

Volume 3, Issue 3 | June 2024

The

Stream

Newsletter

*Apostles - you are the salt of the earth,  
And you are the light for those in darkness;  
May your prayers be our fortress.*

*-Enyono, Feast of the Twelve Apostles*



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

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Metropolitan  
Dr. Thomas Mar Ivanios

# Faith of the Apostles

My Beloved Children in Christ,

As we observe the Apostle's fast (June 16-29), we honor and celebrate the Apostles' lives, especially their faith. We are called to embrace their dedication and renew their commitment to live a true spiritual life. The fast invites each and every one of us to deepen our relationship with God Jesus Christ and each other. It holds deep theological significance emphasizing the themes of discipleship, liturgical worship, and spiritual mission to the world. The lives of the Apostles teach us two fundamental ways of Christian Life.

## 1. Love of Christ as Love for Fellow-beings

The apostle's love for Christ and to spread the Gospel message was marked by their eagerness to serve others. St. Paul the Apostle teaches us in Galatians 5:13,14, "For brethren, you have been called unto liberty only do not use it for an occasion of flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself." The Apostles envisaged the love of Christ as love for one another. We are called primarily to serve others. Apostles were marked with a servant attitude focusing on shared responsibility. Likewise, let us also be humble and selfless like them, willing to be not only teachers and preachers but to exemplify ourselves as servants. Let us go out into the world to serve like our church fathers, helping and comforting the poor and oppressed.

## 2. Liturgical Worship as Communion with Jesus Christ

The Bible verse of Acts 20:7 explains the early Apostolic Church ideals, "On the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them." This verse illustrates two important mandates of discipleship. One, the acts of Christian apostleship were centered around the Lord's Supper or the Holy Qurbano as a proclamation of the Gospels, baptizing believers, establishing churches, and finally completed in fellowship and communion with Jesus Christ. Community worship centered around Altar-Table and celebrating the Holy Body and Holy Blood was important in early church worship. For the Apostles, the Holy Qurbana was real and had the presence of Christ. They received godly blessings from the worship. The words of St. Basil teach us thus, "To communicate each day and to partake of the holy Body and Blood of Christ is good and beneficial; for He says quite plainly: "He that eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood has eternal life." Fellowship with Christ is attained through Holy Mysteries and this is the greatest teaching instituted by the apostles. Therefore, let us also follow their pattern and understanding in this regard and receive communion daily from the altar, the nourishment of life.

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!





# DYNAMITE DIANE!



I am Diane Mathew, from Calgary, Canada. I am the Online Sunday School Coordinator. I am supported by Shijo Thomas from Dallas and Manu John from Detroit. As the coordinator of the Online Sunday School I have the privilege of working with passionate and dedicated teachers who help nurture the spiritual growth of our children. My journey in faith education began many years ago when I started teaching at my Calgary parish. I have been a teacher for a long time, a vice principal and a principal at my local parish. Through all the roles I hold I enjoy the journey and the opportunity to grow alongside the lovely, talented children. The most rewarding aspect of my role is witnessing the growth and development of our children.

The Online Sunday School is a venture that our Diocese of South West America planned and implemented in 2021. On Nov 7 2021, the very first class of Online Sunday School began with 7 children. Today I am proud to say that the Online Sunday School has 142 children registered from various places in the US and Canada. The approach of Online Sunday School is to provide consistent Sunday School education to the children who are living in remote places with little or no access to a Orthodox church and to help Sunday Schools that have less than 25 children with grade level education.

My goal is to build a community where faith, love and learning go together and help children build a strong foundation in Christ that will help them throughout their lives. I am excited about the future of the Online Sunday School and look forward to exploring new ways to enhance our program and support the children in their Spiritual journey.



*I love my online Sunday School teacher!*



# Online

# SUNDAY SCHOOL

**Diocese of South-West America**  
**Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church**

*"Let little children come to me"*  
MATHEW 19:14

## ONLINE SUNDAY SCHOOL

ACADEMIC YEAR 2023 - 2024  
EVERY SUNDAY 6:00 PM TO 7:00 PM EST

TO REGISTER YOUR SUNDAY SCHOOL, PLEASE CONTACT:

DIOCESIAN SUNDAY SCHOOL DIRECTOR: FR. JACOB MATHEW		+1 (407) 970-9090
DIOCESIAN SUNDAY SCHOOL VICE DIRECTOR: FR. ABEY ABRAHAM		+1 (832) 888-9296
ONLINE SUNDAY SCHOOL COORDINATOR: MRS. DIANE MATHEW		+1 (403) 869-7648

EMAIL: [online Sundayschool.dswa@gmail.com](mailto:online Sundayschool.dswa@gmail.com)

AN INITIATIVE BY THE DIOCESIAN SUNDAY SCHOOL ASSEMBLY

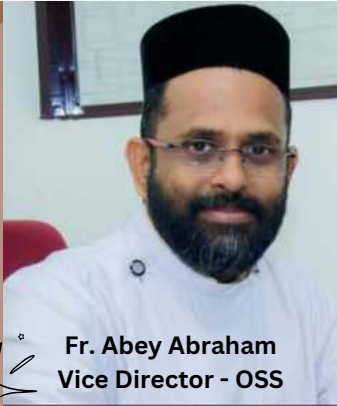
The Online Sunday School, an initiative of the Sunday School administration of the Diocese of SouthWest America, aims to unite Sunday schools from smaller parishes lacking access to grade-level education resources. Aligned with the mission of DS-WA's Sunday School, our goal is to nurture children's spiritual growth and guide them to success in their walk with God.

The program can be visualized as a collective umbrella encompassing small Sunday schools across the US and Canada. Small parishes, with 25 or fewer children and lacking grade-level resources, are our focus.

The Online Sunday School brings together resources from the Diocese of SouthWest America, and mirrors the structure of traditional Sunday Schools. Our team comprises an Online Sunday School coordinator, grade-level teachers (from PreK to Grade 12), and technical support.

Classes are conducted via Zoom every Sunday at 6pm EST. The session starts with prayer and a general session, followed by class time and a concluding prayer. Each week, the general session explores a new topic, promoting interactive engagement among children and speakers alike.

# ONLINE SUNDAY SCHOOL



Fr. Abey Abraham  
Vice Director - OSS



Ashley Alex



Linu Abraham



Jacob Thomas

## Teachers 2024



Ashwati Kuruvila



Abin Varghese



Shijo Thomas



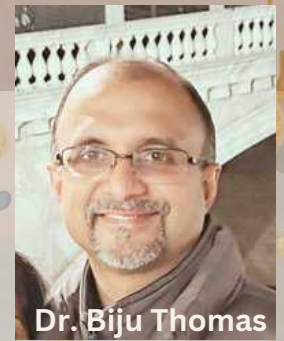
Santha Varghese



Mathew John



Diane Mathew



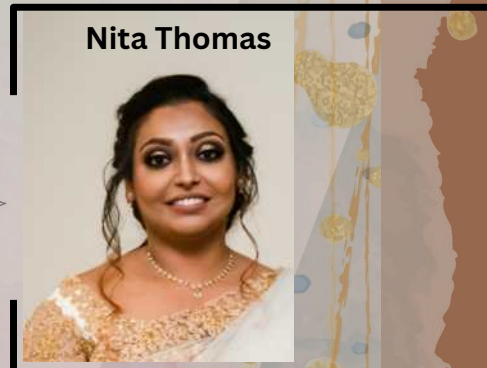
Dr. Biju Thomas



Sivi Varghese



Sindhu Alex



Nita Thomas



Manu John



Gladstone Mammen



Rachel Aby



Soniya Mathew

# Principal Profiles

of the Online Sunday School Classes

## *The best thing about being a principal*

Sharing with the children the word of God and being a guide to them when they bring up challenges they face.

