

THE DEPARTMENT OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

“This, then, is our task . . . to educate ourselves, and our children in holiness,” St. John Chrysostom, Homily on Ephesians

Our task, as St. John Chrysostom states, is to educate for holiness. We are striving to move ever closer to that goal, and I am pleased to say that this report includes a note of progress on a new curriculum which has theosis—holiness-- as the goal for the students.

In the Department of Christian Education, we serve primarily the Church Schools of the Archdiocese, and in that regard: 1) we educate and train teachers and directors, 2) attend to the curriculum needs, and 3) assist and support parents as they form their children in the faith. In addition, we provide continuing education in the faith through the Orthodox Institute program. Each of these will be addressed. We will also report on our social media ministry—our newest, and expanding area of service to teachers and parents. Finally, the report will conclude with the concept paper for the new curriculum, “Walking the Path of Salvation.” This year, for the first time, the Christian Education report features statistics documenting the numbers served by our internet efforts. We thank the Department of Internet Ministry for these.

The Department of Christian Education consists of the Director, Carole A. Buleza, and the Administrative Assistant, Rosemary Shumski. Rosemary also manages the Creative Festivals. Our theme this year was St. Raphael, Shepherd of the Lost Sheep of America. St. Raphael knew the importance of gathering the people into churches—*to live Orthodox is to be centered on the church*. In honor of his Jubilee Year, the Department of Christian Education has provided a gift to each parish, a set of seven commemorative posters which feature all the churches he founded, so the children will know the saint from Syria, and his tireless work.

Dedicated Volunteer Staff

Over the years we’ve been active in the field, training Church School Directors and Teachers, and through events such as The Orthodox Institute for Continuing Education in the Faith, now in its 14th year, and the “mini” or Diocesan Institutes. Over 1,100 people have taken at least one course from our training programs in the last 10 years. Only the dedication of our volunteer departmental staff has made this possible. The Diocesan Coordinators are listed below; however, we are also grateful for our Associates: Kh. Leslee Abud, Sandy Mitchell, Gail Meena Malaniak, Kh. Gigi Shadid, and Fr. Michael Gillis. At this time, trainings are scheduled in the fall for Calgary, Alberta, and Grand Rapids, Michigan. Contact your Diocesan Coordinator to schedule! Please note: the Department will pick up the costs that the parish cannot cover through registration fees.

Diocesan Coordinators	Phone Number	Email
Eastern Dioceses Fr. George Alberts	203.798.1771	frgeocar@sbcglobal.net
Toledo and the Midwest Robert Snyder	330.285.3688	bobsny1107@aol.com
Ottawa, Eastern Canada, Upstate New York Fr. Christopher Rigden-Briscall	519.807.2986	englishorthodox@yahoo.ca
Wichita and Mid-America Vasiliki Billie Oldziej	512.694.7073	vasiliki1@cox.net
Worcester and New England		

Kh. Anna Timko-Hughes 978.686.3274 matannah@aol.com

Miami and the Southeast

Kh. Betty Randolph 864.261.6058 randolba@yahoo.com

Los Angeles and the West and also Eagle River and the Northwest

(Carole Buleza, Interim) 717.747.5221 aodce@aol.com

The Orthodox Institute for Continuing Education in the Faith

Now in its 14th year, the Institute is held each November to coincide with the Feast Day of St. Raphael. In 2015, in fact, we will be hosting a portion of the first Saint Raphael Pilgrimage program which will be held concurrently with our event. Under consideration is a plan to hold the Orthodox Institute at the Antiochian Village every two years. In the interim year, we would hold diocesan mini-Institutes around the Archdiocese, thereby extending the educational opportunity of the Institute. We have had requests to have events in places other than the Antiochian Village.

The 2015 Orthodox Institute, Adult Education: Building on the Foundation of Faith In Christian education circles, we have spoken of the need to educate adults for years. Yet, in the majority of our churches the focus is still on educating the children. The goal of our Institute is to provide tools and resources for those parishes ready to move toward adult education. Our keynote speaker is Kevin Allen, renowned podcaster and creator of a dynamic adult education program at his home parish in southern California. Other presenters include Bishop THOMAS, Fr. John Oliver, Fr. Josiah Trenham, Fr. Stephen Freeman, Fr. Sergius Halvorsen, Robert Snyder, and Vasiliki Oldziej.

