

## **MASI Study Days 2008 a Huge Success**

From July 2 to 5 almost 200 people from as far away as San Diego and Lviv, Ukraine, participated in the first ever “Study Days” of the Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky Institute of Eastern Christian Studies at Saint Paul University in Ottawa. The participants were treated to a program of lectures and workshops by renowned Orthodox and Eastern Catholic speakers. The Study Days also included Vespers, Matins and the Divine Liturgy as well as film presentations, a youth program and opportunities for fellowship.

Fr. Thomas Hopko, dean emeritus of St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary in New York presented the first plenary address, “Christian Doctrine in an Age of Relativism.” The highly-acclaimed dogmatic theologian stressed the holistic means needed to approach the truth. “I always counsel people, don’t even begin to ask theological questions until you have made an honest attempt to live the commandments, read all four gospels slowly at least three times and spend time in prayer and silence.” Hopko noted how truth is not a “what” but a “who” – Jesus Christ – and that only a preparatory purification can enable our minds to approach him.

The next day, Fr. Peter Galadza, Kule Family Professor of Liturgy at the Sheptytsky Institute, spoke on “Eastern Liturgy in a Western World.” In a trenchant analysis of North American culture and lifestyles, Fr. Galadza indicated how Eastern Christians can capitalize on positive aspects of western life to realize the potential of their traditional liturgies; but he also reflected on how consumerism, narcissism, and “entertainism” hinder the goal.

The noted Orthodox author and media personality, Frederica Mathewes-Green, spoke on the third Study Day on “Christian Morality in a Post-Christian Age.” Presvitera Mathewes-Green analyzed the influence of films – beginning with the era of silent movies – in transforming our sense of right and wrong. She noted that Christians need not succumb to a sense of inevitable decline. “In the 1940’s and 50’s adultery and drunkenness were valorized as ‘necessary’ and comical respectively. Today, in spite of moral decline in other areas, the man who cheats on his wife, or the individual who does stupid things while drunk is not treated sympathetically in movies.” Mathewes-Green suggested that Christians can work effectively to change sensibilities in other areas of morality.

Fr. Andriy Chirovsky, Peter and Doris Kule Professor of Theology and Spirituality at the Institute, capped the four-day event with an inspiring, brilliant and humorous reflection on evangelization. He noted how the small size of many Eastern Christian parishes can be turned to advantage. “People can actually get to know one another well in such small communities. We also need to overcome our inferiority complexes and see the treasures that can – and do – attract outsiders to our churches,” said Fr. Andriy.

All of the morning plenary addresses were followed every afternoon by smaller workshops by specialists in other areas of Eastern Christian thought and life. To feature the outstanding teaching personnel of the Sheptytsky Institute, the organizing committee invited Frs. John Jillions, Andrew Onuferko, Maxym Lysack and Stephen Wojcichowsky – all full-time or sessional lecturers at the Institute – to lead workshops on pastoral theology, scripture, spirituality, and social justice respectively. Out-of-town workshop presenters included Lesya

Sabada Nahachewsky from Saskatoon, who presented her newly-released book on the Melkite Archbishop Joseph Raya and his efforts for reconciliation in the Middle East. Irene Galadza from Brampton spoke on catechesis. She highlighted the popular “Generations of Faith” program, noted for its adaptability to different kinds of communities – small and/or aging included. The evenings were devoted to a guided screening of the excellent DVDs on the sacraments by Sr. Ann Laszok, OSBM, their producer.

Topping off the workshop schedule was cantor training. Melita Mudri-Zubacz of Winnipeg and Fr. Roman Galadza of Brampton taught advanced and beginner groups respectively. Presvitera Melita focussed on the resurrectional tones and Fr. Roman taught the common chants of the Divine Liturgy. The participants then had an opportunity to apply their knowledge at the daily Study Days liturgical services.

A particular feature of this family-friendly event was the youth program, coordinated by Lisa Hladio of Western Pennsylvania. Over 30 youth from the ages of 5 to 15 spent their mornings and afternoons learning the Word of God through prayer, Bible readings, skits, games, songs and crafts. The adult participants were regaled with their enthusiastic learnings at the Friday evening community supper as they sang a number of songs they had learned during the week.

Reaction to Study Days as a whole was exuberant. Most of the participants voiced a desire to return next year, and tentatively the next Study Days are planned for July 2 to 4, 2009 in Ottawa.

### **Comments on Study Days**

- A wonderful experience!
- Liked the mixture of traditions – Eastern and Western Catholic and Orthodox of various jurisdictions
- An excellent facility and overall experience
- All the presenters were very well prepared and articulate. My two favourites were Presvitera Mathewes-Green and Fr. Andriy Chirovsky.
- What I liked most was the fellowship, friendliness, approachability of everyone – the Spirit.
- My son didn’t want the youth program to end because he was having so much fun.
- What I liked best was the opportunity to come together with fellow Eastern Christians and other Christian brothers and sisters to share and deepen our faith in Jesus Christ.
- Study Days was spiritually enlightening. It was a chance to meet with other Byzantine Christians that we had heard of before.
- I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to attend and to find out more about what is offered here.
- I will encourage our parishioners to take holidays at this time next year and come to Ottawa for Study Days.
- I loved praying, studying and having time to be together.
- The enthusiasm and the authenticity and firm belief of the speakers was truly inspiring as well as the frankness of their presentation.
- Thank you to all for all your hard work and effort in making these study days an experience I will never forget.