

Sunday School Handbook/Curriculum 2011 - 2012



St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Church

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A MESSAGE TO PARENTS

St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Church of Albany, NY in its continued effort to design an effective and valid educational program for youth, proudly presents to you for your consideration and appraisal our Sunday School program. This booklet of our Sunday School program is designed to acquaint the parents of our students with the curriculum and purpose of Sunday School, and to impress upon all members the value of the St. Sophia Sunday School Program.

We believe that our efforts to create living, knowledgeable Orthodox Christians have been blessed by our Lord. Our Church today is proud of the spiritual caliber of its children and sees the children who pass through its doors as the future members of a congregation that is rich due to its members' conviction, and Greek Orthodox beliefs.

It is this program in conjunction with the dedication and love of the parents, family members and other community members that will secure our Church's future. The program to be effective requires parent support and commitment to achieve continuous participation of each child in all facets of our program.

INTRODUCTION

The general education our children receive today is simply not enough. In a world that becomes ever more complicated and morally complex, our children run the risk of lacking the spiritual and moral development to navigate their way through these treacherous waters. Our children must balance the advancement of their intellect through traditional schooling with the development of their moral character through education in the Greek Orthodox faith. It is here, in our Sunday School program, that we hope our children will not only make new friends and have fun, but that they will fundamentally build a moral compass that will guide them in later years to what is right and what is true.

OBJECTIVES

St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Church Sunday School program nurtures our most precious resource—our youth. Children raised in this program are taught the spiritual values of Greek Orthodox Christianity, and the rich customs and Traditions of the Greek culture. Our Sunday School, equipped with the latest and best teaching aids, a sound yet flexible curriculum, and staffed by qualified teachers, has the following three goals:

1. To educate our children spiritually and morally, in accordance with the teachings of Jesus Christ and the faith and traditions of the Greek Orthodox Church
2. To develop in our children the habit of attending church regularly, studying the Scriptures, and participating conscientiously in the worship and sacramental life of our church
3. To cultivate in our children a Greek Orthodox conscience and devotion to our ideals and to prepare them so that they become faithful and devoted dynamic members of our church, our community, and our country

ENROLLMENT

Currently, we have on average annually between 120-130 children enrolled in our 11 Sunday School classes.

CLASSES

The Sunday School has grouped its children according to age and current grade level at their school to maintain continuity across groups. The minimum enrollment age is three years old (children of this age are placed in our nursery class) and runs through 10th grade.

TERM

The Sunday School term runs from the third Sunday of September and extends through the second Sunday in June which is Graduation day.

Classes for the 2011-2012 Sunday School Year: 31 CLASS SESSIONS TOTAL

September: 18th (classes begin in the church hall after registration for a welcome introduction with all classes), 25th
October: 2nd, 16th, 23rd, 30th
November: 6th, 13th, 20th
December: 4th, 11th, 18th
January: 8th, 15th, 22nd, 29th
February: 5th, 12th, 26th
March: 4th, 11th, 18th, 25th
April: 1st, 7th (Saturday of Lazarus and Student Breakfast), 22nd, 29th
May: 6th, 13th
June: 3rd (Church Name Day Brunch sponsored by Philoptochos)
10th (Last day of classes and Graduation Ceremony)

FAMILY WORSHIP DAYS

These are the Sundays that generally fall on holiday weekends or weeks: Columbus weekend, Thanksgiving weekend, Christmas break, Winter Break, Holy Week, Greek Festival weekend and Memorial weekend. On these 9 Sundays, classes will not be held and students have the opportunity to worship with their families in church for the entire service.

Days classes WILL NOT BE IN SESSION for 2011-2012

October: 9th (Columbus Day weekend)
November: 27th (Thanksgiving weekend)
December: 25th (Christmas Holiday)
January: 1st (Holiday Break continued)
February: 19th (Winter Break)
March: CLASSES EVERY SUNDAY
April: 8th (Spring Break Begins / falls on our Palm Sunday), 15th (Orthodox Easter)
May: 20th (Greek Festival), 27th (Memorial Day weekend)

HOURS

Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 am. All students are encouraged to be seated near the choir in church at that time. Sunday School begins at 10:00 and students are required to be in their classrooms by that time and remain until they have been dismissed by their teacher (usually around 11:15-11:30 a.m.)

ATTENDANCE

Children should attend regularly to benefit from the program. A child must be physically **PRESENT** in the classroom in order to be marked **PRESENT**. Otherwise that child is marked **ABSENT**. If a child attends an Orthodox Church out of town, he/she will be excused and will receive credit for that day if they bring a bulletin from that Church. This should be given either to the teacher or the director. Any child attending a Memorial Service in our Church will receive attendance for that day.

