

Development of Orthodox education in Nizhny Novgorod region as a factor of interfaith relations regionwide

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Abstract. The article analyses the current state of most mass Orthodox educational institutions in the Nizhny Novgorod region – Sunday schools and gymnasia, to assess their relevance for interfaith relations in the region. The article reviews legal framework intended to ensure religious education in educational institutions, which regulates the content and range of academic disciplines, and serves as a conceptual basis for drawing up curricula at church educational institutions.

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Introduction

The relevance of the above topic is conditioned by the development of Orthodox education in the Nizhny Novgorod region. Promotion of Orthodox education in the Nizhny Novgorod region is of particular concern and involves vigorous activity undertaken by the Nizhny Novgorod Archdiocese of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) [1]. The strategy of this activity is based on a set of fundamental documents of the Russian Orthodox Church in this area: the canons of the Council of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church of 1994 "On Goals of the Church in the Field of Religious Education", as well as the content of the document entitled "On Religious Education and Catechetical Ministry in the Russian Orthodox Church" approved by the canons of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church of December 27, 2011 (Journal No. 152)[2].

The subject matter of this article implies research into the most highly sought Orthodox educational institutions that have the largest number of students enrolled, namely Sunday schools and Orthodox gymnasia [3]. Currently the Nizhny Novgorod Archdiocese accommodates 10 Orthodox gymnasia, dozens of Sunday schools (31 schools are currently operating in Nizhny Novgorod alone) that are actively engaged in educational activity; local community is interested in theological education as evidenced by the increase in the number of pupils in Sunday schools and gymnasia, as well as introduction of relevant training programs at universities [4, 5].

Main part

The most widespread type of Orthodox educational institutions is Sunday schools. Such schools are usually set up at cathedrals and are within walking distance of parishioners. Curricula of these schools are focused on revealing to children and teenagers the basics of the Orthodox Faith, mastering

the Bible, giving an insight into major religious festivals and saints, orthodox lifestyle and introducing into the Orthodox culture. Such work can be called catechetical or doctrinal. Curricula of Sunday schools are usually designed for two years of study (or three years for very young children). The children of parishioners are generally enrolled with them. A smaller part of the total number of students is adults. The academic process in such schools is versatile: in some schools children learn just the way they do in ordinary schools while sitting at their desks and listening to their teacher. In other schools training is practiced in the form of conversations, games and is highly interactive; many schools combine traditional methods with interactive ones when children and adults come together to organize events, hold festivals, training there is built mainly on the "club" principle with tea drinking and long talks [6].

Most Sunday schools teach pupils the following subjects: the Law of the Lord, Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture, History of the Russian Orthodox Church, Spiritual and Moral Education, Church Slavonic.

In some schools additional disciplines are taught such as church singing, hagiography (namely in the parish of the Conciliar Church of the Life-Giving Trinity in Vysokovo), Piety, the Acts of the Apostles, Sacred Music, etc.

The training program of Sunday schools includes as a variety of hobby classes such as handicrafts, wood carving, painting, there are theatre studios for children, etc. Certain work is being conducted with parents, including parental lectures; some schools hold literary circles (such as "Candle" literary salon at the Sunday school at the Church of the Intercession in the town of Bogorodsk).

As a rule parents of pupils at Sunday schools are active parishioners, who are eagerly involved in the organization of pilgrimages and festivals. In

terms of extracurricular activities the following are being arranged: participation of children in worship services, pilgrimages, charity concerts, participation of children and teachers in various competitions. Nizhny Novgorod parishes of the Churches of the Smolensk and Vladimir Icons of the Mother of God have some experience of urban and suburban Orthodox camps, which are an extension of a yearly work with the pupils. The parish operates an urban camp in June, a countryside camp in July and a diocesan camp in August.

The academic process in many Sunday schools ensures clarity, sufficient handouts for working with the texts of the Scripture, textbooks on Church Slavonic. Schools with relevant facilities integrate audio and video equipment into the academic process, use computers, video and audio libraries (notably, the school at the main cathedral in the town of Bogorodsk – the Church of the Intercession in Bogorodsk Deanery, the parish of the Churches of the Smolensk and Vladimir Icons of the Mother of God, the school at the Church of the Life-Giving Trinity in the village of Kantaurovo, Bor District, the school at the Church of the Acheiropoieic Image of Christ the Savior, the village of Sosnovskoye, Pavlovo Deanery, etc.).

Although this kind of Orthodox educational institutions is developing rapidly, still there are some challenges. Curricula at Sunday schools are highly diverse, since an academic process in certain schools depends on the teaching staff available, their enthusiasm and expertise.

