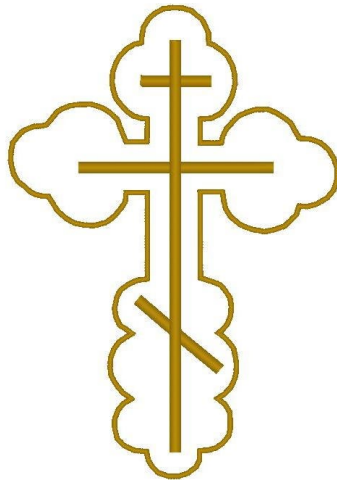


ANNUNCIATION GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

PARENT INFORMATIONAL HANDBOOK



MISSION STATEMENT OF ANNUNCIATION GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH YOUTH EDUCATION

The mission of the Annunciation Youth Education program is to educate our students in the Orthodox Faith through Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition to enable them to become faithful, practicing Orthodox Christians who appreciate the Orthodox way of life and possess the ability to clearly communicate this to others.

Rev. Father Angelo Maggos
Priest, Annunciation GOC

Religious Education Committee
Karina Onderdonk and Lauren Gashlin

INTRODUCTION

“With us everything should be secondary compared to our concern with children and their upbringing in the instruction and teaching of the Lord.”

Saint John Chrysostom.

This handbook is provided for your information and understanding of our Youth Education program. Teaching requires the dedication and commitment of both our teachers AND parents in order to be truly successful. It involves planning lessons that will be relevant and interesting to our students in an organized manner such that our children and parents can clearly see the education path.

Those who volunteer to undertake this time consuming commitment are to be commended for their offering of this time and talent. Throughout our history, here at the Annunciation, we have been blessed with dedicated teachers. This is largely due to the priest, teachers, and parents working together. Our goal is to give to each of our children the total understanding of what it means to be an Orthodox Christian. However, here in America today, we face the tremendous challenge of church having to compete for our children’s time. In recent times, sports has become one of the most serious competitors especially with more programs being scheduled on Sundays.

The only way to balance this is for parents to become partners in the education of our youth who will become tomorrow's church leaders. So we provide this handbook not to tell you what we will do but to offer you, as parents, a guide of what the Religious Education Department of our Archdiocese (OCEC) has put together and, with your support and encouragement, tailor their established program to fit our particular needs and ensure the goal of proper education of our Orthodox youth.

Our Education program is based on a balanced model of education, service, and church attendance.

1) EDUCATION

Religious Education Curriculum

The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, together with the Orthodox Church of America (OCA) and the Antiochian Archdiocese, has combined to form the Orthodox Christian Education Commission (OCEC). This agency was founded in 1957 by the *Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in America*. It consists of a group of Orthodox theologians and educators as a forum to exchange ideas and to search for solutions to common educational problems. It currently aims to develop and publish

educational material for and offers support services to Orthodox Christian Churches in North America. The OCEC has developed and published an extensive education curriculum that shows the progression of education from Kindergarten through High School. This curriculum is supplemented with well written lesson books that are not only tailored to the age of the class but are connected so that each year the lessons increase in depth so that the child is given a firm foundation which is built upon each year. Additionally, each lesson book comes with an accompanying teacher outline which eliminates teachers having to develop their own lesson plans and activities each Sunday. This is very helpful for those volunteers who do not have teaching experience.

Valuing Religious Education

Kids don't drive. Therefore it is vital that parents afford their children the opportunity to learn about our faith. Equally important is to hold our teachers and our priest accountable for what they are taught. Each Sunday ask your child what he or she is learning in Youth Education. In the beginning your child might have little to say about the lesson; however, as you continue to keep an ongoing interest, you will get more dialogue. Much time is invested in preparation for each Sunday lesson. Show your child by your interest and attitude how much you value religious education. Your enthusiasm or your indifference will certainly have an impact on the ongoing interest of the child, and these discussions could spark an interest in you to join our education staff.

Class Time and Regular Attendance

Please consider the short time we have with your children as a sacred time and space in their lives. Please allow us the full time that we need, not to mention being respectful to our dedicated teachers who volunteer their precious time to not only teach but prepare for each Sunday lesson. Have your child attend Youth Education regularly. Sporadic attendance brings limited understanding, often lack of understanding, and weakens the important bonds that our children are forming.

All Children are Welcome in Our Sunday School

We are all children of God no matter our strengths or needs. We ask that you let us know if your child has any needs in a school setting. We may at times ask a parent to stay with their child if they are having difficulties in the classroom. We want every child to feel secure and thrive in our program. Please reach out to the Sunday School directors if you have any concerns or questions about this.