### **CELIN SUNNY**

St. Gregorios  
Jacksonville, FL

10 years



### **SHEEBA KUREEKTATIL**

St. Mary  
Las Vegas, NV

8 years

## *Proud Moments.*

Being able to guide our kids to Jesus ways makes me feel happy and proud

## *The goal.*

I would like to share that encouraging children to practice compassion, service to others, and spiritual growth .

### **BEENA JOHNSON**

St. Gregorios  
McAllen, TX

8 years



### **BIJU K. THOMAS**

St. Mary  
Fort Myers, FL

9 years

## *I enjoy...*

Interaction with children

## *The best thing...*

The interaction with kids.

### **PAUL PARET**

St. Thomas  
Denver, Colorado

3+ years



# Principal Profiles

of the Online Sunday School Classes

## *The best thing...*

I get to personally know every child in the church and be part of their spiritual journey to love God, grow in faith, and develop relationships with the church. My favorite verse Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"

**SUMA PHILIPS**

St. Ephrem  
Columbus, OH

7 years



**JASON KORA**

St. Mary  
Tampa, Fl

3 years

## *The best thing about being a principal*

Watching children grow in our faith and worship

## *The goal.*

Making a difference in young lives and experience personal and spiritual growth through service.

**RENCY K. JOHN**

St. Mary  
Vancouver  
British Columbia, Canada

1 year



**LIJI REJI**

St. Mary  
Saskatoon  
Saskatchewan, Canada

1 year



The best thing about serving as a Sunday School Principal is that I get to grow in my faith and spiritual life with the children! I get the privilege of grounding our children in God's Word. My vision for our Sunday

School is to instill and nurture in our children the spiritual values of the christian faith and develop them into unique individuals who live and serve in the Kingdom of God.

**GINA MATHEW**

St. George  
Sacramento, CA

17+ years





# Greetings,

*from the*

# MIDWEST DETROIT TEAM

Photo credit: Ciaran Carr, WDET

Due to an oversight on the April 2024 issue, this page is being republished to include all of the principals of the Midwest- Detroit Region.



**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.



**SUMA PHILIPS**

7 years

St. Ephrem  
Colombus, Ohio

Best thing about Sunday School is I get to personally know every child in the church and help them live the verse in their lives - Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"



**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.

# A Test, A Triumph

O Lord, You test me and know me,  
Even when You are all I can never be  
In this unholy world  
of sin and lies  
You are my stronghold  
When everyone dies.

You are the light  
That makes me calm in the midst of chaos.  
You ease my pain and brokenness,  
And my tears are in Your book.  
You control my impulses  
And give counsel to my action  
And transform me into the mighty warrior  
Through Your life and victory on the Cross

You are my God who knows me intimately!  
Who knows my deepest needs and desires  
Who understands my unholy thoughts  
And knows "every idle word" that I speak.  
Praise to You, who knows all sins in my heart  
But welcomes me once again with open arms.

I am Your unique workmanship,  
fearfully and wonderfully made.  
From the deepest part of my soul  
to the hairs on my head.  
My times are in Your hands  
You know me and direct my way!

How precious is to be known by  
my Heavenly Father in such detail!  
yet still and always has loved me!  
Your righteous right hand is a ground of  
confidence and hope,  
a wonderful and humble place to be  
for Your omniscience is truly comforting  
where leaning on to Your grace is  
A beacon of hope.

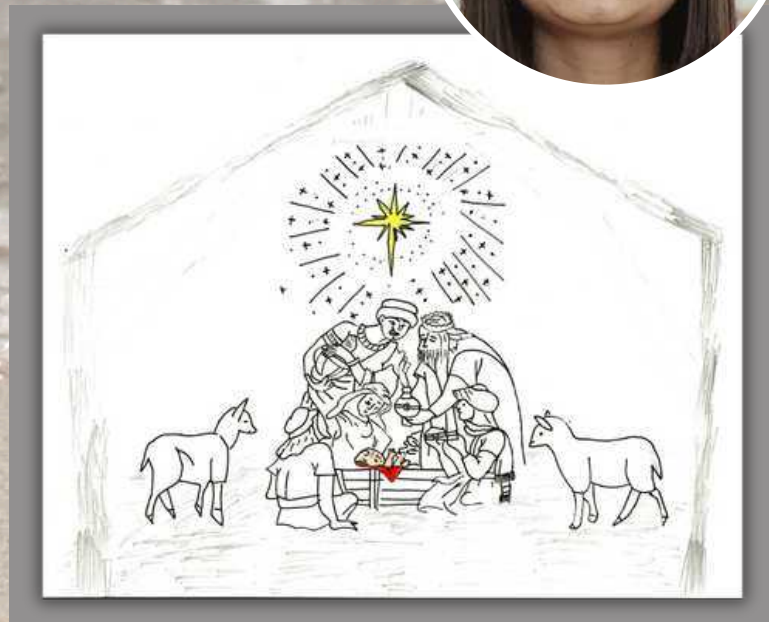
And that, my friend, is a triumph.



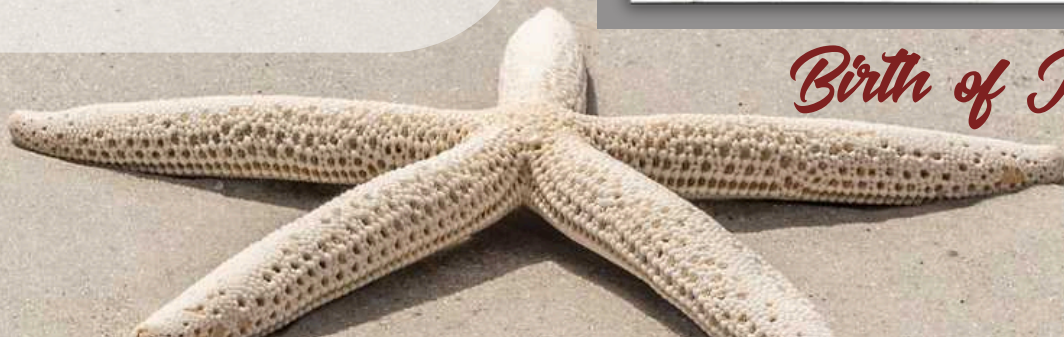
**Shaun Thomas**  
St. Ephrem  
Columbus, OH



**Liz Samuel**  
St. Gregorios  
McAllen, TX



*Birth of Jesus*



# WELLSPRING OF *Courage*

"Judge me, O Lord, for I walk in my innocence, and by hoping in the Lord, I shall not weaken."

In the midst of temptations and the ever-present shadow of death, I find myself seeking refuge in the strength of my faith.

The devil's snares may try to entangle me, and the specter of mortality may cast its long shadow, but within the sanctuary of my belief, I discover a resilient spirit.

Challenges may test my resolve, and doubt may threaten to creep in, yet it's in the unwavering embrace of my faith that I discover a wellspring of courage.

The Lord's presence acts as a guiding light, helping me navigate through the darkest of life's trials.

As I walk this path, I know that life is fraught with uncertainty, but in my innocence and trust in the divine, I find a well of strength to draw from.

In the face of adversity and the unknown, my belief remains a steadfast companion, providing solace and resilience.

So, O Lord, judge me by the sincerity of my heart, for it's through my faith that I find the endurance to face the world's challenges head-on.



