

The *Stream* Newsletter



*How lovely is your festival St. George
It is like April, all adorned with flow'ers
April makes the earth rejoice with its flow'ers
your mem'ry gives us joy and we seek your prayers.
Barekmor.*

Qolo, Thursday Night Vigil

An Online Publication of the Diocese of South-West America
Sunday School Edition



EXPLORE

this issue

02

Thirumeni's Message

His Grace Dr. Thomas Mar Ivanios

03-04

Principal Profiles

Regional Coordinator and principal profiles of Midwest, Detroit Region

05-17

CWE

Children's work from Midwest, Detroit region

18

Curriculum Corner

Why do we teach?

19-26

Lenten Family Altar Challenge

See who won the family altar challenge from each region!

27-33

Sunday School Scene

Sunday School events around the diocese

34

Upcoming Events

See what's coming next





Metropolitan Dr. Thomas Mar Ivanios

*Lord Jesus Christ, Son
of God, have mercy on
me a sinner!*

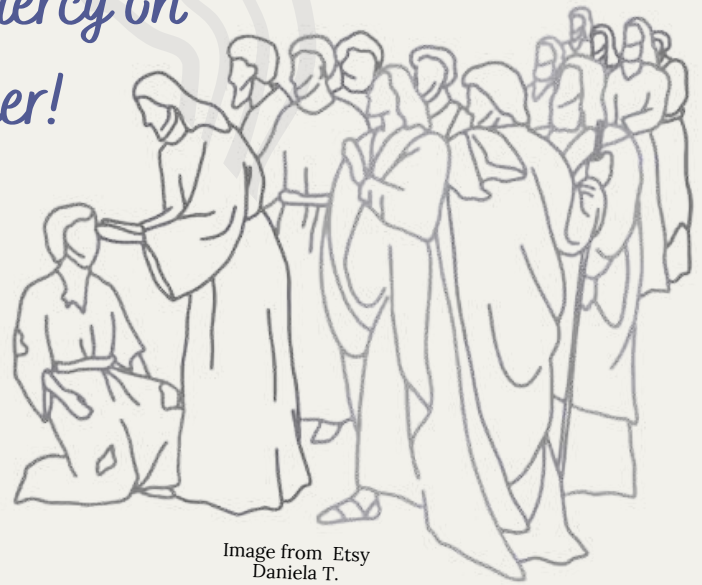


Image from Etsy
Daniela T.

My Dearly Beloved Children,

Christ is Risen! Indeed, He is risen!

Easter is the "Feast of Feasts" and the "solemnity of solemnities." It is the victory of life over death. The corruption that began in Adam and Eve through sin was reversed by Christ's resurrection. In the letter of Romans 5:12, St. Paul writes "When Adam and Eve sinned, sin entered the world and Adam's sin brought death and it spread to everyone, for everyone sinned." In reality, death implies physical death but in essence, it would very much mean spiritual death. Spiritual death caused by sin alienates us from God and that is why we become unholy. Only those who are holy can see God and be in his presence.

Sin captivates us in every way. Through disobedience to parents, for some others it is jealousy, yet again, it might be strife, hatred, or lustful passions. When we are free from these evils, then we become close to God. We become the children of God. The Scripture reminds us always "to be Holy as God is Holy." (1 Peter 1:15,16). How can we become holy and become close to God? St. Paul reminds us in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to pray unceasingly. The one dramatic way to imbibe prayer is to practice the Jesus Prayer. The spiritual generic of Jesus' Prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ have mercy upon me a sinner," helps us to remember Christ at all times and put God within us.

The Holy Church also teaches us to pray seven times a day. We pray seven times by praying the kauma, reciting the Psalms, and singing the liturgical songs. My beloved children, memorize and study by heart the Kaumo which is a very ancient prayer that will enhance your spirituality. Also, learn the Psalms that will help you to give courage at all times. We shall remember the words of our Holy Saint Mor Gregorios of Parumala on how he addresses prayer as the "inspiration of childhood, the refuge of youth and peace during old age " If we develop this practice of prayer, Christ, surely, shall live and the very effect of resurrection is completed in us. We become holy and see him face to face in all glory and splendor.

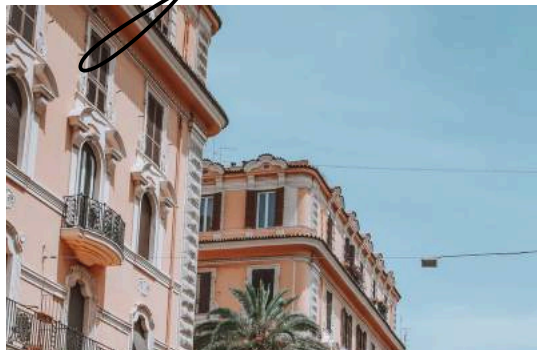
May the love of God the Father, the grace of the Only-Begotten Son, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

MEET

Johnny

John Chacko

St. Thomas Orthodox Church, Detroit
Regional Coordinator,
Mid-West Detroit/Ohio/Pittsburgh

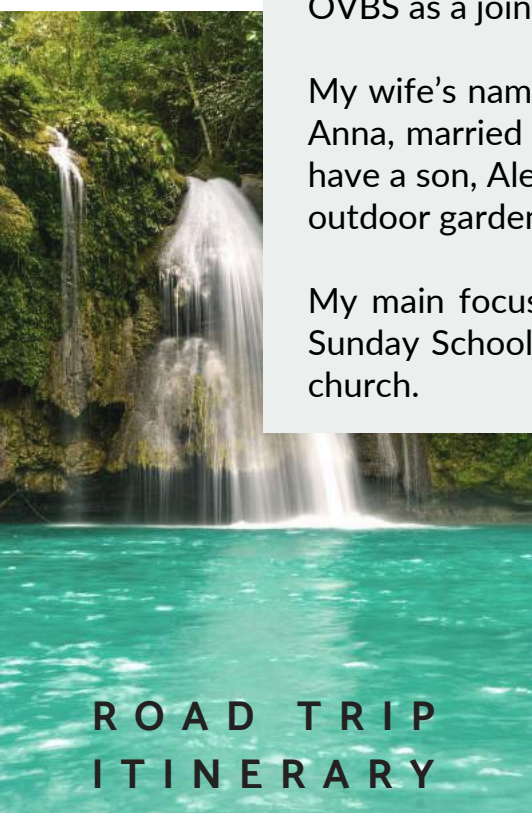


I have been serving as the Regional Coordinator for the past three years in the Mid-West Detroit Region. As a member of the diocese Sunday School administration team, I play a lead role in the internship program for college students. This is a volunteer program where college students give back to Sunday School by actively participating in various Sunday School administration activities. Previously, I have served as a Sunday School teacher and principal at my parish.

Among the many events in our region, we try to organize the OVBS as a joint session for the children in the Detroit region.

My wife's name is Veena, who is a homemaker. I have a daughter, Anna, married to Jerin and they have settled in New Jersey. I also have a son, Alex, who works in Atlanta, Georgia. I enjoy indoor and outdoor gardening, hiking and traveling.

My main focus this year is help develop a strategy to retain our Sunday School children, especially high school children within our church.