Faithful Attendance Awards and Perfect Attendance Awards

At the end of the year, awards for Faithful Attendance and Perfect Attendance (based on the teacher's attendance records taken every Sunday) are given as follows:

Allowances for Faithful Attendance Awards - up to 3 absences are allowed.

Perfect Attendance - Recognition and an additional gift for exceptional attendance is given to students who have **never been absent**.

FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

There is not additional tuition or a registration fee however all students' parents must be members of St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Church. Students are encouraged to make weekly offerings to the donations tray at the Pangari in church when they light their candles.

LOCATION

Sunday School classes are held throughout the various classrooms and rooms in our community center

Pre-K = in the right side of the nursery classroom
Kindergarten = in the left side of the nursery classroom
1st grade = in the Greek School Room
2nd grade = in the Damascos Room
3rd grade = in Father Pat's Conference Room
4th grade = in the Choir Room
5th grade = in the Philoptochos Room
6th grade = in the AHEPA Room
7th grade = in the Library
8th grade = in the Gym
9th and 10th grade = in the Culture Room

PROGRAM

Each Sunday the following schedule is in effect for children in grades Pre-K through 10th grade.

9:30 – 10:00 a.m. Sunday School children are seated in the first five pews in the front right-hand side of the Church to participate in the liturgy, listen to the epistle and Gospel readings and worship.

10:00 a.m. Sunday School children are dismissed from church to go to their individual classrooms. Teachers present a one-hour lesson according to the Sunday School curriculum. On a rotating basis, several classes will participate in singing in the Jr. Choir for that Sunday's Liturgy.

10:30 a.m. (approximately). Students return to church for Holy Communion.

11:15 – 11:30 a.m. (approximately). Students are dismissed from Sunday School. For the safety of all children who attend nursery class up to the second grade, it is necessary for a parent to go to the class and pick up your child personally, before you enjoy the refreshments served at the coffee hour. This will prevent a child from becoming anxious because a parent cannot be found.

METHODS

Our Sunday School program seeks to do more than merely insist that students memorize subject matter. Instead, we encourage them to live out the values learned in Sunday School in their own lives. Our program is one of the valuable ways that our children will learn how to navigate the complexities of life. Given the positive impact of involvement in class, our Sunday School students are encouraged to participate actively – whether in class discussion, dialogues with our priests or, for the younger students, arts and crafts projects, prayer recitals, or singing hymns or songs. Where applicable, the classes will incorporate audio-visual aids including films, pictures, maps and pictures to make the learning process more vivid. We will further enrich our curriculum and Greek Orthodox heritage with a Christmas Program, Three Hierarchs and Letter's Day Program, retreats and field trips such as the Greek Independence Day Parade in New York City. We encourage all students in both our Greek School and Sunday School to participate in this patriotic and cultural experience.

CURRICULUM

The curriculum follows the "Living Our Orthodox Faith" curriculum set by the Archdiocese Religious Education Department. Books, pamphlets, activities, arts and crafts and music from a variety of other Orthodox and Christian sources supplement this. Most of all, the experience, dedication and ingenuity of our teachers brings to life HIS WORD in each of our children. St. Sophia's Sunday School curriculum is tailored to meet children's spiritual needs across various ages. For the younger children, the curriculum tends to focus on the child's individual needs and deals with Christianity in general terms. The curriculum flexes to the children's interests and desires making the learning process enjoyable and fun. For the older children, the curriculum becomes more systematic, but drives the students to voice their own thoughts and opinions. The subject matter is primarily centered on the religious traditions in the Greek Orthodox Church, but will frequently apply religious learning to real-world situations and events. The goal for our older children is to help them apply the fundamentals of Christianity in their life journey and everyday interactions.

Pre-School (ages 3-4): The Pre-School program concentrates on the theme and the experience of love. God loves the pre-schooler, his family and the world. The pre-schooler begins to recognize God's love through seeing his family and others and all things around him as God's gifts. He experiences God's love in playing with others, family relationships, activities and participation in Church worship and life. Overview of the Orthodox Church and the Concept of God is taught. The children are introduced to Jesus through parables from the Bible, songs, coloring, puzzles, projects, storytime, and videos. They are taught how to do the sign of the cross, light a candle, recite basic prayers and other basics. The main books for this class are "God Loves Us" and "Reaching for Jesus."

Kindergarten: "Joy, Jesus Christ and His Love for Children" are the main themes of the Kindergarten program. God's love is the source of our joy. The Kindergartener experiences joy through family activities and through worship and life. Aspects of worship and stories from Scripture highlight specific examples of and reasons for joy centered on the life of Christ. The Kindergartener learns to celebrate God's gift of joy and thus feels a sense of trust and well-being. The children are exposed to basic Church teachings and liturgical events and introduced to our Orthodox feast days. Singing, coloring, projects, storytime and videos are also used. The main book is "Happy With God."

