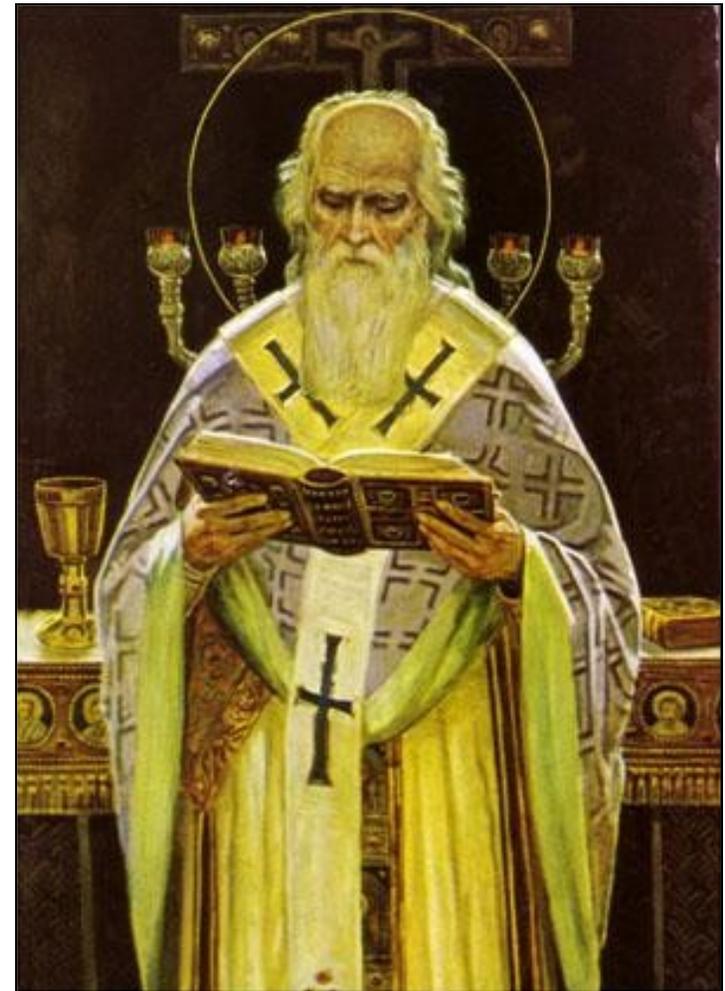
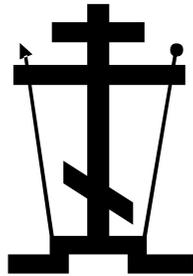




Orthodox Christian Education
A Resource Manual for the Orientation
of Priests, Parents and Church School Teachers



*“Suffer the little children to come unto Me,
And forbid them not, for of such
is the Kingdom of Heaven.” (Mark 10:14)*



Dedicated to St. Clement Ohridski

*by whose inspiration, example and prayers
may the Lord enable us to provide what is needful
for the education of our Orthodox people in the 21st Century.*

Icons of St. Clement of Ochrid

Cover Page: Original is located in University of Sofia, Bulgaria

Inside Back Cover: Stained glass window from
Holy Trinity Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Church, Madison, Illinois

The Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Diocese
of the USA, Canada & Australia
Education Commission

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“The aim of education in the Orthodox Church is to nurture, instruct, and direct each member of the community of faith—the Church—in Christian living, or as Orthodox writers typically call it, the life in Christ, so that each person grows ‘in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ’ (2 Peter 3:18) and becomes ‘a partaker of the divine nature’ (2 Peter 1:4). The real curriculum for learning the Orthodox Faith is the life of the Church as experienced in a dynamic, faith-filled parish. Our education in faith is a lifelong journey.”

– Rev. Dr. Anton Vrame,
Director of the Department of Religious Education (GOA)

“Parents are the first and most powerful teachers of children, whether or not they are consciously attempting to teach anything. From the very earliest days of life, even as an infant, children are constantly learning from their parents the most fundamental and longest lasting lessons of their lives. Other educators, adults and peers may later come to exert strong influences also, but those things learned by the children in their own homes within the circle of the family life are the foundation of all education outside the home.

“The efforts of the parish school and of church life will only be successful to the degree that the child has been prepared by home life to accept the precepts and examples encountered at church. For church based education to succeed, the parents must support it both by what they say and by what they do in their own homes.