ROAD TRIP
ITINERARY



Greetings, *from the*

MIDWEST DETROIT TEAM

Photo credit: Ciaran Carr, WDET



ROJI THOMAS LUKOSE

3 years

St. Anthony
Pittsburgh, PA

It is a wonderful experience helping our kids to learn Biblical principles, develop a personal relationship with God and provide them a sense of belonging to our community.



SHERRYL PHILIP

10 years

St. Gregorios
Cleveland, Ohio

It is always a humbling experience to learn the faith with the innocent ones.



JACOB JOHN (BINU)

6 years

St. Thomas
Detroit, MI

Our Sunday School vision is to provide a platform to spiritually nurture the future Church. Therefore, our children will flourish like the seed that fell on good ground.



V. V. MATHEWS

20 years

St. Gregorios

Sharing our faith and knowledge to the new generation.

PRASAD ZACHARIAH

3 years

St. Mary
Detroit, MI



My name is Prasad Zachariah, and I am writing to you from Windsor, ON. I am proud to be a member of Saint Mary's MSO Church in Detroit, where I also serve as the Sunday School Principal.

Over the years, our Sunday School has faced challenges in maintaining enrollment. When I was elected as Principal in 2014, we had a thriving community with over 30 students. However, as each batch of students graduated without new additions, our enrollment has significantly dwindled, leaving us with just one dedicated student at present.

Despite the decline, we remain committed to providing quality education and spiritual guidance to our students. I am pleased to share that our remaining student is diligently preparing to sit for the Diploma exam this year, a testament to their dedication and perseverance.

Prayers for the Sunday School Ministry.

I walked in your ways



Norah Kuntharayil

St. Gregorios
Cleveland, OH

I was mocked, I shamed,
I was insulted, I was blamed,
But I accepted it all,
Even in my great fall,
For I knew in Heaven's grace
Was Someone more powerful than all,
Stronger than the mighty eagle and the all-
powerful lion.
My Lord and my God,
The great Redeemer of Israel,
I walked in Your ways,
Protect me from evil, for I feared Your
strength,
Let no darkness ever overshadow Your light
in me.

WITH LOVE

Johan George
St. Gregorios
Detroit, MI



Living in a pluralistic society where the tolerance of all people and religions, regardless of their differences are accepted, how does one uphold their Orthodox beliefs and teachings?

In a pluralistic society, everyone's differences are accepted. as Orthodox Christians, we are also accepted in this Society. Although the world has evolved, this pluralistic society has existed throughout Earth's history. From the people in Babylon to the people now, the world has been a diverse place. With everyone's differences, Orthodox Christians have been able to keep their firm beliefs and teachings because of the faith that has been taught and practiced through the believers' life.

After the great flood, Noah's family spread throughout the world. This is when people started adopting differences in their beliefs. Religions were developed and people are no longer the same. A great example of this is when the people in Babylon started speaking different languages.

Even with this, there have been a group of people that would obey God and keep their faith. The Israelites were the group that God chose out of humanity as an example on how to follow Him.

Looking at a more modern world after the time of Jesus, Christ established a faith, a way of life for us, called Christianity. Presently, there are many religions and beliefs. The Orthodox Christians are able to keep their faith because the Lord Jesus Christ showed us the true faith and what it means to love each other. Orthodoxy can be summarized in one word: LOVE. Although this is taught in the Sunday school and the church and practiced every day through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. The Holy Spirit is within us so we are able to keep firm in our faith.

Orthodoxy teaches to love others and we can approach other people with different beliefs and backgrounds because we can love them. As Orthodox Christians our goal is not to convert but to witness the love of Christ to others.



*I will
Guard my
Ways*



Joanna George
St. Gregorios
Detroit, MI

Always on my toughest days
I will not sin with my tongue
Even if I am young

If I have an enemy
I will keep you lord in my memory
I will beep myself silent
And not choose violence

If a problem arises
I will think of you as you are beside me
I will keep myself clean from sin
And think before I begin

I set a guard on my mouth
So that things will not go south
I will do the right deed
Like you taught us with glee

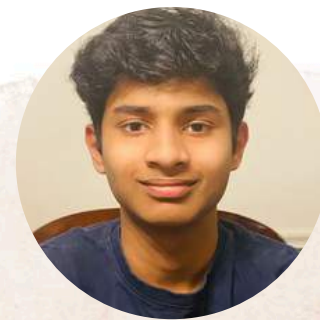


Serah Isaac
St. Gregorios
Detroit, MI

*"And they came with haste and
found Mary and Joseph, and the
Babe lying in a manger."
St. Luke 2:16*



FREE WILL



Arpan Gigi Ninan
St. Gregorios
Cleveland, OH

"Why do bad things such as illnesses, wars, etc... happen to those who follow the path of Christ?"

"Come to me those who are weary and burdened. I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). The simple reason as to why there is pain and suffering in the world is because God in His love gave us free will. When Christ became man, He came to Earth and was crucified. This shows the love God has for us. When God first made the world, there was no evil in it (Genesis 1:31). He made mankind, who sinned, which brought death and suffering upon the world. The fall of mankind brought with it the fall of other worldly things as God gave man free will.

We may feel like God is not with us sometimes, that He is letting us suffer and endure pain on purpose. We can remember that He is always with us, watching over us. We feel like this because we mostly choose to ignore Him. However God is always with us, even if we sin, and waiting for us to repent and lean on him. We can remember Psalm 23: 5-7, " even though I walk through the valley of death, I fear no death because you are with me. Your rod and your staff comfort me."

God does let mankind live according to their free will. This is the main reason there is evil in the world. Evil comes because we have a choice, due to our free will. When people repent it brings us back to God, who is always waiting for us to come back to Him. People who have faith in God are people who mostly suffer. This is because people with faith have to become closer to God. In order to do that they have to suffer even more than evildoers because through the suffering and pain we experience, we are being perfected. This is what leads us to Paradise.

