



“Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

Matthew 19:14

CHILDREN IN CHURCH

Dear Parents,

Infants and young children are not only welcome, but they are wanted in our church! Our Lord charges us to not hinder them from being near Him, so let's make church-going a priority, indeed an activity we look forward to with enthusiasm, for our families.

Children will inevitably make some noise, need to move around, or even become fussy, but with consistency and positive reinforcement, they will grow to display proper behavior in church. More importantly, by being active members of our church from their youngest years, their lives will be so entwined with it that they will love it and not want to be apart from it!

You are not alone – there are parents here with needy young children, and even more who have had children at one time or another – so your fellow parishioners will have compassion and tolerance during this temporary stage in the children's lives. We can all work together to guide the children of our parish toward proper behavior in church through kindness and by setting a good example.

So, let's fill St. Anthony Greek Orthodox Church with children every week! Our community will embrace them as they grow with Christ!

GUIDELINES TO FOLLOW

1. Arrive for the Divine Liturgy by 9:45am. Teach that being at church is a priority for you and your family. Just as you make sure to arrive to school, work, and other activities on time, do the same for church services.
2. Parents with babies, or very young children, can sit toward the back of the church since their children may need to be taken out of the Nave more often.
3. If your child becomes fussy, try one or more of the ideas and suggestions from the next column. If they don't work, or if the disruption escalates, you should temporarily take your child out of the Nave (parents should be mindful of their fellow parishioners who wish to pray and not take advantage of their patience). You can briefly go to the Small or Large Halls to calm your child. Return to the Nave as soon as possible. This teaches that the proper place to be is in Church, praying.
4. To not interrupt Father from giving his message, and for parishioners to be able to hear his message, it is important for children to be quiet during the sermon. That may mean that children are taken to the Narthex or Halls during that time. You should return to receive the Antidoron and a blessing from Father at the conclusion of the service.

Growing our youngest parishioners in the Faith begins with teaching them how to properly behave in Church. This is a process that will entail some trial and error. However, by welcoming them in our Church, these children will eventually learn behavior that is respectful and conducive to prayer. Our loving community will support parents as they teach their children acceptable Church behavior.

IDEAS & SUGGESTIONS

1. Consistently bring your children to church, every Sunday, throughout the year. They will learn faster with regular practice.
2. Talk to them about what a blessed day it is because they get to go to our Lord's house! Jesus is waiting for them, so they shouldn't be late!
3. Allow them to participate fully in the life of the Church by bringing them to other special services throughout the year.
4. On the way to church, talk about what happens during the Divine Liturgy. Also practice using a "church voice" and how to keep hands and feet quiet. We need to be quiet in church because others are praying. We should be praying, too.

5. During the Divine Liturgy, actively participate and model actions like making the Sign of the Cross, bowing when Father blesses or censes the people, following along in the Divine Liturgy book, praying aloud the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, etc.
6. Continually model how to make the Sign of the Cross the Orthodox way. Point out the use of our right hand, the correct positioning of our fingers, and the proper steps.
7. Explain what is happening in the service as it happens.
8. Point out different icons. Who is in the icon, what does the scene represent, etc.? Especially point out icons of Christ, the Theotokos, St. Anthony, and family members' Patron Saints.
9. Find icons in the Church (even in the Divine Liturgy books or Bulletin) and show your child how to reverence them by making the Sign of the Cross and kissing them. We should teach children that Holy things should not be thrown out or stepped on.
10. Bring along some Orthodox picture books that have icons, symbols, etc. that your child can "read," or you can check out a Quiet Bag from the Sunday School room (Small Hall).

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