

“Why is the UOL important?”

Somehow, everyone acknowledges that the Junior UOL has a major function, that it is needed. But the question is frequently asked: “why do we need a Senior UOL chapter when we have the Church Committee, Sisterhood, and other organizations within the church. The UOL is just another organization similar to those already existing in our local parish.”

I am always inspired by individuals who attend the Convention for the first time. They, like the Juniors, always clearly recognize that the main purpose is to have a community larger than one's own parish. To have a family that is more than the nuclear family or parish community. To gain enthusiasm, empathy and love from those who live far away, but are experiencing the same daily struggles we face in our life as Orthodox Christians. Somehow, after attending many Conventions, we lose sight of that vision and fail to recognize the beauty of the UOL.

A Family Reunion of Our Ukrainian Orthodox Family . . .

At the Convention we discuss projects and set goals for the year, but I would argue that the projects and accomplishments are nothing in comparison to this community, our UOL family. In many ways, the Convention is a Family Reunion, where we see extended family. Just like a family, sometimes we get angry or annoyed, judgmental or finicky – but we love each other just the same. In fact, it wouldn't be the same if it weren't for the great myriad of personalities that create the tapestry of our UOL community.

At the UOL Convention, I have the wonderful joy of seeing the children of my peers and the grandchildren of the UOL founders coming to the sessions. If you believe that the Convention doesn't accomplish anything, come and see the Juniors, strong after fifty years. Without a Senior UOL to show that the family is strong, why would the Junior UOL be needed? The Juniors are preparing to become the leaders in the Church and it is our obligation to keep the Senior UOL strong for them. For them to come to the Convention in 5, 10, 20 and more years to remember the great times they had, and to live great moments that will become the stories of the future.

As a family reunion, the Convention rekindles the flames that have been flickering or even close to extinguishing within each of us. Each individual comes back warmed by the joys of the Convention, armed with memories of touching moments, inspirational liturgies and prayer services, incredibly funny experiences (karaoke can certainly bring a crowd to tears from laughter) and heartfelt one-on-one talks with each other. I believe that these moments are in fact far more important than the business decisions and the huge accomplishments of the UOL. The community, the sense of belonging to the family of Ukrainian Orthodox Christians is our purpose. When we have first time delegates they feel that sense of belonging. In the quest for accomplishments, we don't always take the time to step back and appreciate the beauty of the family that we have.

Certainly, there are times when a family gets annoyed with each other, but that is the beauty of being a member of the family – that we know each other – that we love each other – just as we are.

During the Northampton Convention I was touched by Mother Raphael's closing remarks, and would like to summarize a short story she shared with the UOL Convention body. She shared that when Jesus returned to heaven following His ascension the heavens rejoiced having a great party for Christ. One of the angels commented, "Many great things were accomplished while You were on earth, but what about the rest of Your plan, how will it happen?" Jesus pointed to the 12 apostles gathered and said, "They are My plan. They will continue My work." Similarly, today Christ is asked by another angel, "who is fulfilling Your plan?" and Christ answers, pointing through the heavens to the UOL Convention body, a local chapter or a group of similar people, "They are My plan."

*A UOL Hand Reaches Out to You . . .*

If you haven't been to a Convention in years, we miss you. Your talents and your presence at the Convention, our UOL Family Reunion, is always missed. If you have been thinking about coming back to the UOL – we are excited to embrace you. If you have been thinking about someone that you miss – call them, encourage them to return. Not only will it potentially rekindle their flame, it will create a blaze within your own heart. If you have never been a member of the UOL, think about joining. Use the membership form found on this web-page to join today!

*You/We Are Part of His Plan! He Needs You!*

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