
THE TORCHBEARER

The Newsletter of the Church of St. John of Damascus, Dedham, MA

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2008

From the Pastor... For those who carefully read this newsletter, you may remember this article, which was published some time ago. This article by Khouria Joan really "hit a nerve," as it was reproduced in scores of church bulletins/newsletters across the United States and Canada etc. My 10th grade biology teacher used to say that "repetition is the key to retention" ...so here goes! Enjoy.
Fr. John

SHOULD CHILDREN BE IN CHURCH?

by Joan Teebagy

In some parishes today, there has been much debate about the scheduling of church school during Divine Liturgy. Some churches are contemplating or have already implemented a nursery for infants and toddlers during church services. Should children be in church? The answer lies in how the church is viewed and what you see or want for your children in the life of the church in the future.

Should children be in church? Definitely. Disagree? Please read on. In my early twenties as a young single woman in charge of a Sunday School and as a professional teacher, my answer from a theoretical viewpoint would have been "Definitely. You can't teach in a vacuum. You can't teach about the life of the Church if children are excluded from that life." In my home parish at that time, such a question would not have even been entertained. Children were part of the church family. They were expected to be in church and were a welcome part of the services, even with their "holy noise", "liturgical movements" and all. We never knew any different. Are they a distraction to others? Sometimes. But they are Orthodox Christians in the making; they will become regular churchgoers if they attend church on a regular basis from the beginning. Did I know how difficult it was to bring children to church at that time? No.

Now as a young mother of three children, Alexander, who at this writing, just turned five (he is now 18), Elizabeth who is almost three (she is now 16), and Nathaniel who is 9 1/2 months (he is now 14), my answer to "Should children be in church?" would, from a theoretical viewpoint, practical viewpoint, spiritual viewpoint, developmental viewpoint, etc., still be a resounding yes. Is it easy? No. Does it take preparation and planning? Yes, lots of it. Is it worth it? Definitely.

Being a wife of a priest, some people now believe my children somehow behave differently in church because they are used to it or because my husband is the priest. Being used to it? Well, that's the point. Any child will learn certain behaviors in certain situations if they are used to it and exposed to it on a regular basis. Is it easier because my husband is the priest? I am able to use the term "Daddy" instead of "Father John" when pointing out things during the church service. However, growing up in my home parish, we all had closeness with the priest and I remember my parents saying the same things to my brothers and sisters and me. We had the same reverence and respect - perhaps even a little more since to very young children, the priest may represent God while Daddy is just Daddy. In an answer to a mother's question of "Who is that?" instead of saying "Father John", a child of three responded "That's God!"



In reality, my children are no different from any other children their age. Alexander, at five, can be expected to pay attention a little bit longer than Elizabeth who is two and, of course, nine month Nathaniel will just look and take everything in and let out a scream here and there. I have had my moments when I wonder whether it is worth it or not. I have made my treks to the back of the church when my children have become a little too noisy or rambunctious or made trips to the bathroom - often at the most inopportune times during the Liturgy. At some bleak times, I wonder if those who say children should not be in church are maybe just a little bit right. These moments are rare since I am shaken back into God's Kingdom and His welcome of little ones when my son suddenly asks about a particular icon or asks what "mercy" means or my daughter sings along with the choir with a chorus of "Alleluia" or "Lord Have Mercy" or how she crosses herself every time she hears "Father, Son and Holy Spirit" or even when my infant son just watches with great curiosity the censer being shaken or listens intently as the bells are being rung.

Is my time in Divine Liturgy different now with children? Yes. Would it be easier for me during Divine Liturgy if they were in a class instead of church? Yes, but that's not what I want for my children. I want them to be involved with Christ and the Church. This is what I want for them now and in the future. If I keep them on the fringe now, they will be involved only in the fringes of the Church later. At this time, being with my children during Divine Liturgy is my work for God and His Church. If I don't have the opportunity to hear every word of the Liturgy or miss the response to one of the petitions or even not be able to sing in the choir as I have all my life, I can believe that my job now is to raise my little children to worship the name of God, to know my prayers are offered through my children, as I watch them at their tender age recite the Lord's Prayer and receive the Body and Blood of Christ through Holy Communion - to know I have tried my best to make them a welcome part of God's worshipping family.

By regular attendance in church, children learn and notice more than we will ever know in the short term but this knowledge and habits will become a reality and a part of their existence in the long term. One parent in my local parish admitted that she thought that she would be the last person to say children should be at Divine Liturgy rather than Church School. She has noticed that her children have learned so much during their time in church, have become used to the length of the service, and have made observations and asked questions about what they see and hear. However, it is not

without a great deal of effort and patience on the parent's part. Following are some suggestions that will help you with your little children as you make the life of Christ and His Church part of their life.