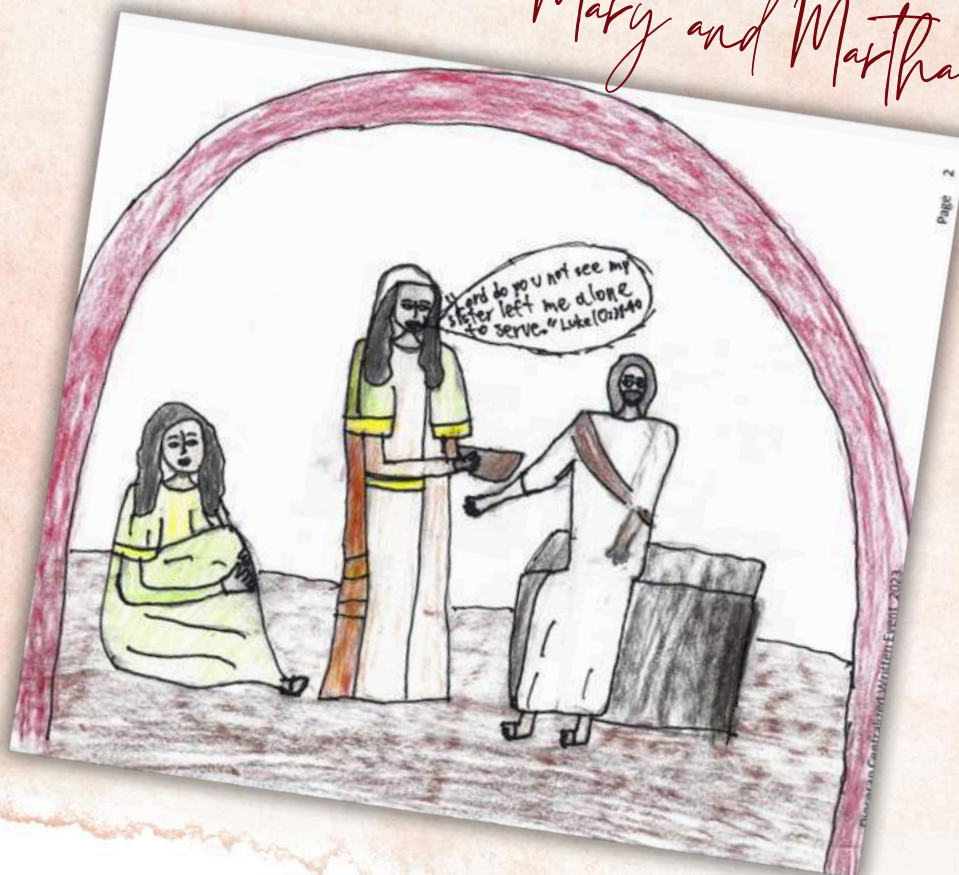


Tarun Avinash
St. Gregorios
Cleveland, OH

"Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me."

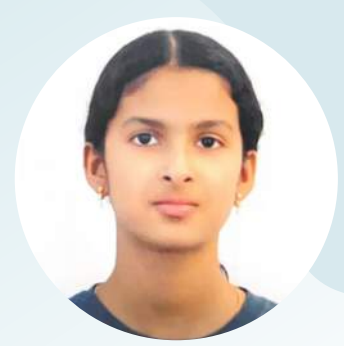
St. Luke 10:38-40

Mary and Martha



SOCIAL MEDIA project

Joanna George
St. Gregorios
Detroit, MI



"How can social media be used positively for one's spiritual growth?" This is a great question that needs to be answered. In order to be spiritually connected to God through social media, there are three key points: always be respectful, don't seek attention, and don't gossip.

The word of God has many examples of how we should always treat others with respect. In 2nd Timothy 2: 23 - 25, we see, " have nothing to do with foolish ignorant controversies for you know that breeds quarrels. and the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, and correcting your opponents with gentleness." This verse has many inner meanings to it. In the first line it says: "have nothing to do with foolish ignorant controversies for you know that they breed quarrels." In our real life though we may be surrounded by foolish and bad people, we are called to gently and patiently avoid them. In the second part of the verse it says, " and the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil and correcting our opponents with gentleness." As the children of God, we must always treat everyone with respect, even though it may be hard to be patient, kind, and respectful to people who are the opposite to us. As the children of God, that is what we are called to do.

How can you apply this to our social media life? For example, let's say you walk in on someone getting bullied in the bathroom at school. You should not take a video of this and post it because it will only make the person that was bullied feel worse. Instead you should tell an adult what you saw and let them take care of it. In some cases, not using social media is the best solution.

One thing that you should not do on social media is seek attention. In 1 Thessalonians 5:11, it says, "encourage one another, lift one another up, just as you are doing." Not everything is about us. We should always encourage other people and care about others. If someone is feeling left out, you should go up to them and include them in the activity you are doing. Let's say you got a new car. You shouldn't pull up Tik Tok and start bragging about your new car but you should praise God that you got the chance to buy a car. Not posting on social media for every little thing will make a huge difference in your life.

You should not gossip about anything or anyone. In 2 Timothy 2:16, it says, " but avoid irreverent babble for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness." An important thing to remember is that it will make you a sinner if you are talking about other people behind their back. Not only will it make them sad but it will make our Lord sad. When you are on social media you shouldn't start texting your friend about what happened at school and you also shouldn't spread rumors about things that are not true.

You can also make friends through social media. The story of David and Jonathan is a great example of an unfailing friendship. When Saul hated David, Jonathan stuck with David no matter what. Although we should be careful who we talk to on social media, you can join together and worship God. A good thing about having friends that you can reach out to, is that you can trust them. If you have a problem in your life you can ask them to pray for you and you can work it out together.

We use social media for many things. In fact the average human spends about 7 hours online. Taking some time out of that 7 hours to spend time with God is essential for your spiritual growth.



The Attack

"OK, slow down. What happened?" I said to a boy, who appeared to have been hitting another student. It had been a quiet day, and I had just finished teaching all my classes, when I started to hear commotion on the first floor. Suddenly a boy shouted my name,

"Mr Cane! Two students are fighting on the first floor!"

Startled, I jumped out of my seat and sped down the stairs. Sure enough, there were two students fighting, and one of them was lying on the floor. Almost immediately, I thought that the boy on the floor was the one getting beaten up, but that wasn't the case at all. The student on the floor was acting like he was half dead, when there wasn't a single bruise or trace of blood on him. The boy that was standing up had many bruises on him, and was even bleeding on his face.

"What happened?" I demanded.

"He started attacking me out of nowhere!" the boy on the floor said, "and I'm really hurt. Could I go to the nurse's office?" I saw right through his lie, but I had to make sure I was right. "And what about you?" I asked the student that was standing up. Just as I had thought, the student responded,

"Sir, he is lying! He is the one that started to attack me out of nowhere, and when he heard your footsteps coming, he fell to the floor and acted innocent!"

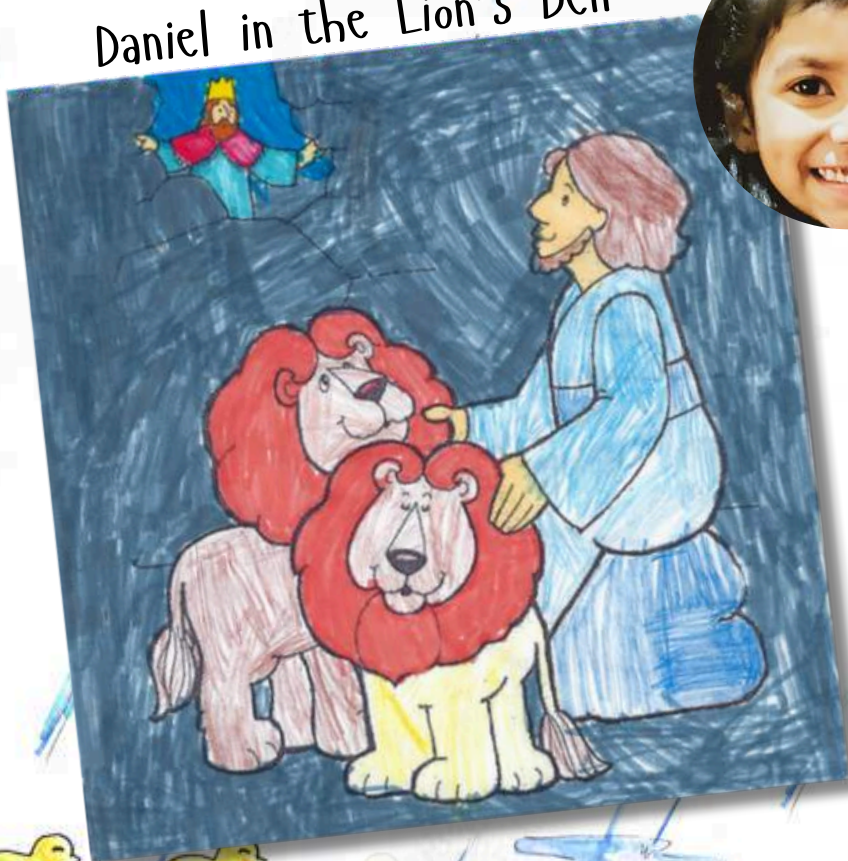
Now I knew exactly what had happened. I sent the bully to the principal's office, and escorted the injured boy to the nurse. As I did, I realized that if I had not examined the situation closely, I would have judged wrongly.