**Abel Varughese Vinoyi**  
St. Ephrem  
Columbus, OH

# Spreading God's Word

**Kareena Kurian**

St. Mary  
Fort Myers, FL



**What is spiritual growth? Spiritual growth is learning more about orthodoxy and God. You can grow your orthodox faith by praying everyday, following the Ten Commandments, and going to Qurbana every Sunday. Expanding your spiritual growth is important because you will understand the word of God and the Bible even more.**

**Social media is websites or apps that you can contact people or watch videos with. Some people use social media to look up random information that most of the time doesn't help you very much. Even though the videos or posts may be interesting. We should use social media for learning more about our religion and God.**

**Using social media to look up more about the Indian orthodox faith and God is something that will help with your spiritual growth. Reading articles about the Orthodox Church will help you understand it and participate in more. Learning about God can help you grow closer to him and help you with your spiritual journey. Another thing that one could research that will help you is the history of the church. The history of the Orthodox Church is very important so we can better participate in Qurbana.**

**Sharing your orthodox faith with others can benefit them and you. Various people don't know where to start with their journey with God and we can help them. Posting things about God on social media or creating videos about God can help people learn about him. Connecting with other people of the Indian Orthodox Church can make you appreciate it a little bit more. On social media, with you even knowing, there are numerous people that follow the orthodox teachings. If you find someone that follows the orthodox faith you could talk about it and learn more about it from each other.**

**There are many different ways to help you expand your spiritual growth. Hopefully instead of watching random stuff you will read articles or watch videos about God or the Orthodox Church. Learning about the history of the Orthodox Church is also an amazing way to help you with your growth. In conclusion, let us use social media to spread God's word.**

# God's Promise to Noah



**Joanna George**  
St. Ephrem  
Columbus, OH



"After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded." (St. John 13:5 OSB)



**Jesus Washes His Disciple's Feet**



**Abel Varughese Vinoyi**  
St. Ephrem  
Columbus, OH

# BULLYING



**Manuel Cherian**  
St. George  
Sacramento, CA



Bullying is when we do something mean to another person repeatedly. In this essay, we will go over tips for ignoring bullying and how to control it when it gets out of hand. Let's begin!

## Tips for Ignoring Bullying



When someone else bullies us, if it only happened once, it's not even bullying. Maybe they're saying/doing those things because they're in a bad mood. Of course, you should report it if it happens again, though. To ignore a bully, simply distract yourself by thinking about something you're grateful for, or something you plan to do, et cetera. They're only looking for the reaction, and ignoring the bully will most likely stop the unkindness. Also, ignoring a bully is not being bean. NEVER attempt revenge. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Leviticus 19:18

## Controlling Out-of-Hand Bullying



If someone physically bullies, cusses at or is repeatedly unkind to you or someone else, and you've already reported it but they refused to stop and it's getting really hard to ignore, then if they're bullying you outdoors, tell your friends about it and start playing at any amenity as far away on the playground as possible and face away from them whenever possible in order for them not to notice you.

As for the classroom, your teacher probably knows about it by now, so explain the situation to him/her and ask if you can sit on the opposite side of the classroom. If all else fails, contact your principal and ask if they can give you poster paper. If they say no, tell them the reason why. Contact the best artist that knows and trusts you and work together to make an anti-bullying poster, and hang it at the most frequented area in your school.

Normally, people handle bullying the wrong way. But, congrats! You've just handled it the correct way.

# Why did it

# HAPPEN?

Jacob Kurian  
St. Mary  
Fort Myers, FL



Famines, war, and illnesses have plagued humanity for ages. We have scapegoated many different people, religions, race, and a variety of other factors. But why must these happen? Why can't we live in a utopia? Why must bad things happen to us? Because after Adam and Eve picked the fruit of the Garden of Evil, sin destroyed the perfect place we had. Sin continues to exist, and bad things exist and happen to everybody. Bad things such as illnesses and wars happen to us. Being Christian, we are challenged more, though supposedly, everything is done for the glory of God.

Being Christian is a challenge. It puts a larger target on your back, as we can see with the apostles, where all but one were mercilessly killed. We believe we will receive eternal life after we die, though our life in this world will be challenged. While we might try to blame everything on evil, Isaiah 45:7 states, "I am He who prepared light and made darkness, who makes peace and creates troublesome things. I am the Lord God who does all these things." Nothing that God makes is evil, because God is good. 1 Timothy 4:4 affirms this by saying, "For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving." Things may be bad for us, but they are part of His plan. Fires are bad for us humans, but they do important jobs for the entire ecosystem. Many things, like Nature and animals, don't have free will. We humans do have free will, and we use it in evil ways. All one has to see is the current war in Israel and Gaza. It's clear, no matter which side you find yourself on, that evil can be seen on both sides. These tragedies are evil, and they are directed by humans. We cannot change other people, and the target on our backs, being a Christian is one we must shoulder.

God gave all of us free will, so what happens if somebody does evil? We might be inclined to believe that people cannot do evil, because as 1 Timothy 4:4 says, "every creature of God is good". We are all God's creatures, so wouldn't this be a contradiction? However, in Saint Basil's hexaemeron, in which he compiled dozens of his homilies and sermons, he does say, "Evil isn't a living and animated substance. But a condition of the soul which is opposed to virtue and which springs up in the slothful because of their falling away from God.

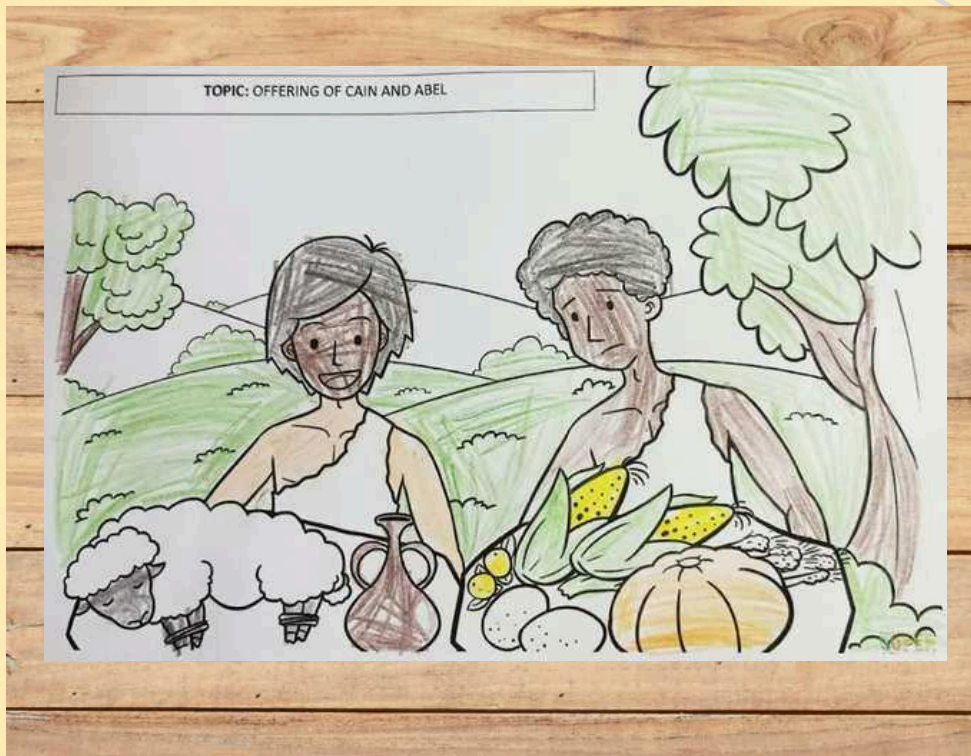
If we use our free will, which God gave us, to go further away from God, evil springs forth. Other people will be evil, and do despicable things, such as starting wars, and that might end up affecting us. But we cannot control what other people do. Saint Basil was fighting Arianism, and although he prevailed, he had to control himself. He couldn't force someone to believe something else, even if it was "evil" and a heresy. We must follow his example, and not use our free will, to make evil, the thing that causes us so much pain to others.

The Devil also will do evil against us, as we can see in Job. Job was a good man, and was very righteous. However, the devil told God that Job was only faithful because he had a lot. To test Job, God let the devil take away everything. He loses his earthly possessions, his children, and much of his life. He still remains faithful, despite all of this. These bad things were because of the devil, but most of the time, it was evil. Job shows us an example of what we should act like, by remaining righteous and faithful. No matter what life may throw at us, we should stand firm in our faith. We must be the seeds scattered in good soil, not the ones that grow, then shrivel and die.

