

Why we should enroll our children in the Sunday School?

On September 1st, a new ecclesiastical (church) year starts, and surely another Sunday School year will start after the great feast of the Elevation of the Holy Cross (September 14). As in previous years, we hope that the parents and grandparents will enroll their children or grandchildren in the 2018-2019 Sunday School year. We have made the enrollment easier by giving you the possibility to enroll them online at: <https://goo.gl/forms/OukV41hD59k5QOYE3>.

We have noticed, with chagrin, that the number of enrolled children in the Sunday School has gone down year by year; some of the children completely missed the Sunday School learning and some of them were brought to the church and classes infrequently, and thus they missed the opportunity to learn basic knowledge about our faith.

From past generations of St. Paul's children, who now are college age, we learned that they regret their lax attitude about Sunday School education. As they are confronted with major questions by their peers, some of them felt intimidated by the lack of knowledge about their own faith and hid their Orthodox faith; others simply gave up, joining the vociferous crowds of the campus and declaring themselves non-believers.

In these turbulent moral times in which we live, nothing can be worse than missing the moral compass, the direction in life, and the support of Jewish-Christian system of values. As previous generations of Orthodox parents, much sacrifice is put into the education of our children, with the hope that this will make a difference in their lives and choices. And what they find on the college campus? Courses about "The Sociology of Miley Cyrus: Race, Class, Gender and Media" at Skidmore College or "Politicizing Beyonce" at Rutgers University.

According to some studies, as many as 60-80% of youth are leaving the Church permanently; in the face of such scary reality, we as parents, priests, mentors, parish council members, teachers, etc., we have to work together to change this trend. Nothing should be ignored, from mistakes and lack of excitement in our curricula, to enriching the programs of our organizations (such as HOPE, JOY, GOYA, Sunday School, Dance Group, Vacation Church School, summer camps, retreats, etc.), to a change in the parental attitude and guidance. In the end, not much progress will be made without parental involvement and guidance.

The youth that have remained in the Church have done so mainly because their entire family made it a priority of being in the church on Sundays, and also being involved in the religious education of their children. Just dropping children at Sunday School and then going back home to sleep more will not do it; children learn by example. Giving up on attending Sunday Services, at the request of tired children (due to sports, or an inordinate amount of time spent on social media) will diminish parental authority, and at the same time, the entire family will miss the chance of being exalted by the Word and sanctified by the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. Abandoning the parental authority for the friendship with the children will bring some temporary good feelings, but in the long term, the result will be marred by a serious disappointment.

If you want to keep your children in the Church, you may show by example that attending Divine Liturgy every Sunday is more important than a morning cup of coffee and watching sports. By personal example, you show them that prayer and fasting is important enough to impact life choices. By being charitable, taking care of the poor and the needy, you show them that sharing is a joy rather than a burden. And so, love for the faith and the church may become a natural thing.

And the seeds for all these things are planted in the Sunday School....