metropolitan, His Eminence Sevastianos. During his stay at the Alexios Retreat Center, the campers of Week 1 were able to speak with, and ask questions of His Eminence, particularly concerning this year's camp theme, which is Love. The following represents his Eminence's reflections of that beautiful day, upon his return to the Metropolis headquarters:*

"Truly, it brought me great joy to witness the happiness on the faces of our youth, as they were united with their peers in this beloved ministry of our Metropolis of Atlanta, which continues to be nurtured through the support of all our parishes. I was also pleased to see so many of our seminarians from Holy Cross serving as camp counselors. During my brief time with Week 1, under the directorship of Fr. Alexander Kamilaris (St. Demetrios Church, Daytona Beach, FL) and thanks to the tireless efforts of our Metropolis Youth Coordinator, Ms. Monica Gjerde, I recall, whether our children were singing, making silly faces, or joking together, these are also expressions of a true and pure kind of love.

"I would say to the kids, there are many kinds of love: you know, 'I love my car, I love my girlfriend, or boyfriend, my parents & siblings'—but the love of Christ is a love that is the model for us to live by. Christ's love is a sacrificial love, and not only a sacrificial love, but it's full of humility. He was praised by the angels in heaven, and yet He condescended not only to become human, but also to be subject to suffering at the hands of His own creatures, because He wants to bring us back with Him, sitting at His table in Heaven.

“One question I enjoyed was, ‘What shall we do in our lives as a career?’ and I told them to look into your hearts and see what your passion is, what you love the most, and to pursue that. If you do that, it will not feel like work, and like our Former Metropolitan Alexios used to say, ‘I never worked a day in my life,’ because he was doing what he was enjoying. So, if we enjoy what we are doing, it will not feel like work. Some people in leadership roles are even known to say that they don’t know if they play, or if they work.



“Another thing we talked about, especially with the older kids, is be rooted in your faith. You're in high school now, you're going to be going to college. Everybody wants to be accepted by each other, and the perception and the notion of other Christians is that we are all the same. For us Orthodox Christians, we are not. We have differences of dogma and of faith with other Christians, and we need to be rooted, otherwise we are going to allow ourselves to be swept away to other churches and denominations; so, get to know your faith. It doesn't mean we need to be judgmental. Naturally, as Orthodox, we are not certain that we are going to be saved, unless we practice our faith; but we know our faith is the correct faith, and if we practice it, we are going to go from

here to there. Stay connected through the local church where you are in college and be connected if there is an OCF chapter in your area.

“I also told them that with our faith, we often talk about sacrifice, but we should realize that our faith is about joy. Christ himself says, *“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10)*. God doesn’t want us to be miserable; he wants us to be happy. Sin is a parasite that doesn’t belong to our nature, which was created in God’s image and likeness. We need to discern what is good for us and what is not good for us. However, being with God that doesn’t mean we’re not going to be happy and enjoy our lives.

“Among the interesting questions I was asked, I was able to offer my favorite scripture reading, the Parable of the Prodigal Son. For me it is a beautiful love story: the love of the Father who receives his son without judging him and condemning him, who says, ‘Come home, you’re still my son. I love you.’ I stressed that our kids should not—never—feel as though they’ve done something, that they cannot come to their Priests, or to me, because God will never turn us away, and I will never turn them away.”

*His Eminence asks us to pray for a happy and loving conclusion for Week 1, for the safe return of those campers to their homes, as well as for an equally blessed remaining 4 weeks. Finally, we pray for good health and strength for all our outstanding St. Stephen’s and ARC staff!*

