



**SUNDAY SCHOOL HANDBOOK**  
**SAINT SOPHIA GREEK ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL**  
**WASHINGTON, DC**



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## **A MESSAGE TO PARENTS**

The Greek Orthodox Cathedral of Saint Sophia of Washington, D.C. in its continued effort to design an effective and impactful educational program for its parishioners and especially its 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 Cathedral 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 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 Cathedral's future. The program to be effective requires parent support and commitment to achieve 90-95% participation of each child in all facets of our program.

Reverend John T. Tavlarides, *Director of Sunday School*

## **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 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**

Our Sunday School, equipped with the latest and best teaching aids, a sound yet flexible curriculum, and staff 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

## **GENERAL INFORMATION**

### **Enrollment**

Currently, we have over 300 children enrolled in our 15 Sunday School classes.

### **Classes**

Given that children may be of different ages in their classes at school, the Sunday School has grouped its children according to age to maintain continuity across groups. The minimum enrollment age is three years old and runs through age 18. Of note, at age 14, the boys enter our altar boy program for one year.

### **Term**

The Sunday School term runs from the fourth Sunday of September and extends through the third Sunday in May.

### **Hours**

Students are required to be in the church building by 10:00 a.m. and remain until they have been dismissed by their teacher (usually around 11:50 a.m.) – see Program section for details.

### **Contributions**

A \$10.00 registration fee is paid per child at the beginning of the Sunday School year. In addition, students are encouraged to make weekly offerings to the donations tray, which is circulated throughout the classrooms. The registration fee and contributions help pay for our books, white boards, visual aids and other school supplies.

### **Classrooms**

Sunday School classes are held in the Frosene Education Center which is connected to the Cathedral via the ground level.

## **PROGRAM**

Each Sunday the following schedule is in effect for children ages three through eighteen.

- 10:00 – 10:35 a.m.** Sunday School children are seated in the first five pews in the front left-hand side of the Cathedral to participate in the liturgy, listen to the epistle and Gospel readings and worship.
- 10:35 – 10:45 a.m.** The priest delivers a short sermon to the Sunday School children usually based on the day's Gospel reading. This may include a question and answer dialogue with the children.
- 10:45 – 10:50 a.m.** Sunday School children are dismissed from church to go to their individual classrooms.
- 10:50 – 11:50 a.m.** Teachers present a one-hour lesson according to the Sunday School curriculum. On a rotating basis, several classes will attend the Divine Liturgy and receive communion. On rotating basis, children participate in music lessons. Also, the teenage classes participate in 3-5 dialog sessions known as "After Group" conducted by father John or father Steve.
- 11:50am** Classes close and children are sent to the church basement auditorium to meet their parents for fellowship hour.

## **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, in 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. From time to time, we will further enrich our curriculum with field trips to areas of local interest.

In addition, the program includes an in-church luncheon retreat(s) or a yearly off-site day retreat conducted by Fathers John and Steve with participation of a group of teachers.

## CURRICULUM

The Cathedral'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.

Age 3	Overview of the Orthodox Church Church Etiquette
Age 4	Introduction to the Concept of God and His Relationship with Us
Age 5	Jesus Christ and His Love for Children
Age 6	New Testament Stories for Children
Age 7	Excerpts from the Bible Major Feast Days & Sacraments Loving God and Living Our Orthodox Faith
Age 8	From the Garden of Eden to the Promised Land The Fullness of Time and the Ten Commandments
Age 9	The Bible: Old & New Testament Sacraments and How They Effect Us in Everyday Life
Age 10	The First Christians The Parables
Age 11	Old Testament
Age 12	New Testament Greek Orthodox Study Bible
Age 13	Nicene Creed
Age 14	Divine Liturgy Interpretation of Gospel Readings Altar Boy Program
Age 15	Using Holy Scripture to Live as an Orthodox Christian
Age 16	The Orthodox Church – Our Faith
Age 17-18	Ethics, Morality, Virtues An Active Prayer Life

Note: Many of the books used are from the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese Education Office.

### **Music Lessons**

The music program provides an opportunity to learn the words (in Greek and in English) of many hymns heard throughout the Divine Liturgy and on holidays. The music lessons are approximately twenty minutes long and are offered on alternating Sundays by age groups.

### **Altar Boys**

The 14-year-old boys depart from the traditional Sunday school curriculum to partake of our altar boy program. Through active participation in the Divine Liturgy on Sundays and holidays, the program instructs the boys on the meaning of the Divine Liturgy, other services, and the fundamental sacraments of the church.

#### **Altar Boy Schedule**

9:00am - 9:50am	Arrive at Cathedral for Sunday School Session
9:50am – 12:00pm	Ascend to the Altar to assist with the Divine Liturgy

### **After Group**

The high school discussion group, historically called the Aftergroup as years before it convened after the church service, brings together the church's teenagers (ages 13 to 18) and provides them a firsthand opportunity to engage in discussion with the clergy. On a monthly basis, this group is convened during the service as one of our priests joins the teenagers 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 and Christianity
- Is There Such a Thing as a Moral War?

## TEACHING STAFF

### Present Staff

Under the guidance of Father John Tavlarides, the Sunday School program is run by over 30 dedicated volunteer teachers and staff, 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 public and private school teachers, academics, professionals, and, of course, mothers and fathers of some of the children. This tight knit group extends back over 50 years with teachers touching generations of the Cathedral's youth.

### Sunday School Staff

Nursery	Alicia Clark
3 year olds	Niki Lachica Diane Stratakos
4 year olds	Lynne Courtney Mary Ann Nasou
5 year olds	Mary Cranford Elizabeth Shramek
6 year olds	Maria Mechelis Melissa Ganginis
7 year olds	Stracie Maniatis
8 year olds	Kelly Tanzi
9 year olds	Kristina Mechelis Amanda Ganginis
10 year olds	Margo Anderson
11 year olds	Jim Polis
12 year olds	Van Andros
13 year olds	Joanne Kenny
14 year olds	Harriett Tavlarides
Altar Boys	Peter Sbily George Paul
15 year olds	Alexis Graham Jane Walsh
16 year olds	Arthur Koines Alexandra Heliotis
17-18 year olds	Diane Cerniglia Amanda Creed

**Qualifications**

The entire staff possesses the following necessary qualifications:

- Knowledge of the Greek Orthodox faith
- Enthusiasm for teaching
- Affection for children
- Patience and understanding
- Solid moral character

**Training**

All Sunday School teachers are required to attend the Cathedral's Inquiry into Orthodoxy class before commencing teaching and many are encouraged to attend it again every several years. The teachers meet on a monthly basis for an ongoing dialogue with Father John Tavlarides. For continuing enrichment, the teachers also participate in an educational speaker series where prominent Orthodox authors and experts discuss timely topics with our teaching staff.

**Preparation**

The teachers devote several hours each week to preparation of the Sunday class lesson and material.

## **CONCLUSION**

This, in its brief outline, is our Sunday School at Saint Sophia Cathedral – 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.