

## OUR SUNDAY SCHOOL

*What's so special?*

Fr. Alexander

Whether you have children in Sunday school or not, it is important for you to know how we meet the challenges that confront us. You may have the blessing of explaining to others what makes our Sunday school so special.

Our starting place is the knowledge that children up to their mid-teen years do not understand liturgical readings (the epistle or the gospel). They do not have the vocabulary, the concepts, or the attention span that these readings demand. For that reason, they cannot be expected to remain still. In most churches, the children are led elsewhere and are kept occupied.

At Saint George, even a baptized infant attends church. The abilities of the infant are not the criterion for attendance. In the worship service, an infant hears sounds, smells the incense, sees icons, sees clergy in action, tastes holy communion, and knows that it has a place among others, even until it reaches Sunday-school age. What is more, the infant becomes accustomed to church life. On the other hand, a child introduced to the church at the age of three or four feels threatened, does not know what the priest will do to him/her, puts up a fight, throws a temper tantrum and, more often than not, leaves without communion.

Sunday school is, and should be, what its name suggests: a school. We have qualified teachers who know how to present new material and reach minds. Very young children (below the age of four) cannot be expected to do more than draw with color pencils. The day's icon is downloaded from the internet, and that is their assignment.

For children four and up, the same gospel that is read out in church is related in Sunday school, simplified and transposed to the level of each child's understanding. Lessons are not downloaded from the internet, but are carefully planned and produced by the teacher, with each child's ability in mind. The same with the questions on comprehension that follow the gospel. All are prepared by the teacher, specifically for each child. At St. George, the teacher and the priest meet, on a regular basis, to approve each and every lesson.

Occasionally, a visiting family expects its children to be in Sunday school. This presents a problem because the teacher prepares lessons for the children that are enrolled, whose level of comprehension is already understood. We would love to teach more children, but they must be enrolled in the school, so that their growth is assessed and secured.

If a loving parent knew how much care and work go into each child at our Sunday school, that parent would gladly travel many miles for this private attention, and would not keep a child away, except for sickness or some other emergency. At least, we can make one point clear: that our Sunday school is what its name implies, a place where the child learns. Sunday school is not for the convenience of the parent. It aims at educating the child in Orthodoxy. We do not offer a Sunday school in place of the holy liturgy or during it, but after fellowship.

We thank God for what we are able to provide for the children that God has given us, whether they are few or many. We would love to see more children participate, and we ask God to grant our children the growth that will enable them to know and live their Orthodox faith in full.