“The Parish is the center of life-long learning on the path to salvation. It is not without reason that the parish priest is called “Father.” For him, all the parish members are his children, regardless of their age. Therefore, for the priest, all members of the parish are in need of ongoing religious education and spiritual formation.”

– V. Rev. Fr. Philip Tolbert,
Director of the Bulgarian Orthodox Youth Apostolate

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FORWARD

The Resource Manual you now hold in your hands is an offering from the Diocesan Education Commission, established by the 2017 Diocesan Convention, to the priests, parents and church school teachers of our holy Diocese. In offering it to you, we are also dedicating it to the great Orthodox enlightener and teacher of Slavic peoples, St. Clement of Ohrid, asking for his holy prayers for all who are interested and involved in the spiritual education of our children and youth.

This booklet is not meant to be read as most people read a novel – starting on page one and continuing straight through to the last page. Which is not to say there is no rhyme or reason in the arrangement of its parts. There is a logic to the whole that you may discover for yourself if you do read it from beginning to end, and we encourage all who are inclined to do so. However, we also give you “permission” to lightly scan the pages that follow and to dip in at whatever point captures your attention. Each piece of this compilation is a discrete article complete unto itself and may be profitably read alone. Still, the combined effect upon one who reads all of the articles will be all the stronger. As St. Basil the Great encouraged his own students to imitate the honey bees, we also have taken from a number of sweet and fragrant spiritual flowers and drawn out what is beneficial for our godly purpose: a prayer to orient ourselves – the clergy, parents and teachers of our Diocesan Church – to the Orthodox Church’s way of educating children and youth in the soul-saving teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ.

May the Lord grant it!

V. Rev. Philip Tolbert,
Director of the Bulgarian Orthodox Youth Apostolate
and Co-Chairman of the Diocesan Education Commission

Feast of St. John of Rila
July 1/14, 2018

“The most effective means for the education of true taste in the heart is a church-centered life, in which all children in their upbringing must be unfailingly kept.” – St. Theophan the Recluse

“Prayer is an all-encompassing obligation, as well as an all-effective means. Through it the truths of the faith are also impressed in the mind and good morals into the will. But most of all it enlivens the heart in its feelings. The first two go well only when this one thing is present. Therefore prayer should begin to be developed before anything else, and continued steadily and tirelessly until the Lord grants prayer to the one who prays.” – St. Theophan the Recluse

Contemporary Orthodox Educators

“That our senses can be used for sin we all know too well. In one of the evening prayers, we read ‘I confess to Thee... all my sins which I have committed ... by all my senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch... .’ Yet St. John of Kronstadt sees in the Divine Liturgy and all of Orthodox liturgical life those same senses being used for good, as an educational experience:

The Church, through the temple and Divine Services, acts upon the entire man, educating him wholly; it acts upon his sight, hearing, smelling, feeling, taste, imagination, mind and will, by the splendor of the icons and of the whole temple, by the ringing of the bells, by the singing of the choir, by the fragrance of the incense, the kissing of the Gospel, of the cross and the holy icons, by the phosphoras, the singing and the sweet sound of the reading of the Scriptures.

“If in the Orthodox Liturgy, all our senses are engaged, is this not a clue to how an Orthodox educational curriculum should be designed? If our body and all our senses are employed in the Church, perhaps we should find ways of employing the body and all the senses in the classroom.”

– Proto-deacon James Hughes,
Headmaster of St. Michael’s Orthodox School

Scripture and the Fathers

“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” (Proverbs 22:6)

“Jesus came and spoke unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

“The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith.” (I Timothy 1:5)

“With us everything is secondary compared to our concern with young people and their upbringing in the instruction and teaching of the Lord. After all, what greater work is there than training the mind and forming the habits of the young?” – St. John Chrysostom

“Always consider yourself as needing instruction so that you may be found wise throughout your life.” --St. Isaac the Syrian

“It is good to teach arts and sciences, but to teach to live in a Christian manner is essential, for all science and art without Christian life is nothing. ... God will not ask you whether you taught your children French, German or Italian or the politics of society life – but you will not escape divine reprobation for not having instilled goodness into them. I speak plainly but I tell the truth: if your children are bad, your grandchildren will be worse, and the evil will thus increase, and the root of all this is our thoroughly bad education.”

– St. Tikhon of Zadonsk

“The good that you sew in the hearts of your children while they are young will blossom forth in their hearts when they come to full maturity, after enduring the bitter trials of school and contemporary life, which often break off the branches of a good Christian upbringing in the home.”

— St. Ambrose of Optina

“The holiest of all holy works is the education of children.”