"Do not find fault before you examine a situation. First, understand it, then make your judgement." Wisdom of Sirach 11:7



Nathan Thomas
St. Gregorios
Cleveland, OH

Daniel in the Lion's Den



Gabriella James
St. Gregorios
Cleveland, OH



BIBLE QUIZ WINNERS



Josiah Francis
Group 2
St Thomas
Warren, MI



Isaiah Joseph
Group 2
St Thomas
warren, MI



Daniel Aronbabu
Group 3
St. Gregorios
Cleveland, Ohio



Abigail Koshy
Group 4
St. Gregorios
Rochester Hills, MI



Evan Jobby
Group 5
St. Thomas
Detroit, MI



Jayden Abraham
Group 5
St Thomas
Detroit , Michigan



Evangeline Philip
Group 5
St Thomas
Warren, Michigan



Alexandria Philip
Group 6
St. Thomas
Warren, MI



STOP THE HATE!

THINK TWICE BEFORE SAYING
SOMETHING NOT SO NICE.

Sthuti Beth Ninan

St. Gregorios
Cleveland, OH



Bullying is an everyday issue to deal with at school. In the past, bullying was overlooked by most people. They thought of it as a part of growing up. According to studies, by the time children have finished school, half of them have been bullied at one point or another. This is a topic that needs to be addressed: What is bullying?

The dictionary defines bullying as abuse or mistreatment of someone weak by someone stronger or more powerful. Bullying is intentional and causes harm or distress to the victim. There are four types of bullying that occur:

- **physical:** kicking or hitting
- **verbal:** teasing or name-calling
- **social:** spreading rumors or leaving someone out
- **cyberbullying:** this type of bullying is done by email, text or social media

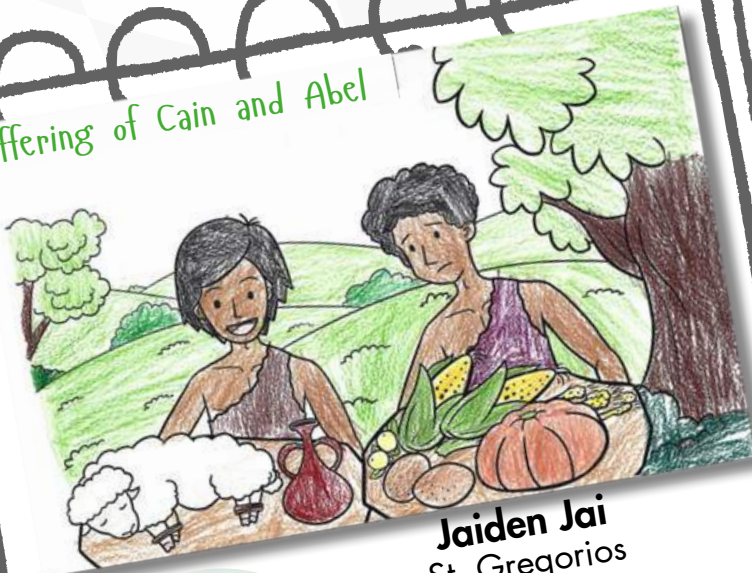
What does the Bible say about bullying? The Bible does not specifically talk about bullying but we can use Biblical principles to understand, such as "love your enemy as yourself" (Mark 12:31) and to treat others how we want to be treated (Luke 6:31). How should Christians respond to bullying?

1. **Keep calm:** Don't do what naturally comes to your heart. don't say harsh words or fight back. instead say with gentleness and love. aA gentle answer turns away wrath but a harsh one stirs up anger (Proverbs 13:1).
2. **Report:** Reporting bullying is one of the best strategies we can do to prevent further bullying. Out of fear, only a few complain when they are being bullied. As Christians we are called to seek Justice and defend the oppressed (Psalm 82). Of course always use wisdom but if it is too dangerous for you to handle, leave it up to an adult.
3. **Defend:** It is justifiable to defend yourself if you are being bullied. Jesus taught us in Matthew 5:39 to turn the other cheek but that is confused by many. It is okay to defend yourself by the law and the Bible. His primary message is speaking against, "an eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth." (Matthew 5: 38). A Christ-like manner is to not seek revenge or fight back at your bully. We should not do evil to those who have done evil to us. "Love your enemy and pray for them" (Matthew 5:44).

Bullying therefore is never acceptable in whatever form it is. We need to take courage and stand up for the weak. Reach out to those who are being bullied and befriend them. Spending time with them or befriending them, makes a bigger difference than you think.



Offering of Cain and Abel



Jaiden Jai
St. Gregorios
Detroit, MI



God's Promise to Noah

Daniel Aronbabu
St. Gregorios
Cleveland, OH



Faith in You

O Lord,
I have put my faith in You
And You have helped me.
You test me,
and You know me.

I have put my faith in You,
And You have helped me,
You know my anxious thoughts,
And You have been there for me.

O Lord,
You know me more than I know myself,
And you know my needs,
I thank thee,
For being there for me.



Serah Isaac
St. Gregorios
Detroit, MI



THE Party

Alexandria Philip
St. Thomas
Detroit, MI



With red and blue lights flashing through the window and onto her face, Rebecca had no idea how her life came to this point.

It all started early in the morning. For as long as she could remember, Rebecca had been anticipating this day. From various movies to shows, high school was shown as the dream time in life. She could meet new people and the cool teenager all kids envied and desired to be. Her parents, on the other hand, were very nervous about this transition. To them, high school simply filled with bad influences, booze, and drugs. They made sure to lecture Rebecca to make sure she would never break the law or disobey them or God. With all this in mind, Rebecca excitedly entered the shining white doors of her new school.

Wow. She had never seen anything like this before. Thousands of kids, all in one building. Loud laughs, fights, and conversations all in one hallway. Everything exciting all of the sudden became overwhelming. She didn't know anyone, and how would she fit in with all these people who already had people they knew. She watched as the other girls practically attracted new people to talk to while she stood all alone. How was she going to make it through this year?

