

Does the Archdiocese Have a Curriculum?

This question is posed all the time. The answer is simple. Yes! First and foremost, the curriculum of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America is the life of the parish itself. That curriculum consists of a liturgical and sacramental life (*leitourgia*), a social life (fellowship or *koinonia*), a life of service (*diakonia*), a life of witness and proclamation (*martyria* and *kerygma*), and a life of learning (*matheteia*).

The religious education programs of parishes should consider all of these elements to be parts of the program. For example, children and families should attend as much of the Sunday Divine Liturgy as possible. If this is a consistent habit, then Sunday Church school can work to explain and explore what is occurring in the Liturgy. Participation *in* the Liturgy and instruction *about* the Liturgy can go hand in hand. Parishes with active social ministries usually involve all the parishioners. Learning the rationale—from the stories of Scripture, the lives of saints, and more—ties the ministry of the parish to the Orthodox Tradition, making it more than just a nice thing for people to do, but something that we do because our Faith teaches us to care about others. Serving the poor and learning about serving the poor are connected.

Beyond that, the “curriculum” that many people are asking about is really a question about standard resources. And here, too, the answer is: “Yes! The Archdiocese has a standard program.” From 1989 to 1993, the Archdiocese Department of Religious Education published a textbook series covering preschool to fifth grade. These resources are being reworked and renovated, starting with the fifth grade for 2014–2015. What

is timeless is the content and relevance of the Orthodox Faith and way of life that they present. What is being updated in the new series is the world that the students know. The Orthodox Christian Education Commission (the Christian education agency of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the United States) also has a textbook series.

For junior and senior high school students, plenty of resources exist. But the Department of Religious Education is currently focused on producing a series of zines (from “magazines”). These present one topic of the Faith in a unit of study comprised of several lessons. The zines are easy-to-read, with small bites of information, plenty of graphics, and many interactive elements, such as questions for reflection or things to look up in the Bible or other sources. The first thing that many people notice is that there are no formal lessons in the zines themselves. The lessons are contained in the Teacher Guide. Each lesson’s activities and discussions lead students to a deeper understanding and active application of the short texts in the zine.

8 ZINES ARE CURRENTLY AVAILABLE

- *A Lamp to My Feet: An Introduction to the Bible*
- *Of Your Mystical Supper: The Eucharist*
- *Heaven on Earth: The Divine Liturgy*
- *For to Us a Child is Born*
- *Journey through Holy Week*
- *Journey through Great Lent*
- *First among Equals: The Ecumenical Patriarchate*
- *The Church: We Are One in Christ*

The goal is to create a menu of topics for teachers and students to select for study. This will allow them to collaborate on the curriculum—the course of study—for the year.

The zines also necessitate our approach to instruction. Information is easily obtained today. In fact, many people are overwhelmed by all of the information that can be found simply by Googling a topic. But what do we do with all this information? Sifting through it, understanding it, and applying it are the three educational challenges today. The zine, by presenting that which is most important and manageable for a learner, cuts through to the core of the issue, asks questions to assist in comprehension, and poses challenges for application of the topic to the learner’s life.

- *About the zines:*
www.goarch.org/archdiocese/departments/religious/zines
- *Recommended textbooks for each grade:*
www.goarch.org/archdiocese/departments/religious/resources

