



**To be delivered in church by a teen on
Special Olympics Awareness Day
October 22, 2023**



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today, throughout our archdiocese, the North American Council of Teen SOYO is sponsoring the Annual Special Olympics Awareness Day fundraiser in support of next summer's 43rd Annual Special Olympics Camp. For over 40 years, the teens of our Archdiocese have hosted a week-long camp each August at the Antiochian Village for Special Olympics Pennsylvania Athletes. It is the second longest running program for Special Olympics Pennsylvania. Our camp offers a unique experience for the athletes, their coaches and members of Teen SOYO to appreciate God's many blessings. Every summer, our Teen SOYO coaches arrive at camp expecting to affect the lives of the athletes, yet ultimately, we are the ones who walk away changed and more enlightened.

Each year, NAC Teen SOYO covers the cost of the camp, approximately \$75,000, through the generosity of our fellow parishioners. Through the years, we have hosted more than 8,500 athletes and coaches. Around 1,200 of our teens have had the unique experience of being a coach or volunteer at the camp. The athletes train in basketball, softball, soccer, track and field, volleyball, swimming, golf, tennis, bocce, flag football and golf. The week concludes with all the pageantry of competition day including the parade of athletes, the carrying of the torch and the Special Olympics oath, "*Let me win, but if I cannot win let me brave in the attempt.*" The evening programs are loaded with fun and fellowship: karaoke, challenge night, movie night -- complete with popcorn, a farewell dance, a picnic, fishing offsite and more. It is always a memorable week.

Through this *firsthand* SOYO Special Olympics Camp experience, the youth of our Archdiocese exemplify the Youth ministry platform of “Living the Orthodox Faith in Christ through Worship, Witness, Service and Fellowship.” As volunteers representing our entire Archdiocese, we offer ourselves in service to make this week a treasured experience for the athletes. We are blessed to have the opportunity to serve, pray and play with the athletes who show their appreciation when they refer to camp as their “*favorite week of the year.*”

Today, we ask for your prayers *and* your financial assistance to enable us to sponsor the 43rd Annual Special Olympics Sports Camp. Lives have been changed, both for the athletes and for our teens. We thank God for your ongoing support and the opportunity for us to serve others through the SOPA/SOYO Multi-Sports Training Camp, known better to us as the SOYO Special Olympics Sports Camp. As an expression of our gratitude, we offer you an icon card of the Communion of the Apostles.

Thank you for your support of Special Olympics Sports Camp. May God bless you and all our participants in this wonderful ministry.

