

Why Do We Educate in the Church at All?

There could be many ways of stating the goal of education in the life of the Orthodox Church. In the mid-1980s, the Department of Religious Education of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese developed the following statement:

The purpose of Orthodox Christian Education (*catechesis*) is to help build up the Church, the Body of Christ, by nurturing every person in the life of personal communion with the Holy Trinity (*theosis*), and thus, through this ministry, to bear joyful witness to God's loving and redeeming work in the world.

Being only one part of the total life of the Church, Christian education is effective in the context of living faith in the home and the local parish. Living faith is concretely expressed through all believers—bishops, priests, parents, teachers, parish leaders, youth leaders, and all Orthodox Christians seeking to know and to live the new life in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Key Term: Curriculum

People often ask, "When will the curriculum be finished?" The glib answer would be, "When the student has learned everything!" Really, the question points to how most of us have confused and conflated the term "curriculum" with "textbook." Offices regularly say that they have produced a "new curriculum" on a topic. What they mean is a book, a resource guide, a program guide for an activity, or some other product with information or set of instructions for people to follow when working with a specific topic or audience.

So what does "curriculum" really mean? It comes from

the Latin word *currere*, which means to run a course, like a racecourse or track. It refers to the path that one follows. In education, a curriculum is an entire course of study that one follows in order to achieve or acquire the objectives of the program. For example, if you were studying to become a physician, the entire program of medical school comprises the curriculum, including the academic courses, the study groups, the clinics, the labs, the internship and residency, and the manner of instruction. All of these elements transmit the knowledge and create the experiences that prepare some-

one to practice medicine. What happens in the entire life of the school or classroom comprises its curriculum. What happens in one day of that life is just one episode in that curriculum. A textbook is just one dimension of that curriculum.

Applying this to the Church, then, means that the life of the parish is the curriculum for teaching people what it means to be an Orthodox Christian. The curriculum of the parish is its life of worship, its social programs for its members, its service to the world, and its witness of the Orthodox Church and faith to others. All of these

together teach the Orthodox faith. So, if you were to read all of the books about Orthodox Christianity that you could find, but never attended the Divine Liturgy, participated in it, or received Holy Communion, your education would be deficient. The intentional programs of schooling, classes, lectures, Bible studies and so on are just one dimension of this curriculum. In a Sunday Church school program, the curriculum is what happens from the moment the students gather until they depart, which includes far more than the textbook used in class.



In this icon, which hangs in our offices, St. Philip the Deacon is teaching the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–36). While traveling toward Jerusalem, Philip came upon the Ethiopian, who was a high official in his queen's court. As Philip drew near, he heard the Ethiopian reading from Isaiah. Philip asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" The Ethiopian replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" This event points to the importance of teachers and the process of teaching in the life of the Church.