

## **From the Font to Fellowship: The Little Saints Ministry**

*Contributor: Jennifer Morris*

On the third Saturday of each month, our youngest parishioners gather with their families for a one-hour program called *Little Saints*. This ministry began in 2017, born out of a realization by our pastor, the Very Reverend Father Aren Jebejian.

He recalls, "One day, after submitting the number of baptisms in our parish to the diocese, it occurred to me that we were leaving a very important thing to chance: that a parent would register and drop off their child to church school four years after celebrating their baptism. There was a missing link in the care of our beloved, youngest members of the church, and that needed to change."

With that vision, Father Aren gathered a group of parent volunteers, supported by our then-assistant pastor, Reverend Father Armash Bagdasarian, and youth coordinator, Lisa Mardigian. Together, they brainstormed and designed a program where families with little ones could feel at home in the sanctuary—surrounded by the sights, sounds, and sacred traditions of our worship.

Today, *Little Saints* is a monthly, one-hour gathering built around four parts:

- Open play
- A themed art project
- A clergy-led lesson with a church connection
- An introduction to the sights and sounds of the sanctuary

On average, a dozen families join us each month, and *Little Saints* has blossomed into a joyful community of fellowship and faith.

In the fall of 2024, the ministry expanded to include weekly gatherings in the *Little Saints Nursery* on Sunday mornings. Over the course of the year, more than 25 families participated, with 5–10 attending regularly. These weekly sessions, open to children from birth to age four, accompanied by an adult, offer art projects and playtime, giving children the freedom to stop in for a break from church or stay all morning. The format not only helps little ones feel comfortable at church but also nurtures friendships and strengthens ties among caregivers in our parish community.

My own daughter, Grace, began attending *Little Saints* before she could even walk or talk. She has since “graduated” to Sunday School and is now entering third grade. While we no longer join the Saturday gatherings, it was important to me that the lessons and framework we created continue to serve other families.

As both a longtime diocesan employee and a former teacher, I compiled the *Little Saints Guidebook*: twenty-four monthly lesson plans aligned with the liturgical calendar, designed to be repeated on a two-year cycle. During the Covid pandemic shutdown, we also created twelve additional lessons for use on Zoom, helping families stay connected from home.

We knew this ministry could bless other communities as well. The guidebook was shared with clergy and youth workers across the Eastern Diocese, and several parishes have since launched their own *Little Saints* programs.

What began as a grassroots effort to bridge the gap between baptism and Sunday School has grown into a vibrant ministry where children and parents come together under the dome of the Church—learning about their faith and drawing closer to God.

We warmly invite you to join us! For more information or to be added to our mailing list, please email [sjlittlesaints@gmail.com](mailto:sjlittlesaints@gmail.com).