– St. Theophan the Recluse

Children In Church

by Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky

Every Christian mother considers it one of her primary obligations to teach her child prayer as soon as his consciousness begins to awaken – prayer that is simple and easy for him to understand. His soul must be accustomed to the warm and fervent experience of prayer at home, by his cradle, for his neighbors, his family. The child's evening prayer calms and softens his soul, he experiences the sweetness of prayer with his little heart and catches the first scent of sacred feelings.

It is harder for a child to take in the atmosphere which prevails in church. At first he just observes. He sees people concentrating and rites he does not as yet understand and hears incomprehensible words. However, the very solemnity and festivity of the church have an uplifting effect on him. When a two year-old child wants to take part in church, to sing, speak or make prostrations – in this we can see his uplifted state of soul, with which he is involuntarily infected. We say this from simple observation.

But there is also something higher than our sense perceptions. Christ is invisibly present in church and He sees the child, blesses him, and receives him into the atmosphere of the grace of the Holy Spirit. Grace envelopes him as a warm wind wafts over a blade of grass in a field, helping it to grow up slowly and gradually, to put down roots and develop. And so the mother hastens to bring her child to Christ, to His grace, regardless even of whether he has any understanding at all of this contact with the gift of grace. This especially concerns the Eucharist, the very closest union with Christ. The mother brings her infant to this mystery while he is still a baby lying in her arms. Is the mother right?

“Suffer the little children to come unto Me, for of such is the kingdom of God.” (Mark 10:14) Can you really say with

certainty that there and then in the fields of Palestine these children had already understood Christ's teaching, had been sitting at the Teacher's feet and listening to His preaching? Do not say this, for the Evangelist himself remarks that *"they brought unto Him also infants, that He would touch them: but when His disciples saw it, they rebuked them."* In bringing their little ones, the mothers' purpose was simply that His hands should touch the children, and not that He should teach them divine knowledge.

Allowing children to have contact with spiritual grace is one of the first, basic concerns of a Christian who thinks about his children, and the task of Christian society, which is concerned about its youth. Here is the door to a correct Orthodox Christian upbringing. Enlightenment, compunction and joy, as they awaken in the infant's growing consciousness are an external indicator of the fact that the little Christian is feeling warmth from the divine source in himself. And even if he does not feel it, the invisible action of God's grace does not stop; only we do not see it, just as we do not see the effect of the sun on our own health instantly and at once. In Russian literature we have such apt examples of the disposition of children's souls during preparation for confession and communion, after confession and after communion of the Holy Mysteries.

Nevertheless, how often it is forgotten that herein lies the key to organizing religious education. How often, on seeing the inadequacy of religious education, we pick up the programs and rework them, lay the blame on the textbooks and the teachers—and forget about the importance of the church and the influence of the services; certainly we do not always ask ourselves the question: "But did the children go to church?"

As the child grows up, he should enter more deeply into the life of the Church. The child's mind, the youth's mind must be enlightened by the church services, learn from them, become immersed in them. The church should give him knowledge of God.

- =We cannot look to our secular governments to show us the way or even to support us in our God given task of educating future generations in Christ. The perspective that civil governments and state education departments would like to implement is not our own.
- =Public education is shaping children's identity in a major way and has become increasingly hostile towards Christian precepts and practices. Public education has become chaotic since the removal of the Judeo-Christian sense of morality. On their own, families and individuals are not able to resist this indoctrination. The Church has to act without delay to provide what is lacking in public education and to counter its negative influence on Christian identity.
- =Sunday school programs and youth groups should develop into more extensive Christian education focusing on shaping a Christian "world view" from the earliest age possible. Lack of resources should not be a deterrent to start such a program. Ask for help from the brethren - give Christ a chance to make Himself known to children, adults and educators alike.
- =Christian education and a Christ-centered world-view does not happen accidentally. It takes dedication and effort to achieve, but relies more on godly zeal than worldly expertise.
- =Don't expect people to understand or become enthusiastic right away. For many of them the idea of Christian education equals stories from the Bible. It is surprising to learn that most people would envision Christian education as being the same as secular education except with a sprinkling of Christian ideas in some place.
- =Be prepared for the long haul; even the Lord took six days to create the world!