Meeting Needs of Teachers through the Internet

The Christian Education website was a project of the Director from its inception and presently it consists of 17 pages of curricula, articles, craft ideas, and more. According to the analytics, **antiochian.org/ christianeducation was visited 14,520 times** during the one year period of March 2014-2015, which **placed it at #28** in the page rankings of antiochian.org current at the time of this writing. It is always a “work-in-progress”; with its educational potential to be increased in the coming year with the addition of some of the resource material from the student text, *The Way, The Truth, and The Life*.

The ground-breaking internet program, “Let Us Attend, the Antiochian Gospel Program for Children,” has reached its 10th anniversary. Designed originally for parents to download the Sunday Gospel to read to their children Saturday night, “Let us Attend” is also used as curricula for mission church schools. The recent statistics **show that 22,567 individuals** visited the Antiochian Gospel Program in the year March 2014-15. Its rank in the “most-visited pages on antiochian.org,” is typically **around #10**.

Social Media

Five years ago we established Facebook pages for Parents, Teachers, Directors and Homeschoolers. In October 2013, in order to properly develop these, the “**AODCE Social Network Ministry**” was created as a project of this Department with Kristina Wenger as Project Manager. An identical blog was created for those who do not use Facebook. These pages are cross-linked with our antiochian.org webpages so as to leverage our presence on the internet and social media scenes. **The Teacher Facebook page is at 500 likes. The Parenting Facebook page is now at 1,660 “likes.”** Those are 1,660 parents we have the potential of educating as they raise their children. Kristina has written 80 brief articles for parents, with the most popular being her Lenten Activities Calendar, which received 780 clicks. **The AODCE Pinterest Board has 400 followers, 29 pages and over 1,000 pins.**

The Department of Christian Education Social Media Sites:

For Teachers

www.facebook.com/Orthodoxchristiansundaychurchschoolteachers

www.Orthodoxchristianchurchschoolteachers@wordpress.com

For Parents

www.facebook.com/Orthodoxchristianparenting

www.Orthodoxchristianparenting@wordpress.com

For Everyone

www.pinterest.com/aodce

For Directors

www.facebook.com/Orthodoxchristianchurchschooldirectors

www.facebook.com/creativefestivals

The internet extends the ministry of the Department to hundreds and thousands of parents and teachers. We are able to provide education, lesson plans and programs for free. Our Department, including Kh. Leslee Abud, has made it a significant tool for Orthodox Christian education. Leslie Atherholt and Kristina Wenger, and Timm Wenger share this ministry, as part-time employees.

The New Curriculum, “Walking the Path of Salvation”

My concept paper was favorably received during my Departmental review at the Chancery. The project is going forward, within our Archdiocese. My goal this year is to develop the Scope and Sequence Chart for the Elementary Grades, and to find key people for the project. I have been reporting on my preparatory work in “The Word”; these reports and analyses charts can be found at www.antiochian.org/curriculumplan. Church school directors might be interested in the side-by-side comparison of the OCEC and GOA texts Preschool through Grade 5. I am also opening a Facebook page for dialogue, “CB Path of Salvation Curriculum Research.” Here is the concept paper.

Concept Paper

A New Vision for Orthodox Christian Education:

“Walking the Path of Salvation”

A Formational Catechesis with an Authentically Eastern “Methodology”

In reviewing the catechetical materials of both the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese and the Orthodox Christian Education Commission, it is apparent that knowledge of the faith was a prime concern of the textbook writers. Firm knowledge of the faith has always been my top concern, but knowledge alone does not make a Christian. The spirit must be engaged, nurtured and matured. The task of catechesis is not so much to *inform* the child as to *form* the child toward the goal of spiritual maturity, salvation, or “theosis.”

What comprises spiritual maturity, for an Orthodox Christian? Five aspects of our spirituality were identified as key contributors, by several professional Orthodox religious educators some years ago. As a curriculum planner, the question became how to integrate firm knowledge of the faith, and spiritual maturity. I looked at the scope and sequence charts, which break-out subject matter by grade, of the GOA and the OCEC. Across the top were categories such as Bible, Church History, Doctrine, Liturgy, and Ethics. The unstated expectation was that by grade 12 the students would have learned from these subjects how to be an Orthodox Christian. Could we do better?