Rumors of an after school party already began by the time the first period bell rang. This was Rebecca's way in. If she went to this party and showed everyone how fun she could be, she would have a ton of friends instantly. With this new plan in mind, Rebecca spent the rest of the school day figuring out ways to convince her parents to take her.

After begging her parents for hours, Rebecca was finally allowed to go under the condition that she followed all the rules parents set. No alcohol, no drugs, nothing inappropriate. Rebecca was ecstatic. She got ready in her nicest dress and headed to the party.

Upon her arrival, Rebecca had that same feeling she had earlier that day. She immediately felt like an outcast. While she was in a beautiful sundress, all the other girls were in low cut tops and shorts. She looked nothing like them and couldn't help the pool of embarrassment flooding through her. She felt as though everyone was making fun of her, and had no choice but to sit alone in the corner.

Until, something crazy happened. A girl walked over to her and sat down next to her. She introduced herself as Elizabeth and talked to Rebecca and Rebecca finally felt a sense of belonging. It was like they had known each other for years. Everything was going amazing, until she asked Rebecca the question she dreaded the most.



THE Party

Alexandria Philip
St. Thomas
Detroit, MI



"Would you want a drink?" she asked. Rebecca instantly froze. What should she do? If she doesn't take the drink, her parents would be proud and she wouldn't have to disobey God. However, Elizabeth would see her as uncool and would stop talking to her. With this internal war waging inside of her, she hastily said "No, thank you."

Elizabeth immediately looked disappointed. Rebecca's heart dropped. Has she made the wrong choice?

"Come on, it's just one drink. Look, everyone's doing it." Elizabeth pleads. She calls over some other girls, standing near them, saying, "Girls, tell Rebecca to stop being so perfect and just have a drink!"

"Drink! Drink! Drink! Drink!" They chant, tempting her to grab the cup from their hands. Rebecca was stuck now. If she didn't take it now, the whole school would think she was lame. Her hand hesitantly reached for the drink. Everyone cheered. However, as her eyes wandered to the icon of God on the wall, she could almost see God looking at her disappointedly. She snatched her hand back, with a firm decline of their offer. The group muttered their disappointment and gave her looks until they heard a loud noise.

"Woo woo" came the blaring of a car. As the red and blue lights glared, the group realized what was happening.

The cops had arrived!

People ran through the house, frantic to get out. Rebecca was lost in the swarm, scared for what was to happen. As the cops chased through the kids, she felt herself be tugged on the arm and pulled over.

"Breathe into this." She was ordered by a cop. It came back negative and the cop moved on.

She was saved! She was extremely glad she listened to her instincts. She would find better friends eventually with the help of her parents and God. Friends who appreciated her just the way she was.



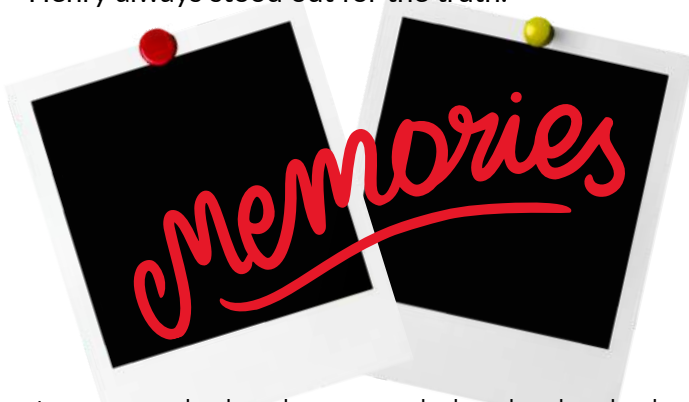


A RING, A CRIME & THE TRUTH

Johan George
St. Gregorios
Detroit, MI

Once upon a time there was a boy named Henry in a small town. Henry was an obedient child in God. He believed in God and prayed every day. He always stood up for the truth no matter what. In school He was a child of integrity. All his teachers loved him.

Since the town he lived in was so small there were only a few people. Mostly there were small families and only a few rich people. On a rainy Monday night, a rich man named Thomas panicked. It was because his priceless ring was stolen. Thomas was very sad and prayed to the Lord to get his ring back. When the police launched an investigation. Police started collecting evidence. That night Henry was watching everything from his small bedroom. When the town was called in order to find out the reason, Henry provided the evidence he had and told the police. Although Henry did not know who it was, a man named Sam, admitted to stealing the ring. But he said it was to support family because of poor conditions. Thomas was happy that he got his ring back and appreciated Henry. The whole town helped Sam's family and supported them even though he committed a theft. It was because of Henry's truth that everyone was happy. Because of his obedience, Henry always stood out for the truth.



Hannah Susan Jacob
St. Thomas
Detroit, MI



In a cozy suburban home, nestled under the shade of an ancient oak tree, two grandparents, Mary and Joseph, sat in their living room. They were reminiscing about the past, nostalgia filling their eyes as they leafed through a photo album. It consisted of pictures from their daughter's baptism. "Do you remember Esther's baptism?" Mary asked, her eyes lighting up in fondness. Joseph chuckled light and said, "Of course I remember dear. Our little girl was so full of hope and wonder." They sat there, tears of joy brimming their eyes. Mary started recounting the memory of a disbelieved middle-age man that walked in on that very day, as their house was filled with family and friends.

They guided him in. They gave him warm food and fresh clothes.

As they got to know each other better, they learned his name was Gabriel and that life had thrown him a series of challenging blows. As they were about to part ways, Gabriel came up to them and said, "I may not have much to offer but I want to bless your daughter. May she have a wonderful life full of joy and the same generosity you have shown me today." The blessing warmed their hearts and they never saw Gabriel again. Tears filled their eyes as they remembered this encounter. As they often told their family, you should never judge a book by its cover. Gabriel, a disheveled man, who if you really looked deeper, you would have found to be a very sweet and loving person. The moral of the story is to never detest a person for their appearance, they might end up surprising you.



Joanna Renjy Thomas
St. Gregorios
Detroit, MI

"And seeing the multitudes,
He went up on a mountain,
and when He was seated
His disciples came to Him.
Then He opened His mouth
and taught them, saying."

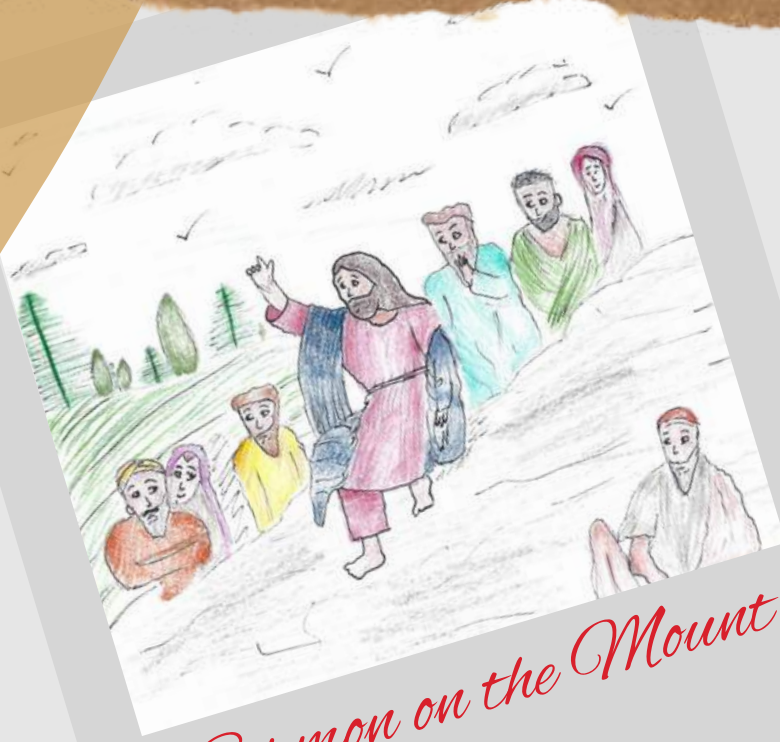
St. Matthew 5:1-2



Sermon on the Mount



Rain OR SHINE



Sermon on the Mount



Christel Jebu Mathew
St. Gregorios
Detroit, MI



CURRICULUM CORNER

WHY DO WE TEACH?