Brief Thoughts on Education

- =Education is a mission given to the Apostles and to the Church by Our Lord as a commandment not as a suggestion (Matthew 28:19-20).
- =Education should not be mistaken for "instruction" – the former concerns forming a world-view; the latter is concerned with the method of building such a world view.
- =Most people relate the education of their children to the one that they themselves received. That may have been good, but we can do better for our children. (Who is the model of success?)
- =Christian education is Christ-centered. He made us, saved us and transforms us after His own image and likeness. In Christ only do we find the full stature of human potential expressed and realized.
- =Christian education grows from the desire to know Christ and to be like Christ. Both in content and in method Christian education is concerned in developing a Christ-like person.
- =It is more desirable to have as teachers, Orthodox Christians who have the flame of love for God and neighbor burning in their hearts and who are willing to pass it to the others, than to have highly trained people focusing on methods only.
- =It is imperative that the whole Diocesan Church be very involved in the process of religious and spiritual education of children and youth, indeed of all the faithful, as the Church alone possesses the vision and the means, the perspective and world-view that is necessary for the salvation of souls and the formation of genuinely human life in human societies.
- = Each parish priest in consultation with the parish board of directors should identify ways to initiate, develop or increase Christian education in their own community.

This matter is more complex. The task of religious education will be fulfilled only when we teach our children to love church.

When we, the adults, organize church services, make arrangements for them, shorten or lengthen the order of service and so on, we are accommodating ourselves to our own concepts and needs, or simply convenience, understood in adult terms. But in so far as the concepts, needs and spiritual strivings of children are not taken into account, the surroundings are often not conducive towards making children love church. This is nevertheless one of the most important means of religious education: let the children come to love the church, so that they may always attend church with a pleasant feeling and receive spiritual nourishment from it. And since parents often cannot help here, if only because not infrequently they are irreligious themselves, we are often compelled, when we think about our Orthodox children, to place this work into the hands of the community, the hands of the school, the hands of the Church.

Just as we are not afraid of destroying a devotion to learning and books, or love for our national literature and history by making our children come running to class at the sound of a bell and sit at desks, and by immersing them in an atmosphere of strict discipline and compulsion; so also, one might think, we would have no reason to be afraid of using a certain amount of compulsion in the matter of attending church, whether it be part of school regime or an expression of self-discipline on the part of youth organizations—both those that are connected with school and those that are not. But certainly, if this remains just compulsion, and to such an extent that it creates a psychological repulsion in the young people—this will show that the aim has not been attained, that the method has proved to be inadequate and the compulsion in vain. Let the child brought by our will express a desire to remain there through his own will. Then you will have justified your action.

child or youth should not be closed to holy impressions, but should be freely opened: and then it will no longer need effort, force or any other form of self-compulsion; it will be nourished freely and easily and joyfully.

There is one thing that must not be forgotten: human nature requires at least a minimal degree of active participation. In church this can take the form either of reading, or of singing, or of decorating and cleaning the church, or of some other activity, even if it is only indirectly connected with the services.

The indisputable importance of the church and of communal church services for the religious upbringing of children constitutes one of the arguments in favour of the Orthodox understanding of the mystery of baptism: that is to say, an argument in favor of baptizing children at a very young age, as we do in the Orthodox Church. Baptism is the door through which one enters the Church of Christ. One who is not baptized—which means he is not a member of Christ's family—has no right to participate in the life of this family, in its spiritual gatherings and in its table—the Lord's table. Thus our children would be deprived of the right to be with us in church, to receive the blessing in the name of the Holy Trinity, to communicate the Body and Blood of Christ. And however we may influence them in our family at home, however much we might teach them the Gospel, we would be depriving them of the direct action of heavenly grace, and at best we would arouse a thirst for faith in them—but we would still be keeping them far from the heavenly light and warmth, which comes down, regardless of our human efforts, in the mysteries, in all the services, in holy prayers. How grossly mistaken are those religions which recognize only adult baptism!

The holy maidens Faith, Hope and Charity, and the holy young bride Perpetua, who became martyrs, are witnesses to the fact that adolescence is an age prepared even for the highest active participation in Christ's Church. The baby in his mother's arms

Organizing a Parish Education Program

Fr. Teodor Anastasoae, Instructor, St. Herman Christian School
[adapted from: "Proposal for Christian Education" 2017]