1st Grade: The focus of 1st grade is on creation as God's gift. God has made the world and everything in it as an example of His love and goodness. As the child discovers the world around him, the child understands that family, friends, church, school and all things come from God. Through the daily experience of God's world, the child understands that God is real, loving and caring. The child's faith in God is awakened and is expressed through prayer worship and thanks. This grade focuses on the students expanding world from the family to church to the world in which they live. They begin to learn the Lord's Prayer "Our Father" in both Greek and English and have storytime using New Testament stories. Singing, coloring, videos and projects are also done. The main book is "Me and My World."

2nd Grade: Grade 2 concentrates on the theme of loving God as the child's obedient response to God. Through the examples of men and women of the Old and New Testaments, as well as the examples of Orthodox saints, the second grader begins to understand sin and forgiveness in the light of God's love. Through such examples and through acts of worship and life, the child learns to respond to God with love and obedience – the foundations of morality. By exploring that they are loved by God through experiences at home and at church, the students come to realize that service to others, respect and obedience are ways we show our love for God and one another. The Lord's Prayer is reinforced in both Greek and English and the Ten Commandments are introduced. Videos and projects are used. The main book is "Loving God and Living Our Orthodox Faith."

3rd Grade: In Grade 3, the emphasis shifts to the theme of sharing based on the life of the Church. As the third grader becomes open to the outside world and peer group relationships, he learns about God's people and their relationships in the Old and New Testaments, as well as the history of the Orthodox Church. The students discover how Jesus has taught us to share. The experience of sharing is connected to the home through family events at church through the Divine Liturgy and in the world through acts of justice and charity. The Lord's Prayer in Greek and English is enforced and the Ten Commandments are reviewed. Through study of the life of the Church, the child experiences sharing, giving, dialogue and dealing with relational difficulties in a positive manner. They encounter the world from the Garden of Eden to the Promised Land through videos and projects. The main book is "Sharing God's World."

4th Grade: The themes of the 4th grade, "Growing with God", explores a period of deeper moral and spiritual growth in the life of the child, and the Sacraments and how they affect us in Everyday Life. By concentrating on the prayers and sacramental acts related to human growth (40 day Blessing, Baptism, Chrismation, Liturgy, and Confession), the children begin to gain a sacramental vision of life. They come to understand the world, and their own growth in the light of their faith, prayer, and sacramental life. The students learn how an individual grows through worship in the liturgy, prayer, fasting and through relationships in and outside the family. History of the church is discussed and bible skills are developed as they begin to read the Bible. The main books are "Growing With God" and "The Bible: Old & New Testament."

5th Grade: The 5th grade theme, “Responding to God” concentrates on the stories of the heroes of the faith in Scripture and Tradition as examples of faith, loyalty, self-sacrifice, obedience, love, justice and social responsibility. Through the study of these great figures, (like the First Christians) the child learns to respond to God in terms of personal faith and the basics of Christian morality, the Ten Commandments and the teaching of Christ. The Saints and the Parables of our Lord and how they present major teachings and basic truths for application to daily living. Videos and projects are used. The main books are “God Calls Us” and “Parables of Our Lord.”

6th Grade: The focus of the 6th grade is on the importance and consequences of choices in the light of Christian faith. The 6th grader, as a pre-adolescent, becomes more aware of one’s own personal freedom to make right and wrong choices. Friendships are very important and peer pressure increases. Through the many examples and teachings of Scripture and Tradition, the child is helped to recognize the basic Christian moral and spiritual values and to make the right choices for his life. A detailed discussion of the Divine Liturgy is done. Church history is expanded upon. Videos and projects are used. An introduction to the “Creed” is begun. The main books are “Heaven on Earth - The Divine Liturgy”, “The Creed” and “The Nicene Creed for Young People.”

7th Grade: In 7th grader, as an early adolescent is moving beyond the security of the late childhood. They begin to search for a personal identity, show new reasoning abilities, seek to be oneself, while conforming to peer values. The 7th grade year of study is on the structure of the church and church services, The New Testament, The Byzantine Era and its prayers, and The “Creed” is continued in depth. In addition, primary focus is on how the information we believe in as orthodox Christians in regards to The Sacraments and The Commandments are actually based within their lives. Main books are “Facing up to Peer Pressure”, “Honesty”, “If God Loves Me Why Can’t I Get My Locker Open?”, “Worship in the Orthodox Church” and “My Orthodox Prayer book.”

8th Grade: The 8th grader, as an adolescent continuing his or her search for identity, has sharper questions about religious teaching, childhood notions about God and the interplay of good and evil in life. Through the study of the experiences of ancient Israel and how spiritual pilgrims in Scripture and Tradition searched for and found God, the 8th grader is able to clarify questions and find answers in his own pilgrimage especially relating to their heritage of Greek Orthodoxy and its culture. A study of “The Twelve Great Feasts and Holy Days”, “The Orthodox Saints”, “The Twelve Apostles and their lives”, “Journey to Pascha” and “Greek Orthodox Culture and Traditions.” Videos and projects are used. Main books are “A Guide to Greek Traditions and Customs”, “Lives of the Saints and Major Feast Days”, “Women of God”, “40 Saints of the Orthodox Church” and “The Bible - Old Testament.”