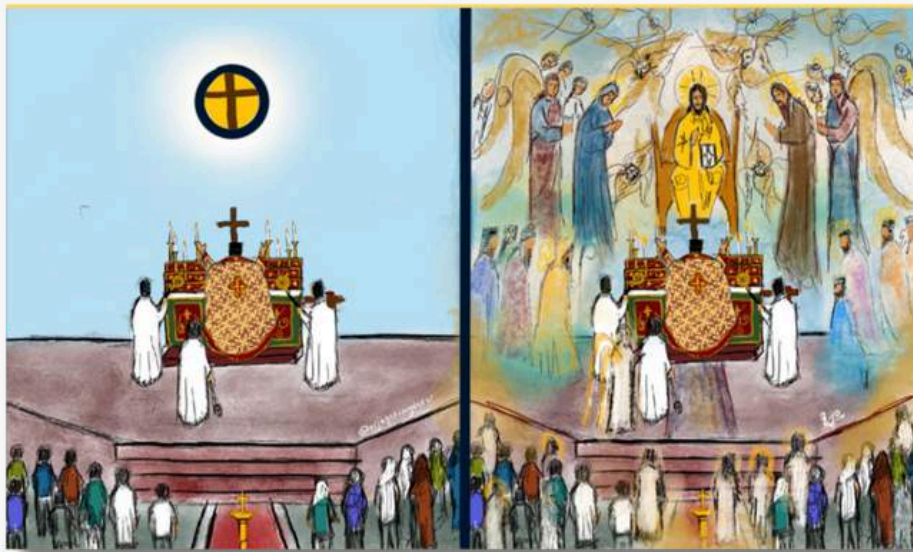
The introduction of the new curriculum was driven by a philosophy and approach that advanced from a "textbook-centric" educational approach to a "context-driven" Sunday School education where application of learned material will help reach the mastery of each topic via explicit learning outcomes.

This change was not easy for teachers who were already struggling with irregular attendance, lack of resources in the classroom, and often parents and children who were not prioritizing Sunday School over other secular events.

As we continue to improve the curriculum resources as well as grow a partnership across the Diocese of like-minded teachers, it's important for everyone to remember that Sunday School is a labor of love, and more specifically love for Christ and His Body which is the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

A familiar quote from secular education from Scott Hayden helps us remember our calling as Sunday School teachers: "Teachers have three loves: love of learning, love of learners, and the love of bringing the first two loves together."

The children in our classrooms must see us be students of the Faith! This is why the traditional "teacher/student" roles do not actually apply in a Sunday School classroom. Rather, everyone in the classroom including both adults and children are disciples. "Talmido" in Syriac (ܬܠܡܝܕܐ) means disciple. The following illustration from Fr. Rijo Geevarghese is included in the new textbooks and is one that is a reminder of the importance of our roles as Sunday School teachers.



Holy Qurbana

Many people (young and old) see Holy Qurbana as the left – a lengthy, repetitive, and for many "boring" activity that needs to be modernized. However, the ancient Church understood Holy Qurbana was so much more! Every Liturgy is in actuality the intersection of heaven and earth at the Holy Altar (the "thronos"). Through the real Body and Blood of Christ, we are in Communion with God and participate in worship with all who are present in the parish as well as all our departed, the Saints, and the holy angels.

The curriculum includes a textbook but also encourages teachers to use any resource – Scripture, hymns, prayers, videos, live discussion, etc. – to connect with the children on specific learning outcomes at each level. The hope is that as children grow from class to class, these learning outcomes that change from "what" to "how" to "why" opens their eyes to see Holy Qurbana as the right side of the illustration.

But this transformation begins with the teachers who can make the classroom an area where our love of the true Faith can be shared with a young heart yearning for Christ. When teachers become students and love learning about our Faith, the children will begin to see the beauty and we hope they take their next step forward towards becoming like Christ.

LENTEN

FAMILY ALTAR challenge

For the first time, the diocese Sunday School Association held a Great Lent Challenge, created by the Faith and Family Parenting Group. The challenge invited all children to create a family altar in their home or prayer corner in their bedroom.

The idea was inspired by our first parenting session on, "The Importance of a Family Altar", held on January 13, 2024. Hence, we created an opportunity for families to share their family altars, their dedicated space in the home where they come together for prayer and worship. With a few basic criteria in place, children shared photos and a description of how their family altar was built. The ultimate goal was to encourage family prayer, fellowship, model prayer life to the children, and direct the children to Christ.

From the 103 entries received across the diocese, seven first place winners (one from each region) were identified. The following pages reveal the first place winners, who will receive a personalized icon from our Thirumeni, His Grace Dr. Thomas Mar Ivanios. Second place winners are also highlighted from each region.

We pray that you are blessed and transformed by your family prayer life as you continue to develop a holy habit of daily prayer.

God Bless Our Families,
Faith and Family Parenting Group



LENTEN

FAMILY ALTAR challenge

A-LIST ALTARS

Northwest Region

1

First Place

1st Place: Joann Liz Thomas, Jayden Abraham Thomas

Grade: Grade 11 and grade 2

Parish: St. Gregorios, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

The prayer Altar is set in the East side. The icon of Christ is itself drawn on a cross and the candles are placed in front of the icon of Christ and in front of Theotokos. The icons of Parumala Thirumeni and the Holy Trinity is also placed in the Altar. An Orthodox prayer rope is also placed.



our prayer corner



Second Place

2nd Place: David Mathew and Sophia Mathew

Grade: Grade 9 and grade 4

Parish: St. Mary's, Calgary, Alberta, Canada

This is our prayer corner. We make the sign of the cross when we go to school. Our mom adds pictures and frames collected from a lot of places and some pictures are from her childhood. We have icon and pictures of St. Mary, we have pictures of Saints, there is a craft from OVBS, we have Bibles and prayer books.