1. **Sit as close to the front as possible.** Children need to see what is happening. This also helps with their attention and eventual understanding of the service. You may feel uncomfortable doing this, thinking your children will be a distraction to adults. Please don't. It is the children's job to learn how to be a part of the Divine Liturgy at their level, and it is the adult's job to be tolerant of this learning process and not expect children to be adults. (Look around and see some of the adult behaviors, such as talking. This is more of a distraction to priests than a child's "holy noise.") Don't expect young children to sit still for the whole service or stay quiet. This is unrealistic and counter-productive. I never say to my young children "Don't talk" but rather "Whisper." Movement can be restricted but



not prohibited. My five year old is expected to sit on the pew and stand with minimum of movement while my two and a half year old can move around a little bit more.

2. **Bring materials for the children.** This can be children's liturgy books, picture books, crayons, and small snacks. Let the children know what is acceptable and what is not - this will change, as the children get older. I don't expect my two and half year old to stay still as much as my five year old is expected to do. As children learn to read, an illustrated Divine Liturgy book may be sufficient. Don't overdo on activities. At times, our pew was so cluttered with the various things packed for the children. Now I have learned to bring much less

and set up routines for the children to follow.

3. **Prepare your children for the Liturgy.** Try to read the Gospel reading for the day to your children on Saturday night. Explain to the children that they will hear this in the church and have them listen for key words during the Gospel. During church, whisper to them to remind them to listen to the gospel story. On special days, such as Elevation of the Cross or Orthodoxy Sunday, have them bring in their own cross or icon so they can participate in their small way. Have children prepare an offering envelope that they can place in the collection baskets. Children as young as two can recite the Lord's Prayer. Teach it to your children and encourage them to recite it during church.

Teaching your children certain routines such as lighting a candle before church, watching for the Little and Great Entrance, listening to the Gospel, receiving Holy Communion on a weekly basis, reciting the Lord's Prayer, etc., not only breaks down the service so it is manageable for young children but also teaches them a lot about the Divine Liturgy itself. (Your children will surprise you with their own observations and habits as my daughter has, who, without any coaxing, crosses herself at every "Father, Son and Holy Spirit" and who sings "Alleluia" and "Lord Have Mercy" - this from a child who is described as the "wild" one of the family.) As your children grow older, expect and teach more. If you do not know enough about the Liturgy to teach it to your children, find out. What a great opportunity to enhance your own spiritual life. As your children grow older, encourage them to

participate in the Divine Liturgy and the life of the community by singing in the choir and serving in the altar.

4. Ignore comments that belittle your effort to make your children part of the church life. People who make these comments about behavior of children have little understanding of what the Church is about or Christ's acceptance and welcome of little children. I have found that my tolerance level is lower and my children's behavior appears to be worse when I am more concerned about what people are thinking rather than concentrating on encouraging my children during the Divine Liturgy. Don't let "bad" days discourage you. Evaluate what has happened, change expectations if necessary and try again. You are not alone so seek advice from other parents as well.

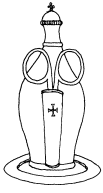
5. Make the Church an important part of your life. Your own spiritual life is an important role model to your children. If the children see that God and the Church is an important part of your life, this will make a great impact as children grow older and one day, accept this faith as their own. Pray at home, read the scriptures, and involve your children in good works. Your own spiritual strength will also give you that extra strength to tolerate those less than perfect but child-like behaviors in church and to bring your children on a regular basis to the Liturgy, even during those summer months when there is no Church School. Parents, who bring their children just to Church School, whether it is before or after church, do not realize that the real class is IN CHURCH. The other class is only reinforcement. It is only an enrichment of what is being taught at home and what is being absorbed through all five senses in church. When Church School is put first rather than the Liturgy, it sends a mixed message about the importance of the church in your own life and, unfortunately, it is a much stronger message than whatever they could learn in church school.

6. Attend extra services with your children. Make an effort to attend weekly Vespers and other special services with your children. This is where our Elizabeth learned her "Alleluias" and "Lord Have Mercy" and where Alexander (starting at four years old) is getting his feet wet as an altar boy. Although it is not always possible with young children to attend all the extra services during Great Lent, attending a few extra services including Presanctified Liturgies, special Divine Liturgies and Akathist exposes the children to the cycle of services. Again, learn about these services and prepare your children to know what they will see and hear.

In conclusion, you need to examine how you view the Church and what you see and want for your children in the life of the Church to answer for yourself if your children belong at church services. If you want your children to experience the fullness of Christ and His Church and possess a full liturgical life that will one day enhance their own spiritual life when they struggle with the question of making this faith truly their own, then you must answer "definitely".

Church Records...