No matter what happens, God has a plan for us. This is especially seen in John 9:3, where the Pharisees ask Jesus who sinned to make this boy blind. John says, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in Him." Being blind is something that most people would say is a bad thing. If we look back to what Isaiah said, he says that God is the one who made these troublesome things. God's great plan is good, and the boy being blind was part of his plan. Fires in forests aren't good for people, but they re-fertilize the soil, and let more life grow. The end result is good. Thus, we can all see that all things are done for the Glory of God.

While all these things may happen, it is important to remember that we aren't in control of a lot. However the things we can control are stuff we must. As St. Basil said, evil is a condition of a soul that has fallen away from virtue. Bad things happen to us, but like Job, we mustn't lose our faithfulness. We must carry on, regardless of whether it was due to natural problems or other people, or even the devil. The thing we must remember as Christians is that God always has a plan for us.

# Offering of Cain and Abel



**Nathan Aji Joy**  
St. Ephrem  
Columbus, OH



# Daniel in the Lion's Den



**Eleanor Rose Joby**  
St. Thomas  
Denver, CO







**@riyanageorge**  
bullying is so yesterday

**Riyana George**  
St. Ephrem  
Columbus, OH

Bullying is the act of hurting or harming other people who are weaker than the bully by words, actions, or bodily harm.

The Scriptures do not directly reference bullying, but there are references which we can utilize to address the issue. The scriptures teach us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves and to treat others the way we would like to be treated. Every person, regardless of what he or she looks or acts like, is created in the image of God and is worthy of the dignity that God gives to every person. This can be used in reference to bullying on the basis of race or social discrimination.

Bullying is never the right choice. According to the Scriptures, we should make sure not to bully others. As Christians, we are called to respect each other and honor God with our words and actions. We should constantly examine our actions and motives to make sure they line up with the standards being asked of us by God.

It is permissible to stand up for yourself if you are bullied, When Jesus is teaching His disciples about the suffering they are going to endure for being a Christian. His primary concern is speaking against the "eye for an eye" mentality of revenge that was prevalent in the culture then. He is not speaking against all forms of self-defense.

We need to reach out and support individuals being bullied. One of the best ways we can do this is to befriend them and invite them to hang out with us. Not only will this make them feel loved, and accepted, and less lonely, it also prevents them from being bullied. Bullies are much less likely to pick on someone if they are in a group of friends than if they are alone. Even little things like spending time with the person who is a victim of bullying or giving them a hug make a bigger difference than we may realize.

We should never try to get back at a bully or seek revenge. As Christians, though we know that this world is not perfect, we are not the judge of the earth. God is the one who judges the world in His righteousness and repay everyone for the evil that they've done. Instead, respond to the bully with kindness and love. The Scripture calls us to love our enemies and pray for them . Do not try and overcome the evil being done to you by doing evil in return. Rather, overwhelm your opponents with the goodness and love of God . You never know how your kindness may change their heart.

We should never bully others. As Christians, we are called to act in love and kindness toward everyone, including those who wrong us. And we are called to stand up for the helpless and the weak. We should do good in spite of being mistreated, and befriend those who we see being mistreated.

In conclusion I want to reiterate the fact that bullying is not an act which we have to tolerate. As Christ tells us, let us love our neighbor as ourselves and stop people from being bullied.



**@stopbullyingnow**  
check out my website!





# THE CENSORIOUS JEWELER



**Jennifer Thomas**  
St. George  
Sacramento, CA

There was once a famous jewelry store, called Bejeweled. The jewelry store was famous for its diamonds and platinum necklaces. Many people were hired to help support the jewelry store, but among those people was a censorious jeweler. The jeweler's name was Katherine, and she had a friend, called Elizabeth. One particularly sunny day, a woman with plain, simple clothes walked into the jewelry store.

"See that woman," Katherine said, "She's probably here to rob us. We need to keep an eye on her."

"I don't think so. I'll go ask her what she needs," Elizabeth replied.

"Don't be stupid! How can someone looking so average come into such a prestigious store like this? I'll go ask her to leave," Katherine berated.

Elizabeth followed her friend, knowing that Katherine could be wrong.

"Excuse me miss? Are you lost? This is Bejeweled, but there are some local jewelry stores down the street," Katherine explained to the woman.

"Katherine, that's so mean, you didn't even offer to ask her what she needs," Elizabeth hissed.

"Oh no, I'm in the right place. I was hoping you could show me your five-carat diamond cuts." The woman asked.

"The five-carat diamonds are very expensive, are you sure you can aff-," Katherine was cut off.

"Of course, we can show you our five-carat diamonds!" Elizabeth glared at Katherine.

"No, it's fine. I'll just go somewhere else," The woman looked at Katherine.

"We just lost a potential customer, I hope you're happy." Elizabeth huffed.

"Customer?" Katherine scoffed, "She's a thief, she's trying to bite off more than she can chew!"

"Don't judge a book by its cover," Elizabeth reminded.

"Whatever, who believes that nonsense anyways," Katherine said.

A few hours had passed, and Katherine and Elizabeth were talking about a promotion opportunity.

"Our boss is offering a huge upgrade! The most hardworking employee will get a 50% raise in salary and be promoted to manager! Elizabeth excitedly informed.

"I think I've been the most hardworking, especially since I know which customers are good and which ones are like that woman who just left," Katherine stated.

"Really? Whatever you say," Her friend replied, "But I don't think that woman was bad. You didn't even ask for her name or number! We could have saved it and discussed a time to meet and talk about the jewels she wants."

You're blind, that woman is bad news, and- look! A customer! Except this one looks like she can buy things from here," Elizabeth said.

A woman wearing fine clothes and her hair styled nicely in a pretty bun had walked into the store.

"Hi, my name is Anastasia," the newcomer said, "I was wondering if I could look at your 0.9-carat diamonds.

"0.9-carats? She looks so wealthy. I'm going to try to sell her a three-carat or a five-carat," Katherine exclaimed.

"What if she doesn't have that much money," Elizabeth questioned.

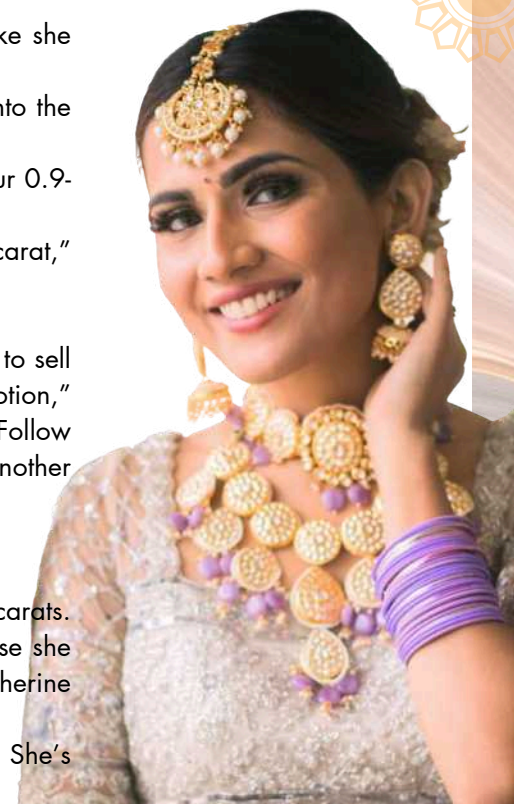
"Are you kidding? She looks so rich! There's no way she's that low. I'm still going to try to sell her a higher-priced diamond. Once I've sold that much, our boss will give me the promotion," Katherine smirked. She turned back to Anastasia, and said, "Of course, I can help you! Follow me right this way." Elizabeth stayed behind, thinking that they were going to lose another customer.

Thirty minutes had passed by, and Katherine came back looking angry and confused.

"What happened?" Elizabeth asked.

"I showed her the three carats and the five-carats, but she kept on asking me for the 0.9-carats. I gave up and decided to just show her a three-carat, but say it was a 0.9-carat because she had so much money to spend, so why not spend it on a higher priced jewel!" Katherine ranted, "Then she saw the price and said that she'll look at a different jewelry store!"