A Sunday school as a type of orthodox educational establishment has not yet been conceptualized. Orthodox teachers hold different views on its place and importance in the life of the Church. These institutions and their teaching staff need to exchange pedagogical experience, develop and update the goals of Orthodox education in modern conditions, as well as to familiarize themselves with contemporary educational literature reflecting Orthodox values.

Meetings held annually by directors, clergymen and teachers of Sunday schools of all Deaneries of the Nizhny Novgorod Diocese in "Saint Nicholas" Orthodox Cultural and Educational center located in Avtozavod District of Nizhny Novgorod have in recent years come up with a developed common understanding of the role of Sunday schools.

Following the results of the meetings of the past three years Sunday schools are seen by Orthodox teachers as a Christian folk home, a school for parishioners of all ages that should involve its pupils into social, missionary, cultural and educational activities of the parish. Presence of a Sunday school,

its welfare is one of the most reliable indicators of active development of parish life.

The main tasks of further development of Orthodox educational system outlined by the Department of Education and Catechesis of the Nizhny Novgorod Archdiocese imply opening of Sunday schools in every operating parish, arrangement of systematic work on certification of Sunday schools, creation of a unified curriculum and preparation of a single set of teaching materials. Orthodox teachers themselves believe that a no less important task is to create a methodical association of the heads of Sunday schools that should include representatives from each Deanery. Its goal is to facilitate arrangement of catechesis and educational work at Sunday schools and coordinate actions of Orthodox teachers. A methodical association shall take note of modern trends in Sunday schools, maintain the initiatives and transmit accumulated experience. In terms of creating pedagogical methodical associations ROC educational institutions actively cooperate with secular educational institutions. The Slavo-Greek-Latin Office for the Volga Federal District of the Russian Federation (hereinafter referred to as SGLO) at the Linguistics University of Nizhny Novgorod (LUNN), the Minin University, the Nizhny Novgorod Institute for Education Development (NNIED) have such cooperation experience [6]. The academic teaching staff of Nizhny Novgorod universities provides professional assistance in creating teaching methods for the disciplines of the religious module. Notably, the SGLO at the Linguistics University of Nizhny Novgorod is engaged in active cooperation with the Orthodox educational institutions in order to develop teaching methods for linguistic disciplines (Sunday schools see methods of teaching the Church Slavonic language to children as most challenging).

Among the problems that persist in terms of functioning of Sunday schools is their certification, providing them with the latest information and communication tools, logistics, material support of the personnel, most of whom work on a voluntary basis suggesting the need to introduce FTEs for teachers of Sunday schools.

In general, the primary function of Sunday schools in terms of promoting Orthodox education is to raise educate and attract new parishioners, as well as to raise public awareness in the field of Orthodox culture and Orthodox values.

Apart from Sunday schools the Nizhny Novgorod region at present is actively developing a system of secondary schools, providing pupils with general secondary education compliant with the federal educational standard of secondary education, which further comprises an Orthodox component.

These are Orthodox gymnasia, or some of them are called classical Orthodox gymnasia. The legal status of these schools is "Non-state educational institution of a religious organization". The Orthodox component of education provided to schoolchildren in Orthodox gymnasia is regulated in the document approved by the canons of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church in 2010 entitled "The Standard of the Orthodox Component of General Primary, Basic General, Secondary (Complete) General Education". [7]

The Nizhny Novgorod region currently accommodates 10 Orthodox gymnasia. The educational process in them is based on the historical experience of classical grammar schools that traditionally used to be old-line educational institutions in Russia back in the late XIXth - early XXth century. The purpose of education was to form a harmoniously developed personality prepared to perceive university programs in any field and able to be active in all socially useful walks of life [8]. The foundation of education in classical grammar schools was comprised of three blocks of subjects: ancient and modern languages, mathematics, and natural sciences, the law of the Lord.

The educational process in modern gymnasia is based on the same principles: the curricula of all modern Orthodox gymnasia apart from disciplines of the federal component of school education include obligatory subjects such as ancient languages (Church Slavonic, Latin and Greek), the basics of the Orthodox Faith (or piety), high school subjects include the Law of the Lord and Church Singing [9]. Classes in the Law of the Lord are held by Orthodox priests. Each gymnasium has a school church and a clergyman. The aim of the classes in Piety and the Law of the Lord is not only to teach religion and everything related therewith (this is what Seminary does), but the father in a gymnasium during such classes teaches to respect faith, and spiritual and moral values. Considerable attention is given to teaching gymnasium schoolchildren the Russian Literature and History. New languages are a mandatory part of the educational process.