- Have love for Christ and for His little ones. Christian education cannot happen without love and respect for one another.
- Ask for help from the Diocese or from other Parishes that already have a school – contact them, visit them, take whatever you find that might be useful to you.
- Involve a few good, dedicated people who are willing to "suffer the little ones" to come unto Christ, rather than career driven, diploma waving "professionals"
- Start small, person to person; ask everyone to contribute. A Church sponsored home-school cooperative is a great way to begin a Church day school.
- Retain the highest standards possible in instruction without hindering the children's natural sense of wonder and "the wisdom that is from above" (James 3:17).
- Quench the thirst - know what the community of learners needs most and strive to provide it.
- Encourage the mind-set to be creators of good things rather than merely consumers of what others provide. Certainly eat meals together from food you have purchased, but plant a garden also and eat the produce from it together. By all means listen to good music, but also sing and learn to make your own music together. Definitely view and contemplate great art, but also learn to draw and paint together. The teacher doesn't have to know how to do all these things before beginning, but merely to be themselves someone who is willing to learn by doing along with the children.
- Be good stewards of the people entrusted to you, as well as of the world we live in together.

“... the pain in your knees is part of your prayer.”

Fr. George Calciu, of blessed memory, many times described to us his life growing up in a pious Orthodox family in Romania. He always stressed how important his mother's piety had been to him as a young boy. It was at her insistence that they would go to church together. He said that often while standing in church his knees and feet would hurt, and he would want to sit down or go outside, and she would tell him that the pain in his knees was part of his prayer to God. In this regard, his mother was truly an Orthodox theologian of prayer.

The teaching and example of Fr. George's mother to her young son were the essence of simplicity and yet were in perfect harmony with the teaching of our Holy Fathers concerning the Orthodox way of prayer as a threefold progression beginning first with the stage of bodily prayer, proceeding to mental prayer, and finally rising by God's gift to spiritual prayer (see *The Art of Prayer*, edited by Igumen Chariton). The theological principle is clearly stated by St. Paul when speaking to the Corinthians concerning the body of the resurrection: *“It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual.”* (1Co 15:44; 46)

If we do not teach our children this way of prayer, prayer which begins with the body, they don't ever really begin on the path of prayer. It is like attempting to build a house by skipping the foundation and starting with the roof. We are often tempted to exercise a false compassion towards our children by letting them take the easy way because of their youth – letting them come late, or leave early or stay home altogether – thinking that later “when they understand more” they will come on their own. But if we don't guide them from their early years in the bodily forms of prayer, the first stage of prayer, and indeed in all the practical aspects of Orthodox piety, then how can we expect that they will ever make this beginning on their own?

V. Rev. Philip Tolbert, *“Until Christ Be Formed In You...” Insights of the Holy Fathers for Guiding Children and Youth Along the Path to Salvation*, p. 10 (2014).

in church who cried out, "Ambrose for bishop!", and by his exclamation determined the choice of the renowned Ambrose of Milan for the episcopal cathedra – this baby is a defender of children's rights to an active participation in Christ's Church.

And so let us take some trouble over our children: first let us give them the chance to take more part in church – and in a wider and more elevated form than just giving the censer to the priest; and secondly, let us adapt ourselves somewhat to our children when praying together with them.

Let the children be conscious that they are members of Christ's family.

Let the children come to love church!

Selected Essays. Holy Trinity Monastery (1996), pp. 19-22.

*In our own day every man takes
the greatest pains to train his son in
the arts and in literature and in speech.
But to exercise this child's soul in virtue,
to that no man any longer pays heed.*

– St. John Chrysostom

The Three Pillars of Education: Church, Home and School

*By V. Rev. Patrick Tishel, Headmaster,
St. Herman of Alaska Christian School*

Years ago I lived in a house that was undergoing renovations. The brunt of the work focused on creating more space, and by the end of the project the workers had enlarged many of the rooms, giving the house a seemingly new and improved flare.

Yet, to their horror, as one of the workers bounded up the stairs to the second floor, the house began to sway back and forth. It so happened that they had taken down certain walls that bore the weight of the structure. Without these walls in place, the house lost its strong foundation and was affected by the slightest movement. It is clear in all construction projects that all of the "finish" work must be done after the house has been founded upon strong, weight-bearing pillars.

The same must be true in a child's formation. If the educational pillars are not in place, then all of the knowledge gained in specialized disciplines will be shaken by the slightest wind - whether it be from society, peers, or from powers and principalities. This principle applies from the very beginning stages. Often parents assume that any school will suffice in the education and intellectual formation of their children. Yet just as the structure and foundation of a building upholds and affects the entire house, so too the educational structure should be wholly integrated with the rest of a child's life. For this reason it is important to be mindful of the three weight-bearing pillars of a child's education, which are the Church, the home and the school. Imagine the results, when these three spheres of influence are all working towards the same goal.