"Didn't I tell you not to judge a book by its cover? She just wanted a 0.9-carat diamond! She's probably not that rich," Elizabeth explained..



# THE CENSORIOUS JEWELER

**Jennifer Thomas**  
St. George  
Sacramento, CA



"Well, then why does she look rich?" Katherine asked.

"She only looks rich, but that doesn't mean she is rich! Don't judge a book by its cover!" Elizabeth repeated.

"Whatever," Katherine rolled her eyes, but then widened them.

"What, what's wrong?" Elizabeth interrogated.

"It's that lady, who I said looked average...she looks stunning! Katherine said in disbelief.

"Hello girls, my name is Julia. I came here earlier and asked for a five-carat diamond, but one of you, Katherine I believe? Anyway, Katherine said I couldn't afford a five-carat diamond, but I am a multi-millionaire. Perhaps you've heard of the famous billionaire, John Hemsworth. I'm his daughter. I will leave a bad review about this place, specifically about you Katherine," Julia said. She glared at Katherine but gave Elizabeth a sympathetic smile. Julia left leaving an awkward silence in the air.

"A Hemsworth? A multi-millionaire? That's probably fake," Katherine gave an awkward laugh.

"She's not fake," Elizabeth said.

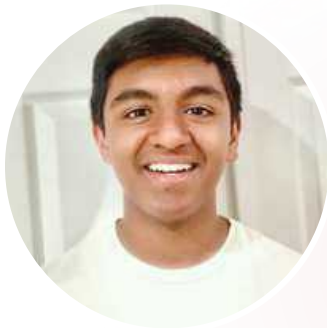
"How do you know?" Katherine asked.

"Didn't you notice the necklace she was wearing? We're trained to identify different jewels and guess their wealth, as part of the training to get a job here. She was wearing a diamond necklace worth over \$90,000!" Elizabeth exclaimed.

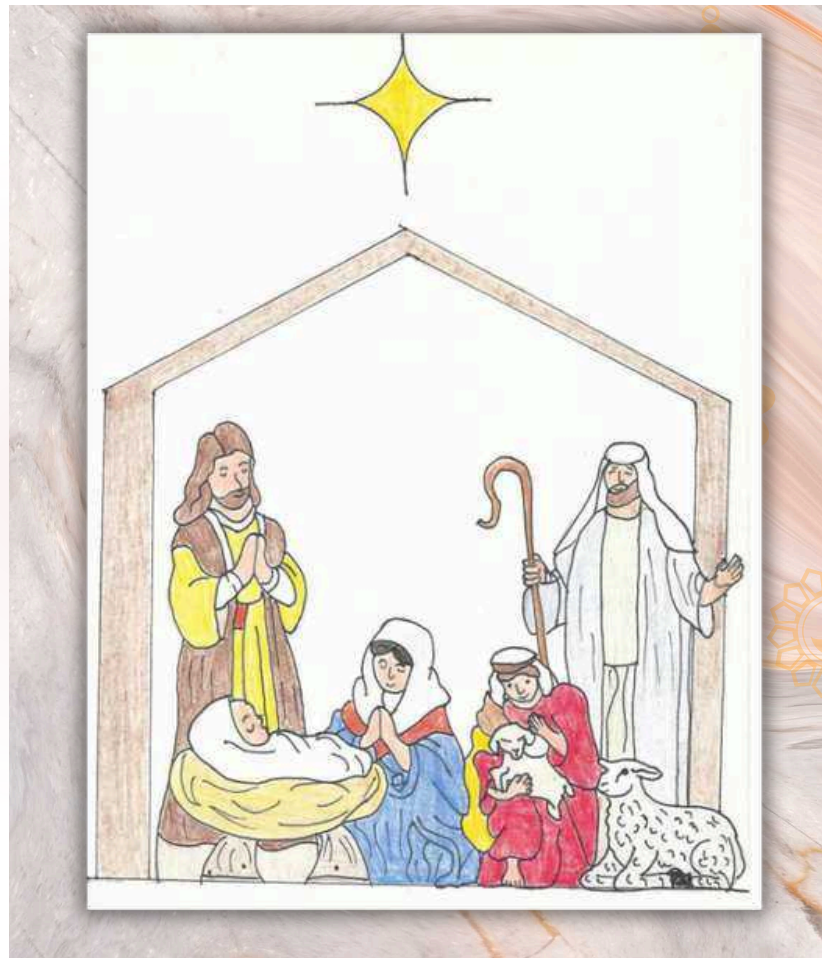
"Yeah right," Katherine scoffed. A week later Katherine was fired. It turned out Katherine was wrong about Julia, and that Julia was truly a multi-millionaire, and she was the daughter of the famous billionaire, John Hemsworth.

"If only I had listened to Elizabeth. She was right, don't judge a book by its cover," Katherine whispered to the empty space of her apartment

## Birth of Jesus



**Kevin Mathew**  
St. Mary  
Las Vegas, NV



Wardiere Inc.

# From Shepherd TO Soldier



**Rishon Thomas**  
St. George  
Sacramento, CA



[Link to Rishon's story.](#)



**Elijah Kurian**  
St. Mary  
Fort Myers, FL



## The Offering of Cain and Abel

# NEW POST

Social Media is a term that refers to a lot of platforms (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Reddit, etc.) According to the University of Cambridge, the definition of Social Media is, “websites and computer programs that allow people to communicate and share information on the internet using a computer or cell phone.” Now the question is, can social media be used to benefit a church community? The answer is yes, due to the ability to find new churches, locate Christian songs/podcasts, and watch church services or events.

One reason social media can be used for spiritual benefits is locating new churches. When somebody new moves to the community, one of their priorities is to find a church. So, they use social media to find churches nearby, and to get to know the community at the said church. Oftentimes, when traveling, we can go to another church, and attend service there. This is also where social media comes into play. By finding churches, where learning about God is of the utmost importance, we can grow spiritually, and make new friends, all because of a nifty app or website.

Another reason why social media can be used for spiritual benefits is learning/listening to Christian songs/podcasts. In Ephesians 5:11, it says “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” This basically means that God loves songs that are good and meaningful (from your heart, not only from your mouth.) So, we know that God loves music/songs, but what if we didn’t know any songs to praise him? Well, we’d use a social media platform, such as Youtube or Spotify. This teaches us the song’s lyrics and therefore, we can praise the Lord for all He has done for us. Another thing social media can be used for is finding podcasts. There are many great spiritual podcasts, such as Ancient Faith Radio, Search the Scriptures, and Ancient Faith Today Live, where they talk about many earthly matters and relate it to what God tells us in the bible. For example, if you want to know whether Halloween is approved in the eyes of God, but you cannot find any good text evidence from the bible, or whether you want it interpreted from a later generation’s standpoint, you could listen to the many numerous podcasts. And the podcaster, if reliable, should have searched the bible, and can interpret/paraphrase the text to you, to make it easier for you to understand why Halloween is a pagan holiday and is not approved in the eyes of God.



**Joel Ninan**  
St. Ephrem  
Columbus, OH

A third reason why social media can be used for spiritual benefits is to watch church events/services. During the COVID-19 pandemic, where we were often locked down, and quarantined, we could not go to church, and partake in the Holy Communion. So, a lot of parishes started making livestreams of Holy Qurbana so that the general population could still attend prayers, but not be at risk of the pandemic. In Romans 12:4-5, Paul states “ For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are the one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.” In easier terms, this is saying that a church family is a very strong bond, and cannot be broken by anything. Now, after the pandemic, we can still use social media for other church events, such as funerals. If the funeral is taking place far away, but you still want to attend, it is really hard to book a flight and fly there, especially during holiday season. Again, this is where social media comes into play. You can virtually attend a live stream, and still send off the departed individual, helping you understand the importance and sorrow of a funeral – spiritual, and emotional benefits.