9th Grade / 10th Grade: A two-year program ending with graduation in the 10th or 11th grade (depending on years attended). Our relationship to God, to others and to ourselves is discussed. This class alternates between discussion of moral and contemporary issues and how church doctrine deals with these issues and the origins of the Orthodox Church and the differences and similarities with other faiths. Main books include “Contemporary Issues”, “455 Questions on Faith” and “The Orthodox Church.” The focus is on the moral and spiritual lives of the students through the discussion of contemporary issues. History of the Church is done as a review. Some of the teenage curriculum from the archdiocese is also used during this class. Topics include: The Divine Liturgy, Interpretation of Gospel Readings, Using Holy Scripture to live as an Orthodox Christian, The Orthodox Church – Our Faith, Ethics, Morality, Virtues, and World Religions. Video and projects are used. The 11th and 12th graders are welcomed to attend any classes or they can be assigned to be an assistant in one of the Sunday School classes.

This high school discussion group brings together the church's teenagers and provides them a firsthand opportunity to engage in an open-group discussion of challenges faced by teenagers and matters of the soul according to the Orthodox faith and belief system Discussion topics may include:

- Man: Made in the Image of Christ
- The Nature of God, Finding Christ
- The Great Lent, Fasting and You
- A Comparison of Islam, Judaism and Christianity
- Is There Such a Thing as a Moral War?

TEACHING STAFF

Under the guidance of Rev. Father Patric Legato, and assisted by the Interim Director, Father Dennis Nagi, Ph.D. the Sunday School program is run by about 15 dedicated volunteer teachers and helpers, many of whom are graduates of the program themselves. The staff bring a variety of backgrounds to further enrich the Sunday School program and include professional school teachers and college professors, business professionals of all areas and, of course, parents of some of the children.

2011-2012 School Year Teacher Staff **Interim Director: Father Dennis L. Nagi, Ph.D.**

Assistant Director: Maria Sokaris

Pre-School: Tina Michaelides and Anne Hadjioannou

Kindergarten: Eleni Soler

1st Grade: Lea Koutsakis

2nd Grade: Maria Koutsakis

3rd Grade: Barbara Rustin

4th Grade: Anastasia Vasilakos-Garrow

5th Grade: Theodosia Legato and Katherine Papa

6th Grade: Lea Marinopoulos

7th and 8th Grades: Michael Koutsourades

9th and 10th Grades: Maria Ziamandanis and Theodore Pappas

Substitute Teachers for all grades: Lauren Mouzakes, Michel Legato, Debbie Socaris, Colleen Nelligan, and Pattie Jeoney

QUALIFICATIONS

The entire staff possesses the following necessary qualifications: Member of the Greek Orthodox faith, Knowledge of the Greek Orthodox faith, Enthusiasm for teaching, Affection for children, Patience and understanding, and Solid moral character.

TRAINING AND PREPARATION

All Sunday School teachers are required to attend an Orthodoxy workshop and a teaching workshop conducted by Father Pat and the director before commencing teaching. The teachers meet informally a few times a year for an ongoing dialogue and sharing of ideas with Father Pat and the Director. For continuing enrichment, the teachers are also encouraged to participate in seminars and workshop offered through the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in New York City. The teachers will devote the time necessary each week in preparation for the 30 Sunday School classes in the school year and its age appropriate calendar class lessons, activities, games and/ or projects.

PARENTS' RESPONSIBILITY

We cannot over emphasize the importance of your participation in your child's religious life. It is up to the parent to guide, encourage, and direct the growing child into the arms of the Church. It is of utmost significance that this be the understanding of the parent as the first and predominant Role Model. If your child sees both parents coming to Church, he/she will understand what families do. If you bring God into your home, He will be more readily known in your family. Here are some ways that you help the Sunday School staff help your child:

- Please bring your child on time. Remember, they can't drive themselves!!
- Please have your child attend as regularly as possible; consistency is vital to the flow of information and to your child's feelings of group membership and acceptance.
- Please discuss your child's lesson with him/her after Church and during the week.
- Children are great imitators. What they see their parents do, they will also do.

CONCLUSION

This, in its brief outline, is our Sunday School at Saint Sophia Greek Orthodox Church – its goals, its program and its teachers. We are proud of our progress, but recognize the many hurdles we approach – from incorporating modern teaching technology into our classes to making the role of Orthodoxy increasingly relevant to our children's lives. However, we meet the challenge readily and welcome the thoughts and involvement of our larger community of parents, family members and friends in this endeavor.