LENTEN

FAMILY ALTAR challenge

A-LIST ALTARS

1

Midwest, Chicago Region

First Place

1st Place: Eden (8), Lydia (6) & Jiana (3 months) Thomas

Grade: Grade 3 and Kindergarten

Parish: St. Mary's, Oaklawn, IL

By God's grace, we have our family altar in the living room of our home. We have placed the icons (Holy Trinity, Holy Theotokos with Christ, St. Gregorios, Curiosity of St. Thomas at Resurrection icon & Holy Cross fixed on the wall. We have a prayer table to hold the candle stands, icons, Prayer TV & Holy Bible. We have also placed all the Shehimo prayer books, Christian song books, Holy Qurbana service books, lighter, extra candles for the candle stands & intercessory prayers on Wednesday & Fridays. We have been doing regular family prayers in the Evening since the pandemic. We love Prayer & Worshipping God.



Second Place

2nd Place: Isaiah Vetteel

Grade: Grade 10

Parish: St. Thomas, Chicago, IL

An icon of Christ with the Bible and image of a church in Jerusalem both from reverend Alexander Achen, along with the Orthodox study Bible, several Manglish prayer books, and a cross surrounded by icons of Jesus, the virgin Mary, Saint Gregorios, and Parumala Thirumeni. It is located near the front of the house and was made by Isaiah and Elsa Vetteel, my mom.

LENTEN

FAMILY ALTAR challenge

A-LIST ALTARS



Midwest, Detroit Region

First Place

1st Place: Joel Ninan

Grade: Grade 8

Parish: St. Ephrem, Columbus, OH

We have been using the prayer corner for more than a year , so nothing needed to be setup. It is in our dining room . We have a cross with icons of Christ along with holy Theotokos, St John the forerunner, the archangels and the apostles along with the Bible and our song and various prayer books.



Second Place

2nd Place: Ethan, Ephraim, Naomi Pau

Grade: Grade 10, Grade 4, Grade 3

Parish: St. Gregorios, St. Paul, MN

The altar is in the center of our prayer room. Our mom and dad helped to make the altar. This is where we do our morning and evening prayers. We read the Bible, do meditations. We prostrate at our altar. It is the center of our prayer room. We light 2 candles for our evening prayer. On Fridays my dad lights charcoal and incense and the house is filled with incense reminding us of the feeling of being in church for Holy Qurbana. We have 3 icons hung up on the wall above our altar. In the center of our altar we have a beautiful icon of Mother Mary with baby Jesus hugging her. This reminds us of how we are each in Jesus arms and how he hug us so snug. To the left of this icon we have a detailed Jesus icon with Him in the center and smaller pictures of the key events from Jesus life. The thudd icon to the right is the crucifixion icon with Mother Mary and disciples at the foot of the cross. We also have a paa to do prostration in front of our altar like our church has a rug in the altar.



LENTEN

FAMILY ALTAR challenge

A-LIST ALTARS

South, Dallas Region

First Place



1st Place: Benjamin Thomas

Grade: Grade 4

Parish: St. Mary's, Valliyapally, Farmer's Branch, TX

The altar faces the East and has several icons - Jesus Christ, St. John Chrysostom, St. Basil the Great, St. Moses of Ethiopia, St. Mary of Egypt, St. Panteleimon the Healer, St. George the Great Martyr, St. Mary the Theotokos, St. Philopateer, St. Seraphim of Sarov, the icon of the Second Coming, St. Paul, the icon of the Prodigal son, the Saints of Africa, and some Coptic Orthodox icons. Also, it has the Orthodox Study Bible, a cross, a hand-held incense burner and two candles.



Second Place



2nd Place: John, Samuel & Elizabeth

Grade: Grade 9, Grade 4, Grade 2

Parish: St. Paul, McKinney, TX

The altar is in our prayer room, where we pray daily. Our family did it together. We have the icon of Jesus, St. George, Parumala Thirumeni, icons of our patron saints, Abraham, Mother Mary, St. John, Samuel the prophet, and St. Elizabeth. We have placed a Malayalam Bible and OSB on the altar. There is also service book of the Holy Qurbano, song book, morning/evening prayer book, candles and Cross.

LENTEN

FAMILY ALTAR challenge

A-LIST ALTARS

South, Houston Region



First Place

1st Place: James Thomas

Grade: Grade 7

Parish: St. Thomas Cathedral, Houston, TX

My dad helped build our family altar. On it we have placed icons of Christ, St. Mary, Sts. Joachim and Anna, St. Mary's parents, and other icons. We also have a Cross, candles, a censor, the Bible and other books.



Second Place

2

2nd Place: Aaron Abraham

Grade: Grade 5

Parish: St. Thomas Cathedral, Houston, TX

My family altar/prayer corner is in my room. My dad helped me with getting the icons on the wall. I have icons of Christ, St. Paul, St. James the Just, My patron saint Abraham, St. Gregorios of Parumala, St. Dionysius of Vattasseril, St. Ignatius Elias III

LENTEN

FAMILY ALTAR challenge

A-LIST ALTARS

Southeast Region

1

First Place

1st Place: Daniel Abraham, Rachel Abraham

Grade: Grade 9 and Grade 6

Parish: St. Gregorios, South Florida

This is where we do our family Prayer everyday. We also pray our personal Prayers here too. We have a table, with drawers, where we keep all of our Bible, Prayer Books, and Song Books. We have candles, a Cross, Holy Bible, and flowers on top. On the walls, we have the Icon Of Jesus Christ, the Pantocrator, St. Mary, St. Gregorios of Parumala, and Kuriakose Mar Gregorios of Pampadi.



2

Second Place

2nd Place: Gregory Davy

Grade: Grade 11

Parish: St. Gregorios, Jacksonville, FL

Me and my dad built it. On our family altar, we kept a Cross, a Bible, candles, icons of Christ and St. Mary, a censor and some prayer books.



LENTEN

West Region

FAMILY ALTAR challenge

A-LIST ALTARS



First Place



1st Place: Jaya, Aysha, Saraya Eapen

Grade: Grade 10 and Grade 7, Grade 5
Parish: St. Thomas, Whittier, CA

Our family prayer corner was built by our entire family. When we lived in our original house in Ohio, we always wanted a prayer corner but could never find the right space. However, when we moved to our new house in California three years ago, a space for our family's prayer corner was one of the first things we sought out and were so excited to create. Our prayer corner has different icons, items from important people and representing individual aspects of our lives. We have an icon of St. Panteleimon because he was a physician, just like our parents. St. Sophia and Saints Faith Hope and Love are included because we are a family of three daughters. The icons of St. Ephrem and St. Gregorios are present because they are the patron saints of our previous churches in Ohio. St. Gregorios was also the patron saint of our Dad's first church in New York. St. Mary, the protector of Los Angeles is special because we moved to LA and she has protected us. Each saint in our prayer corner means something personal to each one of us and we gain their blessings as we ask for their intercessions. Lighting candles, burning fragrant incense and reading the Holy Bible together in this reverent space gives our family peace. Every item has a meaning to us that connects us closer to God and to our Orthodox faith. Our family Prayer corner has strengthened our relationships with Christ, and have spiritually grown together as a family.