Now, those are three reasons why social media can be used for spiritual benefits, but you must always know that social media cannot always be used or trusted. Most social media use an AI to generalize the topics that you are watching. The church is made up of many different denominations, and it is important that you are watching the right one, which in our case is the Orthodox Church. But the AI may not know that, and may put teachings of a different denomination on our recommended feed, leading us astray. Another thing is that many people may call themselves a church and put a lot of church related info on their feed, but they maybe not, and are just looking for followers. So, it is really important that you validate what you are watching and make sure it is not a scam or what you don’t believe. These are three reasons why social media can be used for spiritual benefits.

# The Test

The test is finished  
I don't know what I'd get  
I don't feel too good

I cannot really sleep  
I pray to get a good grade  
Did it work or not?

I imagine good grades  
I do not have an answer  
I hope to not fail

Still I cannot sleep  
I pray to get a good grade  
Did it work or not?

Only one question  
Did I pass or did I not?  
I hope to not fail

I cannot really sleep  
I pray to get a good grade  
Did it work or not?

I wait eagerly  
My friends are all smiling  
They all passed the test

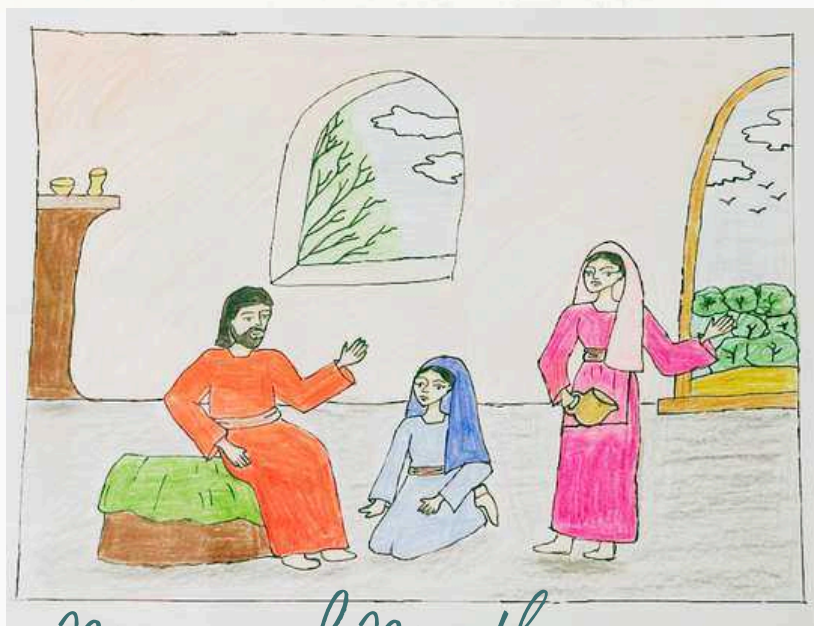
I expect the worst  
My question has no answer  
Did I pass at all?

I see my result  
My Lord heeded my prayer  
I did pass the test

I rejoice proudly  
I thank the almighty God  
For he answered me



**Joel Ninan**  
St. Ephrem  
Columbus, OH



*Mary and Martha*



**Hannah Susan Stavelly**  
St. Joseph  
Dayton, OH

# LIGHT AND MOMENTARY TROUBLES



**Lisa Kurian**  
St. Mary  
Atlanta, GA



Have you ever wondered why God could let you suffer? Or perhaps you've heard of other, less privileged people undergoing terrible pain, and you couldn't help to think that God should be doing something about this. When wondering this, you should always remember that God has a plan for His people and will never abandon them. Bad things occur to people who follow in the path of Christ because we have free will - they help us be trained in terms of virtues, and to become more like Christ to achieve eternal salvation. Christ uses pain and suffering to train us to grow in the path of virtues.

According to James 1:2-3, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness,". This Bible verse indicates that our Lord may let us suffer so that we can build our faith and relationship with God to become more like Him. Without going through these trials and tribulations, our faith will not grow, and may become increasingly wavering. The Bible also gives us an example of when God does this to one following His path, "Then God said, 'Take your son to the land of Moriah and offer your son there as a sacrifice for me. This must be Isaac, your only son, the one you love(...),' " (Genesis 22:2). In this situation, God is testing Abraham, a devoted follower of His. He tells Abraham to kill his only son, Isaac, to test Abraham's faith. Obviously, this situation must have made Abraham go through a lot of suffering and mental stress. Despite all this, Abraham faithfully did as the Lord had told him to, and laid out the wood to offer his son as a sacrifice. But, God's angel stopped him just in time. This goes to show that God heard Abraham's suffering, and didn't abandon him. He watched as Abraham went through agony, and while he didn't let go of the true faith. This helped Abraham's faith in the Lord grow in strength and steadfastness because, even in times of trouble, he looked to the Lord and trusted Him. In the end, God saved Abraham from any further pain, and provided him a lamb to sacrifice instead of his son.

The Lord uses sorrow and anguish to train us in our values. Evil exists because we are given free will by our Lord. "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me." (Revelations 3:20). This Bible verse is about faith and devotion, and how God is always waiting for us to believe and trust in Him. He wants to have a good relationship with us. But, did you notice that, in the above Bible Verse, it is written "if anyone here's my voice"? Why an 'if'? Why doesn't God just make us let him in and love Him? Wouldn't the world be a better place if everyone did this - there would be no evil and suffering? The answer is - free will is required to love. We need to be given the choice to love Christ with all our hearts. If we aren't given this choice, that 'love' amounts to nothing - we don't have any other option. This is why the Lord gives us free will. But, this also means we have the option to not love and to ignore Christ's "knock(ing)".

One thing to note, however, is that every human on this Earth is fundamentally good because we are created by God. Nothing created by God is fundamentally bad because he wants love and goodness to come out in each and every one of us. Evil and sin is another entity living in us, it wasn't put there by God. People may do evil (due to the separate entity within them) and cause others pain and suffering through illness and wars. We need to remain steadfast in our relationship with Christ during these times, and pray. We should pray not just for ourselves, but for the other person performing evil as well, so that they hear Christ's knocking, and let Him into their hearts.

*continued on page 22...*

# LIGHT AND MOMENTARY TROUBLES



*continued...*



**Lisa Kurian**  
St. Mary  
Atlanta, GA

Evil can only be defeated by using this free will to love Christ and others around us. In the end, the pain and suffering we endure will only help us reach the ultimate goal, Heaven. "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." (2 Corinthians 4:17). This Bible verse displays how our Earthly life is one to prepare us for Heaven.

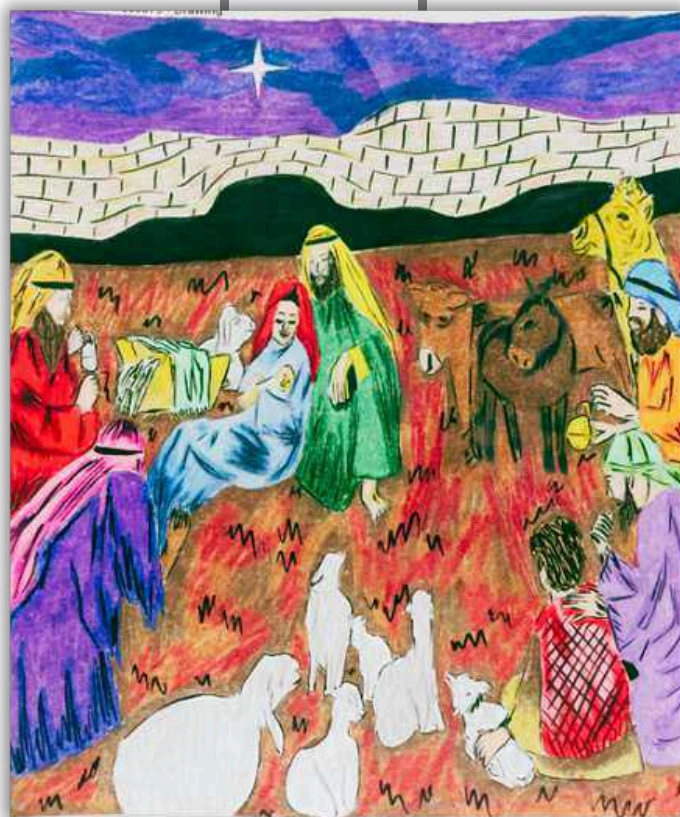
We may suffer on this Earth, but the reward in Heaven will be much greater. Suffering on Earth may remind us that the pleasures in this world could never fully satisfy us and will remind us to turn back to Christ. The grace of suffering pushes us to seek something greater than this temporary world and its disguised pleasures and lifts our eyes to the eternal hope of the treasures in the kingdom of Heaven. It then becomes easier to endure this suffering as we turn back to Christ, and continue our worldly efforts to achieve salvation. Suffering can also improve our oneness with Christ as He suffered greatly while carrying the cross for our sins. Although we will never be able to truly experience and endure the suffering Christ overcame, we can identify ourselves with Him through our suffering to become more like Him.