"As many as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ"



- Xavier James, son of James and Gina (DeStito) Chalhoub of Marshfield, was baptized on May 18th
- Savannah Alexandria, daughter of Nicholas and Andrea (Hadge) Saber of Medfield, was baptized on May 18th
- Layla Roseanne, daughter of Raymond and Claire (Flaherty) Haddad of Cohasset, was baptized on June 15th
- Lucy Ann, daughter of Mark and Kimberly (Kadehjian) Bradshaw of Chicago, was baptized on July 13th

Many Years!

"Blessed are they whom thou has chosen and taken O Lord!"



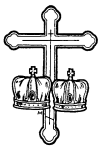
+baby Abigail Mary (8 days) of Quincy fell asleep in the Lord on April 26th. Her parents Phillip and Stephanie (Kaleel) Lynch survive her. Burial was at Fairview Cemetery in Hyde Park.

+baby Nicholas Howard (5 months) of Jamaica Plain fell asleep in the Lord on May 23rd. He is survived by his parents Michael and Nicole (Rawan) Roberts. Burial was at Fairview Cemetery in Hyde Park.

+Anthony Tawa (84) of Rockland fell asleep in the Lord on July 17th. He is survived by his wife, 4 sons, and one daughter, along with their families. Burial was at Fairview Cemetery in Hyde Park.

Memory Eternal!

"O Lord our God crown them with glory and honor!"



Fadi S. Massabni and Erinn R. King were united in marriage on July 25th. We congratulate them as they begin their new life together in Boston.

Many Years!

From the Executive Board Chair... Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

We have a very exciting year ahead of us. As many of you know, the construction to our complex has been started.

We are hoping to have everything completed by the Fall of 2008. We need your support for the Legacy Walkway project, and our other Fundraisers, including our Raffle and Cabaret night scheduled for December.

We are currently looking for a chairperson for our annual Bazaar. Nobody has come forward to take on this very important role. As you know, our Bazaar is an opportunity for our community to come together, and to raise money that is very important to our annual budget. Please help us to help the church. The more volunteers we have, the more easily everything gets done, and the more fun we have. Yours in Christ, Wayne E. Zahka

From the Church School. . . It's "**Back to School Time**" once again at St. John of Damascus Church School! We are eager to work with you towards the spiritual education of your children. Classes begin on September 9th for grades Preschool 2 through Grade 10.

We also offer a Preschool 1 class for children who will be three years old by September 1, 2007. This class is organized as a "Parent Cooperative" – all parents of Preschool 1 students help out on a rotating basis. There will be a brief parent meeting on Sunday, October 14th (during Church School time) to explain how this class operates, set up the parent volunteer schedule, and distribute the curriculum. The first class will be held on October 21st.

Classes begin immediately after Holy Communion. Children will be dismissed from their pews into the Communion line, and then will proceed directly to their classrooms. Adults will be ushered into the Communion line after all children and Church School staff have gone, so that we may start our program as quickly and smoothly as possible. School will be in session until noon each Sunday, at which time children will be sent into the hall area where you can meet them.

In order for children to benefit from our Church School program, regular attendance at the Divine Liturgy and in class is essential. The continuity provided by weekly attendance makes it possible for students to understand, appreciate and embrace our Orthodox faith. **All students who have attained at least 50% attendance during the school year will be awarded a certificate of completion and will be eligible for other awards at graduation.** If you have any questions concerning our attendance policy, please contact me at any time. We have a busy, productive year planned – make sure your kids are part of it! In Christ, Nancy Close, Church School Director, 978-692-0857 / school@stjohnd.org

From the Parent Guild... We hope everyone is enjoying the final days and weeks of summer. As usual, the Parent Guild will be hosting the "Welcome Back Barbecue" on the first day of church school, September 7th, after liturgy. The cost is \$10 per adult, \$5 per child over 5 years of age. Please make a reservation by contacting Carol Hazerjian at (508) 660-0072 or chazerjian@verizon.net, Bertina Kurker at (781) 721-1647, or by e-mailing the church office at churchoffice@stjohnd.org. The first

Parent Guild meeting of the school year will be Sunday, September 14th at 12:00 noon, at which time we will schedule our activities for the year. All parents of church school children are members of the Parent Guild – there are many opportunities during the year for you to get involved and help with our activities. We hope you will do so this year! Our meetings are brief and very informal – please try to attend to find out what the Parent Guild is planning for this year. We would love to hear some new ideas. If you are unable to attend the meeting, but would like to help out with any of the activities, please contact either of us. We are always in need of people willing to help. Looking forward to seeing you in church and at the barbecue on September 7th! Yours in Christ, Carol Hazerjian and Bertina Kurker

From Teen SOYO... Fellow Parishioners, Teen SOYO has been off to a busy start of the new Church year! We have a new slate of officers (President : Cameron Close; Vice President : Dan Totten; Treasurer : Elizabeth Teebagy; Secretary : Danielle Chobanian; Sergeant at Arms : Ilyana Capobianco; and Chaplain : Alyssa Hoffman; our advisors are Heather Feldman and David Haddad.