A Formational Catechesis. What if the words across the top of the charts were changed to the five aspects of spirituality? What if one goal was to explore what it means to be committed to Christ and His Church, or to have a rich understanding of repentance, or to know how to do battle with evil, or be prepared to engage our current culture? These are encompassed in the aspects of spirituality. Would we not be teaching our children how to be Orthodox Christians with more certainty, with more confidence? **The scriptures and hymns, and firm knowledge of the faith would remain**, but be channeled into the five spiritual, **experiential**, formational categories. The curriculum would change from *informational* to *formational*.

The proposed curriculum goal of spiritual maturity is unique--made possible because it has been described in five categories useful for teaching our children, and guiding them in theosis. Next is the construction of a scope and sequence chart--a curriculum plan--for achieving it. The words across the top of the chart, which indicate the content categories, are:

- 1) **Conversion** and commitment to Christ and His Church.
- 2) **Struggle** against evil, which includes our armor for the struggle: prayer, fasting and almsgiving.
- 3) **Repentance** with the knowledge that we are saved only by God's mercy
- 4) **Liturgy** as the offering of ourselves for the benefit of the whole world
- 5) **Wisdom** as seeing the whole picture, learning from those who have gone before, the writings, the icons, the books of Scripture, the Saints.

The words and phrases within the categories would be the scriptures, hymns and firm knowledge of the faith, channeled toward the goal of furthering their experience of repentance or liturgy, or conversion and commitment to Christ.

Two Underlying Concepts

Special Attention will be given to these two theological concepts that will underlie the entire series.

Theosis and "Ecclesiosis--" (for lack of a word). The term "theosis" designates the *personal* aspect of salvation, which is what we are nurturing with "Walking the Path of Salvation." However, our personal salvation is not possible without the *corporate* reality of salvation, namely, the Church. I've coined a term to parallel "theosis," namely, "ecclesiosis." The "ecclesiosis" concept is in preliminary development; however, it is rooted in two concepts, briefly paraphrased:

- 1) if one's primal identity is Christian, one cannot be separated from Church for any "significant" amount of time without losing one's identity (Zizioulas); and
- 2) *as the gathered Body of Christ*, we are the Eucharistic Offering for the world (Schmemmann).

The language and symbols for Church will be explored, throughout the series, including the history of the covenanted people, the new covenant, the Kingdom, so the students see what a covenant is, and that they are members of the new covenant, that they are called apart, the ek-klesia, and thus the critical importance of their "being Church."

The personal aspect of their salvation, theosis, and the corporate aspect, "ecclesiosis." will be given equal attention.

Authentically Eastern "Methodology." In the eastern worldview, religious knowledge is not a matter of deductive reasoning. Knowledge resides in the heart and arrives there by way of **experience**. The curriculum will have, as its point of departure, the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom. Using the Divine Liturgy as experiential learning throughout the years, the eastern way of knowing will be presented to the students *as such*. Quotations and prayers will be the basis of many lessons. For example, an entire lesson may be based on the quote, "*Do thou thyself, O Master, look down from heaven upon those who have bowed their heads unto Thee . . .*" to explore the body language of bowing, and its opposite, being "stiff-necked," and what the two say about our attitudes. The children will learn that one of the eastern ways of knowing is through body language. We speak to, and come to know God, with our posture before Him.

"Heart" knowledge comes from worship, prayer, and a life lived in union with Christ. Other openings into the heart are through imagery, narrative, poetic elements such as juxtaposition, art, hymnography, beauty, chant, and silence, symbol and ritual. By use of "eastern" ways of knowing, the children will come to learn their faith in the way it is presented during the Divine Liturgy, and the other services. Identifying eastern ways of knowing will assist the students in

articulating their faith and accepting its distinctiveness. Orthodox catechesis has not ever been presented with such a “methodology.” We will be delving into the treasure of our Tradition.

The two aspects, the formational catechesis, and the authentic eastern “methodology” comprise the foundation of this proposal. I consider this proposed catechesis radical, in the sense that “radix” means “root.” It seems likely that catechesis was done in this way originally. Please pray for this effort.

All of us at the Department of Christian Education are grateful for the opportunity to share how we work for Orthodox Christian education in the Archdiocese, and we are thankful to His Eminence Bishop JOSEPH, the Board of Trustees, and the Order of St. Ignatius for their continuing support.