

DIVINE LITURGY CURRICULUM: ORGANIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Dr. Constance Tarasar was a professor of religious education at St. Vladimir's Seminary and also contributed to a great many religious education projects. She is one of the most extensive writers on the topic of Orthodox religious education and wrote her doctoral dissertation on *A Process Model for the Design of Curriculum for Orthodox Christian Religious Education*. You can find it at the St. Vladimir's Seminary library. I contacted one of the librarians there and was able to pay a reasonable price to have a copy of the dissertation mailed to my house. It is well worth the read!

In her dissertation, she explains that the development of a curriculum for our church schools should contain well defined: *content* (What will we be teaching?), *goals* (What are we striving to achieve with these lessons?), and *developmental levels* (Have we properly developed the lessons for the intended age group?)

Additionally, Dr. Tarasar explains that we should develop the curriculum within the greater framework of *worship, teaching, praxis*. As Orthodox Christians, we learn and grow throughout our entire lifetime. It is an experiential process of attending services (worship), continually learning (teaching), and living our faith daily (praxis). It is within this model that the Church has taught and guided one generation to the next about their Orthodox Christian faith. Therefore, when we develop the teaching portion of our curriculum, it's important to always place it within the context of attending services regularly and living our faith everywhere we go as well.

On the following pages, I have listed the content, goals, and developmental levels of the *One Year with the Divine Liturgy* curriculum. I also listed how this curriculum embraces nurturing attendance of the services, formal lessons, and connecting all of it to daily home life.

CONTENT

The primary theme of the *Divine Liturgy* was chosen for our entire Sunday School year. We chose sub-themes for each week's lesson in connection with our main theme, the Divine Liturgy. Each of our classes, as well as our parish community, learned about the same topic each week. There are 29 lessons in total for this curriculum.

GOALS

For the year:

- Learn about the Divine Liturgy
- Prepare and encourage children to have weekly Sunday dinner discussions with their parents about each week's lesson
- Foster deeper participation in the Divine Liturgy for our community

For each week:

- The goal(s) for each week's topic is stated in each of the lessons

These lessons were developed for classroom use, but they could also be easily adapted for use at retreats, camp, or at home as well.

DEVELOPMENTAL LEVELS

Each lesson was written with the developmental age of the class in mind. Our classes are divided into five groups – primarily because this is the number of classrooms we have available for our Sunday School. Additionally, links to Fr. Vasile's end of liturgy sermons are also available for the adults.

Teachers are encouraged to make any necessary modifications, in regard to the developmental level of the lesson, given their knowledge and experience with the individual students in their particular class. (Personalities, maturity, special needs, and knowledge of the material will vary from class to class.)

WORSHIP

Our choice for the theme of this curriculum – *One Year with the Divine Liturgy* – was based on the goal of developing greater participation within the Divine Liturgy. It is critically important that we, as teachers, set the example of not only regular attendance at as many services as possible, but also arriving at the beginning of the service. We teach through our example as well as our lessons.

Please encourage your families to attend as many services as possible this coming year and to also arrive on time as well. I know from many years of experience that it can be difficult with little ones, but they learn to be in the church by being in the church. The more our children learn about what is happening during the Divine Liturgy and participate in the service, the more worship becomes a natural part of their life instead of something foreign.

TEACHING

There are lessons provided for the entire school year, but expanding your own knowledge beyond what is provided in this curriculum is highly recommended.

“You can teach only that which you have made your own, and this means that there is always the danger that your personal mistaken judgment of insufficient knowledge will be reflected in your teaching.”

– Sophie Koulomzin

With Sophie Koulomzin’s words in mind, I fully admit that I do not know everything there is to know about the Divine Liturgy. I encourage you to expand what has been provided in these lessons with what you have learned too!

Additionally, it is important to have your lesson prepared and ready to go before liturgy begins on Sunday morning.

PRAXIS

Being an Orthodox Christian cannot be compartmentalized into the time we spend at church on Sunday morning. When we receive Holy Communion, we carry Christ out into the world with us. We are all called to be saints and it is within our daily life that we continually strive to develop and grow closer to God. Praxis is living our faith everywhere we go and at every moment.

Praxis is a crucial part of taking what our children experience in the Divine Liturgy, what they were taught in their Sunday School lessons, and then implementing it into their daily life. How do we prepare for the Divine Liturgy? Why do we use our senses during the Divine Liturgy? How do we incorporate our senses at home as Orthodox Christians? How can I know some details about a saint's life, even if I've never heard a story about them, just by looking at their icon on my bedroom wall? ...and so much more!