
Assessment of Religion and Sharing Personal Information

I mean, I'm no priest but my father is.

I've always seemed to get a variety of different reactions when I tell people this unusual fact about myself. Possibly one of the most unexpected responses I received was the person turning eight shades of red and awkwardly mumbling their confession to me. It's as if I suddenly became a 5 foot 9 heavy set man bearing a large gold cross around my neck. Unfortunately for them, I was still standing there desperately trying to change the subject back to one more suitable for a 17 year old girl.

My childhood wasn't completely different than those of my peers. I still played baseball with my brothers and fought with my mom about not wanting to wear my hair in pig tails. I danced ballet on Saturdays, but also attended church every Sunday. I learned when it was alright to be a kid and have fun, but I also quickly learned when it was time to shut my mouth and smile. Since my father is a priest, I was almost forced to mature at a more rapid pace than most. Everything I did reflected my dad's reputation, whether I liked it or not. I had to learn to balance the more religious aspects of my life with just maintaining a normal lifestyle.

Because my dad has also been my spiritual advisor in my faith, I've been introduced to many different organizations the church has to offer. One of the greatest things that have impacted who I've become today is SOYO. SOYO is the Society of Orthodox Youth Organizations, a group that brings Orthodox Christian teens from across North America together to try and make a difference in each other's lives. SOYO has consistently showed me what it means to be a leader; a leader is someone who serves others. Our organization has participated in countless outreach projects over the years. We fed over 300 homeless families this past June and tried to assist the less fortunate in any way we could. For the past year I've held the title of Treasurer of our region's SOYO chapter, and recently I was elected President of the Diocese of Miami and the Southeast of North America Teen SOYO.

Immediately after being elected, my father sat me down and spoke with me about the new responsibilities I will have to hold. He told me that being in a position of leadership is not something to take lightly, which is exactly what I did for the first couple of days. Over time, as I settled into my new position on board, I learned what it really meant to be President. Sure, you have to run meetings and make agendas, but you also need to make sure everyone feels welcome and included. I can't even begin to imagine what my life would be like without SOYO. It's been a place of refuge for me and showed me how to live my life daily for others.