Educating the Whole Person

The mission of an Orthodox Christian education must go beyond a technical transmission of skills and information. Education involves the whole person and the goal of education is holiness. The saints present an example of a complete education.

Youth. That eternal Youth calls children, so it can give them strength, so that they do not grow old in spirit, but that they always remain young, energetic and joyful. In one word: the wisdom of Christ's education of children is in children always remaining children and not turning into old people. In opposition to that wisdom stands the scholastic model of education which strives by all its might to make old people out of children as quickly as possible – to present old people as their example, to pour elderly thoughts into their minds, to wring their hearts with the skepticism and pessimism of the elderly. Instead of the elderly becoming like children, they turn children into the elderly. And thus, they neither enter into the kingdom of Christ themselves, nor do they allow the children to enter. Hence the complaints from all over Europe that the youth are desperate.

May Christ bless and rejuvenate the youth of Europe!

*Missionary Letters of Saint Nikolai Velimirovich, Part 3. Letter no. 232,
p. 63. (English Edition 2008, New Gracanica Monastery).*

*In preparing your children for life in the world,
have you taken care to plant in their hearts
faith and the fear of God, which will be their
guides in the future? Pray to the Lord
that He protect their hearts from the tares
which are sewn among the wheat by the enemy.*

— St. Macarius of Optina

**TO AN EDUCATOR, MARKON,
About Education of the Young and the Old**
Saint Nikolai Velimirovich

You write how you love children because of their beautiful gratefulness, which is pretty dull among adults. You quote examples. I will quote one, too. Isidor, the Metropolitan of Petrovgrad, used to tell a story how as a child he had to walk barefoot. Some man, named Peter, was moved with compassion and bought him slippers made of birch bark for 5 pennies. This small act of charity was carved so deeply into Isidor's memory that he was commemorating his benefactor, Peter, fifty years later at the services.

You also write that you feel sorry for children, exactly because you love them. A hard time has come for children, for their souls and their characters. There are scandals everywhere. Uncertainties and contradictions whip children like cold winds, at home, at school, on the street. And not only do children hear, in the space of two hours, two completely opposite theories about life, behavior, family, motherland, but they are confused by opposite examples. So you would like to have some sort of special education system which would protect them from the contemporary sickness and scandals. However, Christ said, "unless you return and become like children, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven." So, He points out a greater need for the education of adults than of children. He shows a method by which adults should be educated. Simply ... by following the example of children. But He also said how children ought to be educated. Again, very simple: "Let the children come to me and forbid them not." (Mark 10:14). Just let the children come to Christ and everything else is His work. The only task that parents have is not forbidding children to come to Christ.

So, let the children approach Christ and let the adults approach children. In the presence of Christ, their greatest Friend, children will not only learn, but also be made strong. Christ does not only teach, but He also gives the grace-filled force of life so that children can fulfill what they learn. Christ is the eternal

Memorizing facts and data, and even learning skills, does not make wise men and women – it does not produce saints. With T.S. Eliot we are to ask: "Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is all the knowledge we have lost in information?" The children need provisions for a holy life both in the world and also for their eternal existence with Christ and the saints in heaven. The three pillars of education give us a way to begin this process.

The Church

The Church is the most prominent and foundational of the three pillars. St. Paul calls it the pillar and ground of the Truth (I Tim 3:15). The home and the school must be based upon this foundation. When we are baptized in Christ, we become part of His Body - the Church - and are re-planted into new soil. We must live out this reality consciously and actively. The children and parents need to know the fullness of the Faith. It is good to know the specifics as well as the general concepts, to have a grasp of the dogmas as well as the practices. The children should be familiar with the life of the Church. Being able to read the Psalms and actively participate in the daily prayers and services are some of the fruits of this experience. We must teach and encourage the children to inhale deeply the air of the Church - to stand boldly upon its foundation.

The Home

Family life is both precious and vital. It compliments the life in the school and the Church. The family and the home are close to the heart of the Church and are meant to be the little church, where the communal worship is extended and its fruits made manifest. The common life of a family acts as a garden in which we sow for a time and then perpetually harvest. This is where the heart of a child is formed, the feeling for prayer, the zeal for the commandments, and the love of God and neighbor. The love of God is nourished within the children while they stand before the icons during morning and evening prayers. Father and mother, brothers and sisters are the first neighbors we are required to love. The exalted life of Heaven dwells within this

cave of Bethlehem - the home. The children's future longings, loves and desires are formed here. Children are commanded to honor their parents, and we teach and expect them to do so. But parents are commanded to raise their children in the "admonition of the Lord." (Ephesians 6:4) This means that they need to see the Orthodox Faith in action, within the context of their own home.

