



St. Demetrios Religious Education



FALL-WINTER 2024-25

Dear Parents and Parishioners,

We had a dynamic start this year at our Sunday School, as we aim to help our students **deepen their connection to the Greek Orthodox faith** and the traditions of the Greek Orthodox Church.

In the fall, we worked on a school-wide project honoring the Holy Cross: all of our students made their own **cross necklaces and bracelets** to wear for blessing and protection.

To emphasize the importance of supporting those less fortunate, we worked on service projects. For Thanksgiving, we decorated **forty placemats** that were donated to the Market Street Mission in Morristown.

For Christmas, we wrote and sent **greeting cards to Orthodox prisoners**, through the charity organization OCPM (Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry). Additionally, we organized a **Secret Santa** event for the elderly residents of **St. Michael's Senior Home** in Yonkers, NY, for the second time this year. Our families graciously donated toiletries, while our students wrote meaningful greeting cards. Sunday School representatives visited the home to deliver the presents and spend time with the seniors. We had a wonderful time seeing each other again and singing traditional Christmas and New Year carols. We promised to visit once more in the spring with our older students.

In January, we celebrated St. Basil and the New Year by cutting the **traditional Vasilopita**. Sincere thanks to the Greek School PTO for their support!

On **February 9**, we are very happy to be organizing **Godparents' Sunday** again. Godparents and Godchildren are invited to attend the Divine Liturgy and prepare to receive Communion together. After the service, our Sunday School will be treating everyone to breakfast in the church hall.

Our older students have been making us very proud, diligently serving our Lord and His Church as **Altar Servers and readers**. Congratulations on a job well done!

We would like to **extend our heartfelt thanks** to the parents and grandparents who have been making an effort to bring the children to class on Sundays. Having a full classroom makes our catechists' voluntary work so much more meaningful.

Finally, we are very excited to have three **new volunteer catechists** this year. Sincere thanks to Bill Nicholas, Maria Papadakis, and Stephanos Kotsakis for taking on the challenging and rewarding task of teaching the middle and high school classes. Their faithfulness, dedication, and enthusiasm have been making a real difference.

May our Lord bless and guide us all as we go through the rest of the Church year!



A MESSAGE FROM OUR CATECHISTS

PREK-GRADE 1

In our Pre-K to First Grade class, the children have been having an exciting time learning about God's love and how to follow Jesus. So far, they've been introduced to the importance of kindness, sharing, and prayer, through crafts, and hands-on activities that help bring the stories to life. Each week, they're building a strong foundation of faith that will grow as they continue their journey in God's word.

Sophia Orphanidou-Koukoutsis & Popi Zavola

GRADES 2-3

We always try to do hands-on activities in our class. This year, like last year, we are sharing a prayer bag: the students rotate taking it home for a week, and using its contents to practice praying in different ways (saying morning and evening prayers, praying for others, using a prayer rope, reading Scripture, lighting a vigil lamp, venerating icons). The themes we have been working on so far include: the Holy Cross and its importance in our life, prayer, Saints (types of Saints, St. Demetrios, St. Nectarios), the Entrance of the Theotokos, priesthood and the Mystery of Ordination, Adam and Eve, prophecies about the Messiah and Old Testament prefigurations, Christmas, Theophany, the temptations of Christ, Christ calling the first Disciples. We are extremely proud of all the students who have been doing a wonderful job!

Natalia Tzobanakis-Theocharopoulos & Irene Vlahos (assistant)

GRADES 4-6

This year, our students are learning the essentials of our Faith in more detail. We learn prayers and the troparia to our Saints. Themes covered are: The Holy Cross and the Divine Liturgy as the focus of our life. The holy Angels' love and protection. The Saints living the life of Christ and listening when we pray to them. The Theotokos, who is our ladder to heaven and always listens to us. The family line of Christ from the time of the Old Testament. The prophets of the Old Testament and their teachings about the coming of Christ. St. John the Forerunner as the last prophet before Christ who urged the people to repent. The start of Christ's mission, when He repeated the same message of repentance. We cannot wait to share everything with our Nouna and Nouno on Godparents' Sunday!

Despina Lachanaris & Lisa Bukuvalas (assistant)

GRADES 7-8

In our recent classes, students learned about the importance of fasting, focusing on its spiritual significance and role in preparing for major feasts. The students explored the Divine Liturgy, gaining a deeper understanding of its structure and meaning. We discussed the life of St. Euphrosynos, the patron saint of cooks, highlighting his humility and service, St. Andrew the Apostle, emphasizing his role as the first-called disciple of Christ, and St. Nicholas, whose acts of generosity continue to inspire Christians today. The twelve days of Christmas were covered, focusing on the liturgical celebrations and the deeper spiritual significance of this festive period. Additionally, the students explored the feast of Theophany, reflecting on the meaning of Christ's Baptism for the salvation of mankind and its role in the life of the Church.

Bill Nicholas and Maria Papadakis (assistant)

HIGH SCHOOL

Our high school students started this year revisiting some of the basics of our faith - the meaning behind the parts of the Divine Liturgy and the "do's and don'ts", to help us focus on being present for the right reasons. We reflected on the finding of the Cross by Saints Helen and Constantine, the parable of the good Samaritan, greed and self-control, and the meaning of Christmas and Theophany. At the request of the children, we also discussed where our Church stands with regards to the celebration of Halloween, as well as her views on tattoos and abortion. We are very excited to have quite an engaged class who is eager to learn and asks thought-provoking and meaningful questions!

George Theocharopoulos and Stephanos Kotsakis (assistant)

- *We are grateful and blessed to have Fr Evgenios as our head and spiritual advisor, and wish him many long years.*
- *We are always thankful to Irene Melachrinou for her dedication, advice, and support as parish liaison.*

THE DIRECTORS: Nikos Papadopoulos and Natalia Tzobanakis-Theocharopoulos