When we go through our Earthly agony and see others suffering, we should always remember what Christ went through for us, and pray to Him to help us prevail over it like He did. This suffering will assist us in achieving salvation through Heaven. Evil could plague those who follow the path of Christ due to free will, to be directed in the right path morally, and to achieve the endmost goal - Heaven. Suffering can increase our faith in terms of steadfastness, patience, humility, and endurance. Free will to love our Lord means that we have the ability to do evil and sin also, and overcoming this sin in ourselves and praying for others to do so as well will bring us closer to the Lord so we can be with Him in Heaven. This is why good Christian people undergo turmoil and suffering - it acts as a test here on Earth to help us grow in faith (because we have the free will to do otherwise) so that we can reach the true final destination and be with Christ forever.

## *Birth of Jesus*

**Diana John**

St. Gregorios  
McAllen, TX





# CURRICULUM CORNER

## FINDING SOLUTIONS WHEN TEACHING THE FAITH

Summer is here! Teachers all across our Diocese have wrapped up their grading and are thankful for the close to another Academic Year.

Teaching has its ups and downs, and the introduction of a new curriculum is a change for both experienced and new teachers alike. The emphasis of this curriculum is for our children to not just intellectually learn our Faith but to make it their own. This type of ownership involves the “whole” self - mind, thoughts, and hearts.

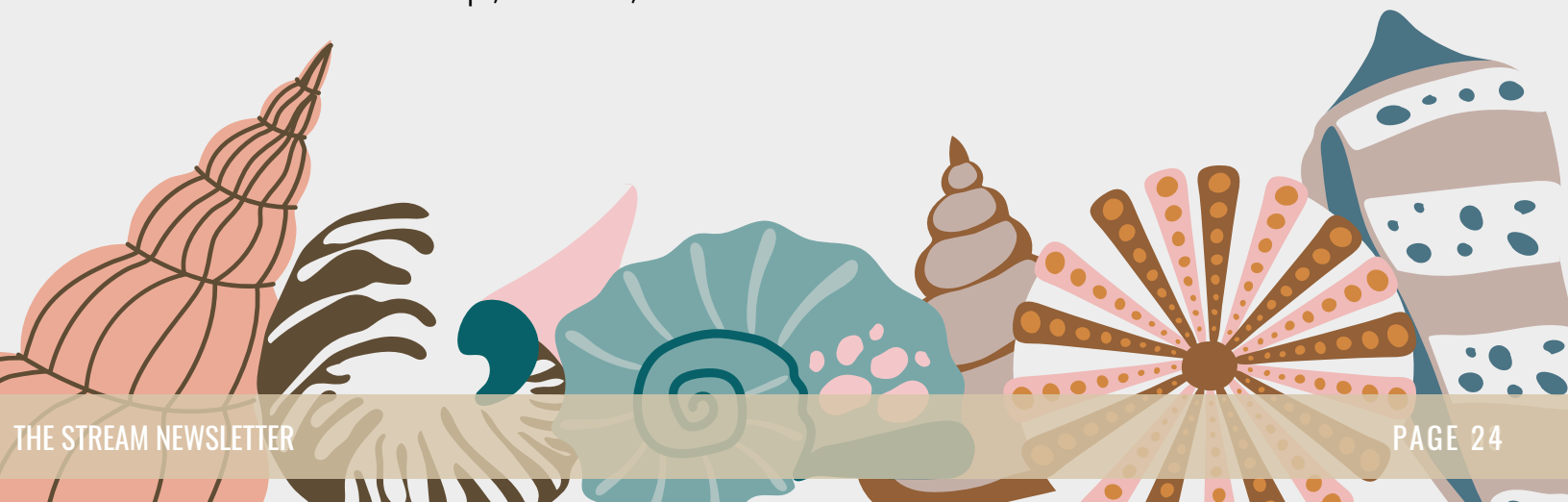
This goal is simply impossible when our only source of teaching material is the textbooks. Secular education has accepted long ago that this approach is not effective, and yet we still find this formula adopted by many teachers in their well intended efforts to cover the materials.

The emphasis in the secular world is that students should eventually be able to explain a concept to others in their own words (Willingham, 2023). Relating this to the Sunday School classroom, we want our children to share their understanding of the Faith as they grow in our program.

Teachers may feel the chapters are too long .. the solution is to break it down and feel encouraged to even simplify or skip portions if those Learning Outcomes have already been mastered by the class. Teachers may not understand initially how Topics or Learning Outcomes for their Grade relate to the material provided .. the solution is to plan ahead using Talmido, talk to our clergy, elders, or seminarians, or even use tools such as ChatGPT. Teachers may see their children struggle with a topic or concept especially when it was not taught in previous years .. the solution is to stop, engage, and even be creative in bringing materials from Holy Qurbana or even videos into the classroom.

Remember that the curriculum emphasizes Learning Outcomes, not the page number of the textbook! As teachers, our main job is to plant seeds that we hope and pray grow within the child. Our reward comes when they open their eyes and finally see all the visible and invisible beauty of our Faith .. this may be immediate, but more often comes with age and maturity.

As Orthodox Christian teachers, our responsibility is to approach our classroom with humility and prayers and share the Faith that was kept, entrusted, and delivered to us.





ST. MARY

HOUSTON, TX

The vibrant community of St. Mary's Malankara Orthodox Church in Houston witnessed the profound engagement of its Sunday school children during the sacred season of Lent. In preparation for this hallowed period, the children embarked on a transformative Lenten retreat centered around the theme "Rooted in Faith," led by Dn. Gerges. Fueling their spiritual growth, the Sunday school organized a Lenten challenge comprising various activities to cultivate their spiritual voyage. The children were motivated to further explore the essence of Lent through multiple activities, including participating in a Scripture Reading Adventure, embracing the discipline of Fasting Fun, disengaging from the virtual realm through the Fast from Social Media initiative, and engaging in acts of almsgiving adventure and meal sharing. Furthermore, they were encouraged to engage in the Prayer and Memory Verse Challenge, strengthening their spiritual practices. Throughout the Lenten season, the youngsters conscientiously adhered to their Lenten journey through prayer and culminated their endeavors by presenting their reflections to the congregation. Their narratives resonated with inspiring testimonies of resilience as they shared their struggles and triumphs in overcoming temptations. The occasion demonstrated the Sunday school children's commitment and a wellspring of motivation for the entire community, reasserting the profound influence of faith and the shared quest for spiritual rejuvenation. As part of its spiritual endeavors, St. Mary's Malankara Orthodox Church thanks the Sunday school team for their unwavering dedication to creating a memorable Lenten experience for our children. Their careful planning and loving direction made for a life-changing journey that instilled a deep appreciation for Lent in the children. We are grateful because they have worked hard to foster faith and gently grow spiritual seedlings.