This year is proving to be a very productive one already. We have planned an exciting event – a Benefit Hufli on October 4th in remembrance of the baby Nicholas Roberts, and to celebrate the life of Nicholas and all special children. All of the proceeds will be donated to Children’s Hospital Cardiac Care Unit in Boston and to the Al-Kaafat Foundation in Lebanon. We hope that kick starting the year with such a big event will get us all excited to do similar things throughout the year!

We will be having our Family Nights throughout the year once again. Family Nights consist of a camp-style vespers service, followed by dinner, and then an activity for the Teens, and a separate activity for younger kids. If you have never been to one of our Family Nights, they are a fun evening for everyone! Watch for an announcement of the first one very soon.

Finally, for all those kids who are twelve years old or are in 7th grade this year, we encourage you to join Teen SOYO. The more members we have, the more productive we can be. I will be coming around to some of the Sunday school classes on the first day and talking to you all about Teen SOYO, but start thinking about it now!!!

Teen SOYO is on the way to having a fantastic year. We hope to really leave a mark on our parish by the end of the year through our activities, fellowship and various service projects. If anyone has any questions or comments please feel free to email me at DedhamSOYO@gmail.com. In Christ, Cameron Close, Teen SOYO President

From the Stewardship Committee...

A LETTER FROM GOD

Dear Faithful Follower:

I’m writing this in reply to your letter to me, in which you complained about the Church asking for money and extra collections. You wrote quite a strong letter. I showed it to my Son, Jesus. He said that he had made it quite clear how important the Stewardship of my gifts really is. You know your whole life is made up of my gifts to you. Time is my gift to you, each hour of your

life. Your talents are my gift to you, your abilities and special skills. Your treasure is my gift to you, the money I enable you to earn.

How you use these gifts, selfishly or unselfishly, foolishly or responsibly, is what my holy writers have called your Stewardship. When I call you to myself, I will ask you to give an account of your Stewardship to My Church.

You say the Church asks you for money for this and money for that and you complain about extra collections. Obviously you are referring to the Christian Stewardship Program for the general support of your Parish, and the special collections for my poor and needy throughout the world. Aren't these funds simply to continue my work of salvation for you and your family through your church, and to give you the opportunity to share my blessings with your less fortunate brethren? You mention that you go to Church to worship, and the collection tray turns you off. But isn't your giving a part of your worship? Doesn't your gift of money represent actual hours of your life, hours of work that earned it? Isn't then your gift a gift of some of yourself? Doesn't this whole matter amount to one simple question for you: How much should I give to the Church? When you have determined that, you can be at peace.

Each person has a different income, and therefore a different ability to give. You give as you have received. What could be fairer? And isn't that what I myself indicated: "Give to the Most High as he has given to you, according to your means." (Sirach 35:9) Let me ask you, how much of the income I enable you to earn do you actually use for yourself and your family and how much do you give back to me? Is it 100 percent for you, and 0 percent for God? Is it 99 percent for you, and 1 percent for God? 95% for you and 5 % for God?

I hope my words will give you food for thought and prayer. Giving is always supposed to be an act of loving. That is my way. That is the way of my Son. Will you make it also your way? With infinite love, God

Announcements...

- **MANY THANKS** to all who donated to the 2008 *Food for Hungry Program* campaign. Because of your generosity, the church was able to send \$4,654 to the Archdiocese to help those in need.
- **ST. GEORGE, WEST ROXBURY** announces their 32nd annual bazaar and food fair on October 17th – 19th at their church hall. For more information, please call St. George at 617.323.0323.
- **SNOWBIRDS** Before leaving for Florida, *please* give the office your temporary address. This ensures that you get the church's mail in a timely manner and reduces postage costs for the church.
- We will return to our regular liturgical schedule on Sunday, September 7th, with Matins at 9 a.m., the Divine Liturgy at 10 a.m. Confession is offered from 8:45-9:40 a.m. or by appointment. As a reminder, confession is *NOT* available after Liturgy.
- **Many years!** This summer, Cameron Close, son of Dennis and Nancy (Zahka) Close came in first place for both the regional and national Oratorical Festival held in Providence and at the

Antiochian Village. Way to go Cameron!!! We are so proud of you! Cam will give his oration in church during Youth Month in October.

MARK IT DOWN!!

St. JOHN' S BAZAAR AND AUCTION 2008

November 7th - 9th



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THE TORCHBEARER

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Sunday Services: Matins 9:00 a.m.; Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Church Office Hours...Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. - 2 p.m.

The deadline for the Sunday bulletin is Thursday at 10 a.m.

Please plan accordingly.

DEADLINE for the November/December 2008 Torchbearer will be October 3rd .

Please consult the Weekly Sunday Bulletin for any changes, corrections, etc.