2) SERVICE

As much as there should be Ορθο-δοξια (Orthodox Education) there must also be Ορθο-πραξια (Orthodox action). Service includes participating in Enrichment Activities, both inside and outside of our communities. This participation enriches the learning experience for our students while also helping to reinforce the lessons of Christianity in that we must always think of ways to offer our time

and develop our talents.

A new initiative is the Service Passport Program. Here each child will be provided with a passport that includes each of the services held during Great Lent and Holy Week. Each time a child participates in one of these events they will receive a stamp in their passport which helps our teachers ensure the fullness of their education.

Service within our church community

Having our children participate in events both in church and our community helps bring a sense of belonging and interaction with classmates. Some of these activities in the past have included:

- Children’s Choir
- Kids parade with icons on Sunday of Orthodoxy
- Children Stewardship
- GOYA service at Mother’s Day Brunch
- Parish Oratorical Festival
- Annunciation Youth Lenten Retreat
- Saturday of Souls – Koliva Making
- Saturday of Lazarus – make palms into crosses
- Incense making class
- Holy Week Passport Program
- Annunciation Youth Picnic
- Volunteer at Greek Festival

(As we rebuild our Sunday School program we hope to start adding these activities back in and adding different activities to our list.)

Stewardship

It is good when students earn and contribute their own money at the offering each Sunday. In this way we can encourage them that stewardship to the Church is ongoing, even into adulthood.

Service to our local community

With the formation of our Community Outreach Program our children, together with their parents and other parishioners will have the opportunity to volunteer their time to help those less fortunate. This committee is establishing connections with many of the Rochester area philanthropy organizations from which the Religious Education Committee, together with the priest, will ask our children to participate. These activities include collecting clothing or food, volunteering at local soup kitchens, packing food at Foodlink, sorting clothes at Asbury Mission Outreach Center, or singing Christmas Carols at the local Senior Centers. These activities will all be made available on the “Outreach” tab of our church website.

3) CHURCH

As our children grow up in our church, it is vital they understand and appreciate the fullness of our Orthodox faith. As Orthodox we take great pride in proclaiming that Orthodoxy represents the

fullness of the Christian faith. If this is true, then classroom education is but a part of this “fullness.” Our children must grow up experiencing what they learn about which means attendance at our services. Not just Sunday Divine Liturgy, but also other important services such as Memorial services, Artoklasia, Blessing of the Waters (Αγιασμος) and 40-day baby blessings. In addition to this there are the Lenten services such as Presanctified Liturgy, Salutations to the Theotokos, Holy Week, and major Feast days.

Therefore religious education will include attendance at these events. Some other activities that will count as participation include:

1. On pre scheduled days the priest will ask that religious education will be accomplished in church so that our children can experience the services listed above. The priest will accompany each of these services with a lesson to explain to our youth *what* and *why* of what of these services.
2. Great Lent and Holy Week Passport Program. Similar to the Service Passport described earlier, each child will be provided with a passport that includes each of the services held during lent. Each time a child participates in one of these events they will receive a stamp in their passport which will bring to life the Holy Week lessons they receive in Religious Education.
3. Boys 7 – 18 years of age are encouraged to serve in the Altar, read the epistle, serve as Narthex Greeters, Chant and participate in particular events during Friday Salutations and Holy Week.
4. Girls 7- 18 years of age are encouraged to read the epistle, serve as Narthex Greeters, Chant and participate in particular events during Friday Salutations and Holy Week.
5. Participation in the Annual Christmas Pageant.

ADDITIONAL YOUTH EDUCATION POLICIES

- a) Youth Education is offered from preschool through 8th grade. The minimum enrollment age is three years old. Children must have had their third birthday by October 1st of the current year. Students enroll in the same grade as they would in their public school.
- b) Currently our classroom grades are:
 - Prek-3/4
 - Kindergarten and 1st
 - 2nd, 3rd and 4th
 - 5th – 8th
- c) Divine Liturgy begins at 10:00 a.m. Youth Education begins immediately following Communion and ends at 12:00 p.m. Students in grades Pre-K/3 - 3rd should be picked up in their classrooms by parents at the end of the day. All other students are released on their own.

- d) Students should be registered each year on the first day of Youth Education. The Youth Education registration forms are on-line at the church website and can be completed and submitted prior to the first day of classes. You are always welcome at any time to come to the Youth Education office to register your child.
- e) While we encourage parents to attend Sunday youth education classes, we require that parents do not interrupt or interfere without the permission of the director. Please direct any comments or suggestions with regards to class conduct or lessons to the REC Committee members or the priest.
- f) Please notify us if your address, phone number or e-mail address changes during the year. Most communication with parents is done through e-mail. Please communicate with us through the religious education email .