# It's the End of the Year!

St. Stephen Church School  
Houston, TX



Celebrating a Wonderful Year: Our Church School End-of-Year Party! Here are cherished memories of each grade with their dedicated teachers, capturing the essence of our vibrant community. While some teachers and children are missing from the photos, their contributions and spirit were very much a part of our celebrations. We are grateful for the growth, learning, and fellowship experienced this year.

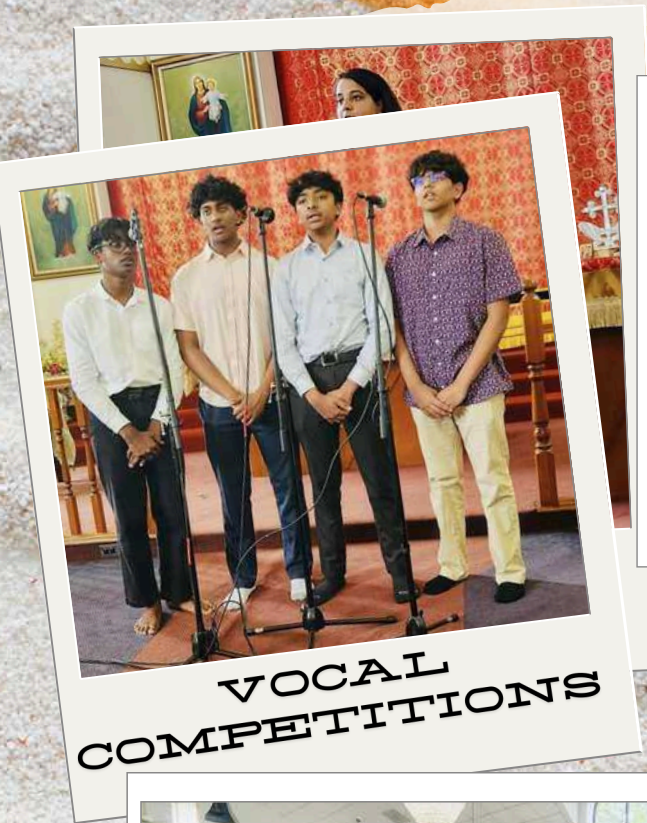
A heartfelt thank you to our incredible volunteers who work tirelessly every Saturday to provide food, ensure cleanup, and capture these wonderful moments on camera. Your dedication and hard work behind the scenes are the foundation of our community's success. Let's look forward to another blessed year together, filled with faith, love, and continued learning!

**[Click here to view more photos!](#)**

# St. Stephen

HOUSTON, TX

Step into the vibrant world of our Church School children's vocal competition! 🎵🌟 Witness the passion and talent of our young performers as they shine in heartfelt solos and captivating group songs in English and Malayalam. From prayer recitals to eloquent elocution pieces, our children express their faith and creativity in various forms, all as they seek to understand and offer praise to God. A heartfelt thank you to all volunteers, including our principal Daisy Aunty and all the teachers and organizers, who have worked tirelessly to make this event possible. Special gratitude to our social media team who patiently captured videos and pictures throughout the entire event. And a big thank you to all parents who cheered on these children for this wonderful program! 🌟



# St. Thomas

Los Angeles, CA



**Irene Renjith**  
4th Grade  
St. Thomas  
Los Angeles, CA

## Father's Day SPEECHES



Respected Achens, parents and friends,

Happy Father's Day! Today is the day we celebrate and be thankful for all the great things that our dads do. Whether it's helping in the kitchen, or inventing new foods and ruining the brand-new oven, the things that our dads do are very essential and make our lives much more fun.

The bible sheds light on amazing stories in which the role of a father teaches lessons worth learning. An example of this is in the very well-known story of the Prodigal Son. Luke 15:20 says, "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him." This story is a powerful example of a father's unconditional love and forgiveness, and it acts somewhat like a mirror, reflecting on how our dads forgive us even when we make mistakes

Psalms 103:13 says, "As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him." Our Father is indeed the Lord himself, but we humans, with our Earthly minds, needed something more tangible, and so our dads came. I'm quite sure that I'm not just speaking for myself when I say that we all admire and look up to our dads. And of course, we all aspire to have the ability to make dad jokes to break the tension in the room.

Through our dads, we learn so much, every single day. They make several sacrifices for us, and even if they scold us, we can always look back and realize that it was only for our good. Our dads are always there to fix things that are broken, whether it's with good advice, or duck tape. So let's take this one day, to appreciate all the great things our dads do for us. Happy Father's Day! Thank you

Dear Respected Achens, Parents, and Friends,

My name is Irene. Today, I would like to share a quick message about Father's Day. Most of us think Father's Day is a time where fathers get a break from their parenting duties, and we celebrate them and how they take care of us. But this day also tells us about the important part they play in nurturing their family's spiritual growth and physical growth. God himself is the world's heavenly Father, and he sets the best example for all earthly fathers how to take care of their families. There are many ways to describe a father; brave, loving, kind, funny, amazing, super, and much, much more. They will be with us all our lives, to guide us, and to nurture us to be successful. There are multiple extraordinary fathers in the bible, and they are example of fathers who live their lives and guide their families according to the Lord.

One of these fathers is Noah. Noah listened to the Lord, put all his faith in him, and because he did this, he and his family survived the flood since they were in Noah's ark. Even when everyone else made fun of Noah and they thought he was crazy, Noah didn't feel ashamed, and he persisted through with God's plan because he trusted in God.

The parable of the prodigal son is another amazing example of how fathers are affectionate and kind to their family. Even after the younger son left his father and spend all his money foolishly, his father still greeted him with open arms. Most people would probably think the father would be mad after what all the younger son had done to him, but instead, he followed God's way, and he had never-ending love for his sons. When the father saw his younger son, he was full of joy. When his older son felt jealous, he easily calmed him down and explained the meaning of why they were celebrating his son returning home.

So, in this Father's Day, let us give our thanks to the Lord for giving our dads, and our thanks to our dads for taking care of us. Whether it's by giving a card, or by hosting a gathering, let's all celebrate our loving fathers.

Thank you & Happy Father's Day

**Sarah Varghese**  
8th Grade  
St. Thomas  
Los Angeles, CA



# HELLO Summer

St. Gregorios  
KANSAS CITY, KS



End of Sunday School Ice Cream for Teachers and Children - Sunday school children and teachers of St. Gregorios, Kansas City, gathered together on June 22nd for dinner and ice cream at church to celebrate the end of the Sunday school year. The evening began with Evening Prayer followed by a Bible study on the Gospel According to St. Mark and ended with dinner and ice cream. The teachers and children enjoyed the evening filled with prayer, food and fellowship!



# ST. MARY CARROLLTON, TX

Class of  
2024

On a vibrant and spiritually uplifting Sunday, St. Mary's Orthodox Church of India, Carrollton TX marked the end of the Sunday school year with a heartfelt celebration. The event, held immediately after the Holy Qurbana, was filled with joy, gratitude, and reflection as the community came together to honor the achievements of its young members.

The highlight of the ceremony was the honoring of the 12th-grade graduates. These students, who have dedicated years to their religious education and spiritual growth, were recognized for their commitment and perseverance. In a touching moment, each graduate was presented with an Orthodox Study Bible, a significant token of appreciation symbolizing the church's investment in their continued spiritual journey.



# — Summer Events —

*July*  
**20**  
2024

## *Principal's Meeting*

Join the zoom meeting to discuss topics for the 2024 - 25 academic year: Principal's Retreat in Dallas, curriculum, CWE, TTC/ diploma, Ambassadors for Christ

*July*  
**22**  
2024

## *12th Grade Diploma*

Last day to submit exam paper.

*July*  
**31**  
2024

## *TTC*

Last day to submit exam paper for teacher training certification.

*August*  
**04**  
2024

## *Back to School Session*

Back to school meeting via Zoom for all Sunday School children.

*August*  
**31**  
2024

## *Teacher's Session*

Back to school meeting via Zoom for all Sunday School teachers.