

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION BASICS

Achievement and Incentives

BASIL XEROS, INTERVIEWED BY ELIZABETH BORCH

Holy Trinity Church of Dallas, TX, has a well-organized system for recognizing student achievement and attendance. The parish has 400 students on the rolls, with 130–175 regular participants.

Each year on the second Sunday in May, students are recognized with a promotion or graduation ceremony after the Divine Liturgy. The following Sunday, awards are given out in the classrooms. (See the sidebars for lists of various awards.)

Starting in the fifth grade, every student receives a “continuing education” pamphlet to help them start building their personal libraries. For further incentive, there are three main categories of student awards: attendance, achievement and graduation.

The attendance award is given to a student if he or she has been present for at least 80 percent of the scheduled teaching Sundays. (This requirement is relaxed if a student comes from a difficult family situation.) The attendance award is presented with a promotion certificate. This award, which changes every year, might be something like a lapel pin or necklace.

ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Awarded to students who elect to do something beyond attending class; task and prize may be determined by the teaching team for each grade

Age or Grade	Task	Award Icon
Age 3	Make the sign of the cross	St. Philip
Age 4	State the name of the church and the priest	Jesus Christ
Kindergarten	Recite the Lord’s Prayer	Three Hierarchs
1st grade	Recite the Lord’s Prayer	Resurrection
2nd grade	Recite the Ten Commandments and name the seven sacraments	St. John Chrysostom
3rd grade	Recite the Creed	Annunciation
4th grade	Complete the <i>Lenten Workbook</i>	St. Nicholas
5th grade	Answer 30–40 questions from the Old Testament	Archangels Michael & Gabriel
6th grade	Answer 30–40 questions from the New Testament	Nativity of Christ
7th and 8th grades	STUDENT’S CHOICE: – Write a paper for the St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival – Teach a class – Write a paper on a familiar Orthodox Christian topic	7th grade: St. George 8th grade: Theotokos
9th and 10th grades	STUDENT’S CHOICE: – Write a paper for the Oratorical Festival – Participate in five dinners for the homeless	9th grade: Sts. Constantine & Helen 10th grade: St. Katherine
11th and 12th grades	STUDENT’S CHOICE: – Present a speech in the Oratorical Festival – Assist in the parish’s “Orphan Tree” – Raise money for Support A Mission Priest (SAMP)	11th grade: Baptism of the Lord 12th grade: Theotokos “Quick to Hear”

The achievement award is granted to each student who meets the requirements of the class for the year. These are age-appropriate goals set by the teacher for the class at the beginning of the year. For example, a three-year-old might have to learn to do the sign of the cross, and an older child might have to recite the Creed from memory. Each year, from age three to high school graduation, a specific icon is given as the achievement award. By the time students graduate from high school, they will have a respectable collection of icons. The teaching staff created a list of the icons awarded in order to avoid duplication.

Older children are groomed for participation in the St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival. Students are required to write and present papers for a couple of years before they are of age to participate in the festival in the seventh grade. This assignment is taken seriously. For example, a student is not allowed to participate on the GOYA basketball team if he or she has not written a paper. The winners of the parish-level festival advance to the Metropolis of Denver’s festival. The church awards these students with their own St. John Chrysostom award.

Graduating seniors who have been regular and consistent in the program receive a special graduation gift and diploma from the Sunday school. They are given an icon of the Theotokos “Quick to Hear,” an *Orthodox Study Bible* and six other books. This costs approximately \$150 per student—a worthwhile and

“ARMOR OF GOD” GRADUATING SENIOR PACKAGE

Icon of the Theotokos “Quick to Hear”
(12th grade achievement award)
Prayer rope
Orthodox Study Bible

Additional books and pamphlets, such as the following:

- Pocket-size prayer book
- Book of Orthodox services
- *What Orthodox Christians Believe*
- *Building a Habit of Prayer*
- *How to Read Your Bible*
- *Cultist at My Door*
- *When You Fast*
- *What the Orthodox Church Teaches about Abortion*
- *Treasures of Orthodoxy*
- *Orthodox Answers to...*
- *The Orthodox Church*
- *Are You Saved?*
- *Introducing the Orthodox Church*
- *The Jesus Prayer*
- *The Creed*
- *The Orthodox Church: 455 Questions and Answers*

CONTINUING EDUCATION PAMPHLETS

5th grade	<i>The Eastern Orthodox Church: Who Are We?</i> <i>Prayer and the Departed Saints</i>
6th grade	<i>Introduction to the Jesus Prayer</i> <i>An Introduction to Prayer</i>
7th grade	<i>Memorial Saturdays in the Orthodox Church</i> <i>Building a Habit of Prayer</i>
8th grade	<i>When You Fast</i>
9th grade	<i>Preparing Prosporo</i> <i>How to Read Your Bible</i>
10th grade	<i>The Resurrection Service in the Orthodox Church</i> <i>Facing Up to Mary</i> <i>Communion: A Family Affair</i>
11th grade	<i>Turned On by the Liturgy</i> <i>Cultist at My Door</i>
12th grade	<i>Treasures of Orthodoxy</i> <i>What the Orthodox Church Teaches about Abortion</i>

useful investment as the students move on to the next phase of their lives.

The teachers are not overlooked in recognition for their devoted service. Each year, teachers get a planner and a book of their choice from various Orthodox catalogs. The book they select may be for their personal use or for classroom use. Doing this has also created a resource library that any of the teachers can draw from. The third Sunday in August, teachers are honored after the Divine Liturgy for the faithful work they do.

This may sound like an expensive program, but the costs are offset in a few ways. The Sunday school does have a budget that is regulated by its director. Funds are available in \$15 increments for proposed craft projects, if approved by the director. Students are given stewardship envelopes for each week and are expected to contribute regularly, so a certain percentage of the program’s budget comes from within. The resource library also saves money in the long run.

Basil Xeros is the Sunday school director at Holy Trinity Church in Dallas, TX. He has served in this capacity for fifty-four years. He is a retired engineer.