Second Place



2nd Place: Jeremy Varghese

Grade: Grade 12
Parish: St. Thomas Valiyapally, Los Angeles, CA



The two icons hung on the wall are St. Mary and Jesus. On the table from left to right, we have a folding icon of St. Mary and Jesus. Next we have a photo of the iveron icon. Underneath that we have two icons of the Kardiotissa from Pennsylvania. The golden case includes myrrh from the myrrh streaming icon in Pennsylvania. The beeswax candle is from the same church. On the right of the cotton, we have oil from the church of St. John of San Francisco. Underneath that is an icon of St. Matthew. Further right, we have two candles, a cross and orthodox study bible. On the right of the Bible, we have an icon of St. John. We then have three bottles of Holy Water. To the right is oil and a photo of St. Nektarios from the St. Nektarios church in Indiana. Underneath that is an icon depicting Pentecost.

ST. GREGORIOS ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

16 MARCH 2024

St. Gregorios partnered with Feed My Starving Children on March 16. The volunteers packed 34,560 meals in two hours. That would feed 94 kids for a year. FMSC packs soy, rice, veggies and vitamins into bags that are shipped from Minnesota to different parts of the world where local distributors bring the food to families. We prayed over the food that will be sent to Guatemala. As a Sunday School group, we encourage our children to do charity events so that they can see the Glory of God touching others. After packing the families got together to hang out at a nearby park since the weather was so nice. Usually one of the adults in the Managing Committee coordinate the packing, but our youth stepped up led by Ethan Paul (16) and Ethan Mathew (15) to rally the volunteers.



St Gregorios Minnesota held a first Lenten Retreat on March 9, 2024. Our main speaker was Fr. Youannes Tawfik from the St. Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church in St. Paul, MN. We were blessed by Fr. Youannes as he spoke to the children about the importance of fasting. He shared examples of fasting from the Old and New Testament including Moses, Daniel and our Lord Jesus Christ. Fr. Youannes also spent time with the parents discussing 2 Corinthians about how we need to carry ourselves to the glory of God.

Fr. Youannes is originally from Egypt and was a medical doctor for 16 years before being called to Priesthood and he has been serving in St. Mary since 1999.

While the parents had some time with Fr. Youannes, Rev Fr. Bijoy Zakhariah spent time with the kids teaching the parable of the Prodigal Son with some crafts and coloring activities. We concluded the retreat with evening prayer and fellowship. With the support of our parents and vicar, we had 22 children participate in this Lenten Retreat.

Our kids are also participating in Lent by memorizing bible verses and discussing the Gospel readings during Sunday School sessions.

Rebu Paul
Sunday School Principal

TOGETHER
WE CAN!

Lenten
Charity
Event

Yohaani Mani
8th Grade

Lenten
Retreat



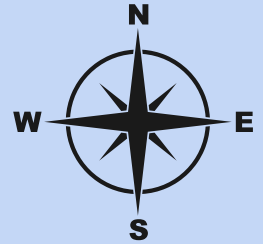
ST. THOMAS

Phoenix, AZ

WEST



**Sunday School
Field Day
2024**



**Walk
the Wall**

ST. GEORGE

Sacramento, CA

**Lenten Challenge
2024**

Family Altar

Our Sunday School children took up the Lenten challenge from the diocese for building a family altar. Each of our Sunday School children painted and decorated a wooden cross to keep at their family altar in their home. They also learned about the importance of having a prayer corner - a dedicated place in their home where they can pray daily. This was an activity they enjoyed doing together as a Sunday School and they shared pictures of their altar they made at home.





St. Gregorios

HOUSTON, TX

Great Lent activities & Christmas popup store service project

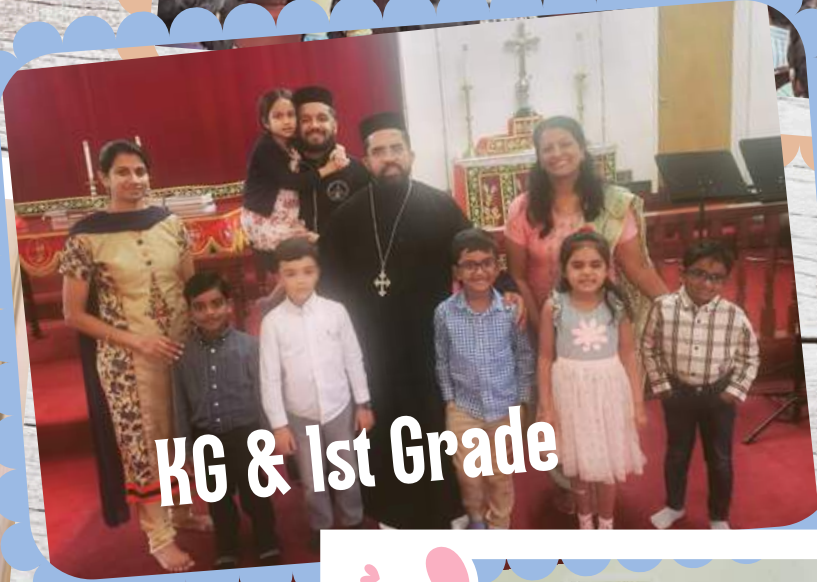
Common class



5th Grade



KG & 1st Grade



Pre-K



2nd Grade



Art Workshop

Easter Cross

Kurian Mani Thyparambil

2nd Grade
St. Gregorios
Minnesota



Resurrection of Jesus



Anna Majin

4th Grade
St. Gregorios
Hopkins, MN

St. George Orthodox Church Sacramento, California

Community Service Project at **THE GATHERING INN**

During this Lenten season about 25 members from our Parish including adults and children volunteered and served at The Gathering Inn - a place that provides shelter and services to people experiencing homelessness. We sorted and organized donations (clothes, shoes, books, adult/baby diapers, bedding, and common household items) received at the center. Our members also donated items to the clothing closet. We also got hear from individuals and families who transitioned through the shelter program and who are living independently now. It was an eye opener for our children and they were able to understand how some people in the community lack basic necessities like food, clothing, and shelter. Our children realized how blessed they are. It was a wonderful experience for all who volunteered.

TIME

RESOURCES

HELPING HAND



ST. THOMAS

The children of St. Thomas, Los Angeles, took part in a Lenten project where they made and donated hygiene kits for the homeless and collected canned goods.



LOS ANGELES, CA



These are pictures of children attending Sunday School at St. Thomas, Los Angeles.



ST. THOMAS PHOENIX, AZ

Sunday School Great Lent
charity event at
**Feed My Starving
Children**



EASTER EGG HUNT 2024



JUNE - JULY

Upcoming Events

**NO RAIN
NO FLOWER**

12TH GRADE DIPLOMA

June 3: Orientation #1 for high school graduates to register to take the Sunday School diploma exam.

June 15: Orientation #2

June 17: Deadline to register

June 21 - Exams sent out

July 22 - Exam due date

Parents and children should register through the Sunday School Portal. Deadline to register is Monday, June 17th!

[Link to portal](#)

TTC (TEACHER'S TRAINING CERTIFICATE)

Interested in becoming a certified Sunday School teacher? Are you a parent who wants to deepen your understanding of the Orthodox faith and teachings? Then register using the SS portal!

June 15: First orientation

June 17: Deadline to register

June 19: Second orientation

June 21: Exams sent out

July 31: Exam due date

[Link to portal](#)

[Link to user guides on how to register](#)