If our children are rich but not generous, if they are smart but arrogant, if they have learned how to be a doctor but have not learned humility, can we claim that they are educated? We should always keep our eye on the ultimate goal. Parents are willing to make sacrifices for sports and social events, but not for feast day services and vigils. The children miss out on the life of the Church, and its importance is undermined. Parents need to instill in their children the significance of the spiritual life by their own example. We are inspired by the stories of someone who goes from rags to riches, but how much more inspiring is it when the zeal for God is awakened.

Parents have a profound impact on their children, but what happens when their work in the home meets the locker room, the college dorm or the classroom, where their minds and hearts are challenged away from the Church? This is a problem of temptation, and their inability to defend their faith in their own minds against the contrary views being presented to them in the presence of their peers. We need to teach them how to love their peers, explain their Faith and influence others instead of being influenced. This work is done at home and can be facilitated by an Orthodox school, the third pillar that helps them interpret the world through the Light of Christ.

The School

The bridge between the home and the Church (and servant of both) is the school. We have become used to schools challenging and contradicting the faith of our children. An Orthodox curriculum, however, shows that the world exists in light of the Incarnation of Christ. If the school is able to present history,

of their lives will not last long, although at the time it may seem you are always walking in and out of the narthex with the little ones. As your children become able to sit somewhat more quietly – near the four year old range – consider moving up toward the front of the Church. There is a lot more to see up front – the acolytes, the Priests, etc.

You may also want to chat with a family whose older children behave well in Church, or whose older teens or young adults are still active in Church life. I believe that you'll find that they brought their children to the Divine Liturgy regularly as infants, toddlers, and young children – even if it was a struggle, and even if the children didn't entirely "understand" everything that was going on. As with all parenting issues, understanding the "big picture" of how things will change over time makes the immediate difficulties with young children far more tolerable and worthwhile.

Finally, there are a number of wonderful books which beautifully address child-rearing from an Orthodox perspective. Ask your parish priest to recommend one for you. As one author expresses it, "if children are conceived, born and brought up surrounded by prayer and love, they will grow up as spiritual persons and come to experience the fullness of genuine human life in Christ." Isn't this ultimately what we all want for our children?

So, as you can see, the decision to schedule religious education for children and youth around the Divine Services, rather than during them, did not come about haphazardly. It is the result of great attention to the historical, spiritual, social, practical and parental issues at hand, and with great love and concern for all our children. The Church School program is in place to augment and support your guidance of your children's religious and spiritual growth in the most Orthodox way possible. Everything that takes place in the classroom, no matter how beneficial, is secondary to our own and our children's practice of our faith as a worshipping community in Christ.



the week, after school or on Saturday. By doing so, we are able to focus on the important task of passing on our Orthodox faith to our children in a longer format than is possible in any of the "Sunday School" options discussed above.

With this arrangement, on Sunday children are better able to learn how to prepare for Holy Communion by being part of the entire worshiping congregation – hearing the Scripture readings, witnessing the processions, learning to recite the Creed and the Lord's prayer by joining in with the whole community, singing along with the other worshipers during the services, and as they become able even singing in the clerics or serving in the altar. By worshiping together with their families during the Divine Services, the children grow up understanding that prayer and worship are a natural part of their own lives and not just something which their parents do. By the time a young person reaches adulthood and begins to take personal responsibility for their faith, they have developed the very beneficial practice of frequent attendance at worship services and are more familiar with, and more able to participate consciously in the Liturgy than those who attended a class instead of the community worship. Many will naturally continue coming to Church on Sunday – whether away at college, or living in their own homes – in very much the same way as they always have.

If you are struggling with your own young children during the Liturgy, do not lose heart. Children today are not so very different from children in earlier centuries. Somehow they all made it through to adulthood, nurturing their own children into mature Christian adults as well. It is a difficult task for the parent, but crucially important for you to find the proper balance: you must somehow immerse your children in our worship as much as possible without creating negative sentiments on their part. Setting them a good example by your own faithful and reverent attendance at Church is the best beginning.

