

Home Schooling in the Antiochian Archdiocese
Report for the April 2015 Meeting
With His Eminence, Metropolitan JOSEPH
Submitted Humbly and Lovingly and Prayerful by Fr. Noah Bushelli

Survey

In March, I sent an informal email survey with four questions to about 60 priests throughout our archdiocese. Seventeen responses came back which I incorporated in my report below.

1. Numbers. Based on the responses to the question “**How many children and families in your parishes are homeschooled?**” I estimate that 15% of our archdiocesan youth are homeschooled.¹

2. Strengths. The responses to the question, “**What are the strengths of these families?**” confirmed what my pastoral experience has shown: the Church and its services, ministries, teachings and life is more prominent in the lives of homeschooling families. Here are some characteristic quotes:

- *The Church is a priority for this family.*
- *VERY faithful*
- *Homeschooled kids are more connected to the parish and to each other. Homeschooled kids in our parish attend weekly academic classes with each other. In general, the homeschooled kids are more conservative on social issues. They often know and understand the Orthodox faith better than their counterparts.*
- *These children come to Wednesday Family Night.*
- *stronger festal attendance, higher level of catechetical knowledge, less "worldly" behavior and dress, strong family life*
- *greater participation in liturgical life of the parish; less steeped in “popular culture”; generally more literate, articulate, self-composed.*
- *they are integrated into the daily and weekly liturgical life more than anyone else- they would fall on the highly committed part of the spectrum*
- *strongest families - regarding knowledge of the Faith, commitment to the Church, attending services, preparedness for our secular/pagan future; just more solid all around*
- *know *why* they believe what they believe.*

3. Weaknesses. Based on the responses to the question, “**What are the weaknesses of these families?**” I confirmed, again, what my pastoral experience has shown: These children aren't as socially adept as their schooled peers and, also, not all homeschooling families are successful. Here are some characteristic quotes:

- *tend to be a little more shy and a bit less socialized than the other children their age.*
- *can be less organized. Some of the kids don't get as complete or strong of an education*
- *struggle to find good support systems. Homeschool families take on a lot. Because of modern times and the fact that their grandparents or others are not in the same home to share in the work of education, the moms are in need of strong support systems.*

- *less outgoing, more independent, can be aloof and judgmental, can be suspicious of some church functions, some of the families are overwhelmed and not well-equipped, money is often tight because of only one income.*
- *fewer friends and acquaintances; less diversity in activities; fewer extra-curricular opportunities than public-schooled children.*
- *the usual--they live in our sick culture and so get tired easily, worn out by children easily, and can be easily scattered by the demands of homeschooling—especially since they stand out so much since not enough Orthodox care about Christian education.*
- *Not good enough Orthodox homeschool material so a lot of re-inventing the wheel.”*

4. Needs. The responses to the question “**How can the Archdiocese best serve these families?**” show: Homeschooling families need curriculum support, encouragement from hierarchs and clergy, networking, training, and inspiration. Here are some characteristic quotes:

- *establish a formal department of homeschooling*
- *establish a homeschooling Sunday and have a hierarchical letter encouraging the parents and promoting Christian education*
- *a resource blog.*
- *articles in “The Word”*
- *recognize this is the ideal model for home management and education, and promote it heavily in our parishes.*
- *Don't dumb down services. These families want the full liturgical life!*
- *Regional home-schooling conferences, rather than one national conference at the Village*
- *a history curriculum from an Orthodox perspective for high schoolers.*
- *have workshops on homeschooling at every convention, PLC, and clergy symposium*
- *build Orthodox elementary schools so that parents who are not great at homeschooling have more resources*
- *educate parents about the negative effective of secularism in education.*

Recommendation

Establish an **Archdiocesan Department of Homeschooling**. The work of the department would be to promote and support homeschooling throughout the archdiocese by

1. **Publications** (articles in “The Word”, webpage, curriculum, blog),
2. hosting **Events** (workshops at PLC's, Clergy Symposia, diocesan homeschooling Retreats/Conferences),
3. helping establishment of **Parish-based Homeschooling Co-ops** (Theophany Academy at St. Elizabeth in Murfreesboro, TN is a well-organized model), and
4. Organize a **Homeschooling Sunday** (August or September) that will include a letter from the Metropolitan as well as strong hierarchical and pastoral support drawing attention to the work of the department and the benefits of homeschooling.

Caveat

Homeschooling is the ideal educational modality but not every family is able to undertake this. Our Archdiocese, like our nation, really needs strong families. A strong family produces strong children like a healthy vine produces abundant grapes. As an Archdiocese, we need to support our families in sanctifying their children no matter what educational path they choose. Given all this, I believe that the proposed department should work very hard to foster respect and cooperation among all our faithful and all our youth and family ministries.

Outreach

Homeschooling is gaining in popularity and prominence throughout United States. If our Archdiocese leads in supporting homeschooling from an Orthodox perspective it could be of assistance to all Orthodox in America as well as become an outreach tool to many Christian families who are searching for this type of support but would not otherwise turn to Orthodoxy.

Recap

Roughly 15% of the youth of our archdiocese are homeschooled, they are among the most dedicated families, and it behooves us to take their needs very seriously. A department of the Archdiocese is needed support these families and as well promote homeschooling.

Prayer

O Lord Jesus Christ, Wisdom, Word, and Power of God, Our Teacher and Enlightener, reared by the Virgin Mary, trained by Saint Joseph the Betrothed, help us to raise our children in Thy love and fear so that they may live lives well pleasing to Thee and inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. Amen

¹This is a difficult number to substantiate on such a small data sample. Actually, based on the results of the survey I'd say it would be more like 30%. But I have noticed that smaller churches have a higher homeschooling numbers than larger churches. I think this is due to converts tending to homeschool more than cradle Orthodox.