

Online Sunday School: Serving our Young People in the midst of the Pandemic - Conclusions and thoughts on the recent initiative of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain



From April until the last Sunday of July the Archdiocese hosted online 'Sunday School' classes for the young people of our Eparchy. Each Sunday we had three separate groups; 6-10, 11-14 and 15-18 year olds gathering together on zoom in order to discuss matters relating to the Orthodox Christian Faith and life. This was not only an opportunity for the young attendees' spiritual edification, an increase in their knowledge and understanding of our belief and worship but also an encouraging and informative opportunity for us leading the sessions to listen to their questions, their interests, concerns and hopes for the future of our Church, in a spirit of open dialogue.

The positive reaction to this initiative across the Archdiocese's parishes and more importantly the active and enthusiastic participation of the young people in the online meetings should be taken, firstly, as a source of encouragement, and secondly, as a reminder that we must continue to support and grow in our youth ministry and truly reach out to the young generation who thirst for Christ's

presence in their lives.

The classes, each lasting approximately one hour, consisted of a particular theme each week, either based on a Gospel reading and closest feast day, or on a particular virtue, teaching of the Church, or Saint: in the younger groups illustrated by suitable activities and crafts. Allow us, at this point, to thank our strong team of volunteers; Presvytera Vassilia Hookway (from St Demetrios in Edmonton) Presvytera Joanna Anastasiou (St Barbara in Southend) and Kyriakos Theophilou from St Cyprian's Greek Orthodox Primary School. These creative and experienced people made this online ministry possible and contributed greatly to both the diversity and quality of the lessons.

When we teach our children in parishes or online we often concentrate on the series of events surrounding a feast, a Gospel passage or a Saint's day. Yet the Church's hymnology highlights that the cycle of the ecclesiastical year is not simply a matter of remembering certain holy events but implementing the truths behind these events in our daily lives: as we hear, 'Today salvation has come to pass in the world...' (Hymn sung at the end of Matins on Sundays), 'Today He who hung the earth upon the waters is hung upon the Cross,' (Hymn of Matins of Holy Friday)

We concentrated on the practical implementation of our faith within the context of the young people's family unit and their school setting, always highlighting the vital element of sacramental life and prayer. Furthermore, in the examples of local saints, such as St. Sophrony of Essex, we emphasised the fact Orthodox Christianity is alive, through holy people of God, in our local area and across all areas of the globe. The young people's desire to learn, to grow in their faith was evident, as was their interest in the relationship between science and our Christian Faith.

With this initiative we feel the flame of trust and love for the Church has been lit in the hearts of several young people, through our discussions and our fellowship in Christ. It is for us to let this flame grow, share the Church's teaching in the Risen Christ and the fellowship He offers with many more young people by creating further initiatives and events. Just as we add fragrant incense on the lit charcoal in worship, we are called to add to and cultivate what has been initiated and generated by our online classes, during Covid-19. As the Youth Office and Archdiocese (when the government measures and circumstances allow us to do so) we will reach out to our young people with talks, social groups and gatherings, pilgrimages and other activities in order for us to build up the body of Christ and ensure our young people are active, enthusiastic participants and contributors in the life of the Archdiocese.

[Source](#)