In some cases you may need to step out for a short time during the service with your young child if they become unmanageable" or if they are disrupting the worship of others. This period

science, language arts and all of the subjects as expressions of this reality, then the children will be given the depth of understanding of the world that will allow them to live and flourish in any environment. They will also be well equipped to walk in Truth in the midst of the world. The school, therefore, will be a workshop for servants of Christ to enter into human society and make a difference. They will learn to think, discern, and speak intelligently and convincingly in the context of the world - in a language that non-Christians can also understand. Just as a brain surgeon's training must be thorough in their vital work, so too our children must know their Faith thoroughly and with a firm understanding of its relationship with the world around them. Christian children must be prepared to be witnesses and apologists, defenders and promoters, students and teachers in this world. An Orthodox school environment, or at least an awareness of the Orthodox approach towards education, are essential when talking about the final pillar of education.

Conclusion

Our goal should be to make all our life dedicated to God. We often think about Church in this way. But considering the three pillars - the Church, the home and the school - as means towards the same end, gives us a good perspective on the educational arenas for our children. St. John Chrysostom exhorts us not to destroy the spiritual life of our children through our own indifference and sloth. We need to pay attention to these three arenas of life - the Church, the home and the school - in order to fulfill our Lord's command to "suffer the little children to come unto Me." This means that parents, godparents, educators and pastors need to labor to ensure that all three pillars are in order, and ready to support the edifice.

How awesome is the responsibility of the education of children! What a wonderful reward it is to see the next generation of children alive in Christ!



Why Do We Have Sunday School on Friday?
The Orthodox Way of Education
By Fr. Philip & P. Junia Tolbert

Not so long ago, a very common arrangement in many Orthodox parishes was for the children to be off somewhere in a Sunday School class during the Divine Liturgy. Although this practice is still found in a few parishes today, from the perspective of the previous 2,000 years of Orthodox experience, it is simply not correct to keep children of any age separated from the Divine Liturgy.

Sunday Schools are a very recent "import" into the history of Orthodox Christianity – beginning only about 75 years ago. Our grandparents borrowed the idea from their Protestant neighbors, who by definition had an entirely different concept of worship than did the Orthodox. The unfortunate result is that some people now perceive Sunday Schools as having a greater importance for children than the Divine Liturgy. In other words, learning about Christ with the intellect began to take the place of the lifetime process of knowing Christ mystically through prayer and worship.

As Orthodox Christians, we receive our infants into the full membership and sacramental life of our Faith. Baptized and Chrismated as infants, they join in the Communion (or "community") of the Holy Eucharist – and have done so for the entire history of the Church. Children are fully included in the worshipping Body of the Church; and we, the Body of Christ, meet Him as fully present in the Divine Liturgy, not in classroom textbooks.

The Divine Liturgy is not a purely intellectual or rational experience – even for adults! It is not necessary that children "understand" everything that is going on. Do we? We should let the Divine Liturgy "wash over" our young children, as one priest recently put it. The sights, sounds, smells and tastes of our worship become for us an experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit. These are far more important memories in

one's early religious development than the definition of the words used. As one Orthodox educator wrote: "Let the children come to love the Church." This is the most important word for us when we think of our children's education.

We have given much thought over the years to determining the proper schedule for religious education within the modern parish situation, one that would allow some quality time for instruction and fellowship in a classroom setting. There are certainly many possible options. One Orthodox parish we know holds Sunday School at 9:15 a.m. ending in time for the Divine Liturgy at 10:00. Another parish we know holds their Sunday School after the Divine Liturgy, at 12:15 p.m. There are pros and cons to either arrangement, but most importantly, either one allows the children of all ages not only to receive the Holy Body and Blood of our Lord at the Divine Liturgy, but to be present for the entire Liturgy, and thus to learn how to worship God by their own participation.

In most parishes that still hold Sunday School during the Divine Liturgy, the children are brought into Church with their classmates for some portion of the Liturgy, usually just in time to receive Holy Communion. But clearly, young children do not develop a sense of piety by sitting next to their friends who are climbing on the pews or making faces at one another while a few teachers here and there are trying to keep them all quiet. This is not at all ideal and really is not how genuine Orthodox education should take place.

When a child's behavior in Church needs attention lest it disrupt other worshipers, the ideal way is "one-on-one" – a parent, grandparent or Godparent helps the child to attend. Religious piety is "caught" not "taught" – by children observing adults whom they respect – their parents or grandparents standing or sitting next to them, engaged reverently in prayer and participation in worship. Worship is a family affair.

Another option for parishes which have the ability, is to have spiritual instruction for children and youth on a different day of