In terms of arranging the academic process Orthodox gymnasia of the Nizhny Novgorod Archdiocese resort to the experience of the "Classical Gymnasium at the Greek-Latin Office of Yury A. Shichalin", which is a non-state educational institution in Moscow. Regulatory documents of gymnasia state that their primary mission is to ensure proper conditions for schoolchildren receiving classical education, as well as religious and moral education in the spirit of the Orthodox Christian morals and traditions of the Russian Orthodox

Church contributing to the restoration of Orthodox culture and piety [10].

The following Orthodox gymnasia are currently operating:

- Arzamas Orthodox Gymnasium named after Holy Martyrs Faith, Hope and Love and their Mother Sophia;
- Gorodets Orthodox Gymnasium named after St. Alexander Nevsky;
- Gnilitzy Orthodox Gymnasium named after St. Nicholas the Wonderworker;
- Diveyevo Conventual Orthodox Secondary School;
- Dzerzhinsk Orthodox Gymnasium named after St. Seraphim of Sarov;
- Zavolzhye Orthodox Gymnasium named after St. Alexander Nevsky;
- Sarov Orthodox Gymnasium named after St. Seraphim of Sarov;
- Semyonovo Orthodox Gymnasium named after Apostle and Evangelist St. Luke;
- Sormovo Orthodox Gymnasium named after Apostle and Evangelist St. John Theologian;
- Nizhny Novgorod Orthodox Gymnasium named after St. Sergius of Radonezh.

The oldest Orthodox gymnasium in the Nizhny Novgorod Archdiocese is the Semyonovo Orthodox Gymnasium that has existed since 2000. The first graduates finished the gymnasium in 2011. Today it teaches about 200 schoolchildren and runs a group of preschool preparation.

The gymnasium successfully went through state accreditation procedures by getting 89% of 100%. In 2012, the Gnilitzy Gymnasium had its first graduation. Graduations at other gymnasia are coming soon.

Despite well-developed systems of Orthodox secondary education, there are still certain challenges. First of all, this is a personnel issue. The greatest difficulty in arranging the educational process is caused by teaching ancient languages, since professional pedagogical education typical of a modern teacher does not involve training in this area. In some gymnasia (Semyonovo, Diveyevo) university professors are invited to teach these disciplines. Another area of concern is ensuring that the Orthodox component of the curriculum is supported by modern courseware adapted for training purposes in an Orthodox gymnasium.

These issues are currently being addressed through cooperation with secular educational institutions, primarily with universities. The activity of the Slavo-Greek-Latin Office for the Volga Federal District of the Russian Federation (SGLO) established at the Linguistics University of Nizhny Novgorod serves up the goals of cooperation with

Orthodox educational institutions. SGLO was established at LUNN in 2007 on the initiative of the presidential envoy, currently Minister of Justice A.V. Konovalov and upon the blessing of Metropolitan of Nizhny Novgorod and Arzamas Georgy. The goal of SGLO for the Volga Federal District of the Russian Federation at the FSBEI HPE "LUNN" is to establish regular professional training of teachers of Orthodox gymnasia in Latin, ancient Greek, Church Slavonic and modern foreign languages. One of the SGLO initiatives is outreach activities aimed at promotion and development of the Orthodox-focused education. The SCLO to date has become an important educational center for retraining and advanced training of teachers of Orthodox gymnasia in the humanities, mainly linguistic disciplines. SGLO conducts educational activities, namely holds annual advanced training courses for teachers of Orthodox gymnasia in linguistic disciplines, provides methodological assistance to teachers of Orthodox gymnasia in linguistic disciplines, and carries out publishing activities. The following textbooks have already been published: textbooks on Church Slavonic, Latin, ancient Greek for Orthodox gymnasia, workbooks on the basics of the Orthodox Faith, the fundamentals of the Orthodox culture, Latin, ancient Greek, Church Slavonic and Russian. The textbook on Church Slavonic received an approval mark of the Synodal Department of the Moscow Patriarchate and is widely used in Orthodox gymnasia in Nizhny Novgorod and other dioceses of the Volga Federal District.

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Conclusion

The review of the state of affairs in Orthodox Sunday schools and gymnasia undertaken in this article shows general demand for religious education in the modern Russian society due to the growing desire of modern people to be moral, to overcome the crisis of identity in the era of globalization. Awareness of multicultural and multi-religious world view and tolerance development are ensured primarily through the educational system. Orthodox education is intended to play a definite role in raising conservative-minded people seeking to preserve traditional values.

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