

St. John Armenian Church Sunday School

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Making Time

Every Sunday from 10:00am to noon, our Sunday School teachers make a quiet but powerful commitment: to be present for the children entrusted to their care. They come from remarkably different walks of life: teachers, nurses, doctors, accountants, bakers, designers, engineers, attorneys, mothers, and many others in our church family.

What they share matters more than their professions: a willingness to invest their time so the next generation can grow in faith. There is something extraordinary about a child being surrounded by adults who reinforce the same message as their family:

Your faith matters. Your choices matter. You matter to this community.

Our curriculum, provided by the Diocese in New York, follows the **We Believe** program for preschool through twelfth grade. Lessons blend pictures, games, artwork, stories, Bible verses, and thoughtful questions that encourage children to pause and reflect. Teachers also receive weekly materials that connect classroom lessons to the Sunday sermon, helping them present content that is both relevant and biblically grounded.

The goal is not simply for children to *know* about faith. It is to help them begin to *understand* their faith and make it their own. As children grow and encounter bigger questions about relationships, right and wrong, suffering, forgiveness, responsibility, and their place in the world, faith becomes a compass, helping them understand not only what they believe, but who they are.

Our Church School also offers something increasingly precious: a bridge between faith, family, and Armenian heritage. Curriculum materials

incorporate both English and Armenian, introducing children to faith-based terminology in both languages. Prayer is taught and often practiced bilingually. Sometimes the learning travels in the opposite direction, because many of our students come from multilingual families. It is not unusual for a child to help a teacher translate an English word into Armenian. In that small moment, a language is preserved, a child discovers that they have something valuable to contribute, generations connect, and faith intertwines with a heritage that has endured because previous generations cared enough to pass it on. Traditions do not endure automatically. Someone has to teach them.

Children Learn to Worship by Worshiping

Faith is not confined to the classroom. Each week, students in second through eighth grade gather in the St. Vartan Room with Mrs. Paulette Apkarian and Deacon Rubik Mailian to hear the week's message, sing, and pray. This year, they will once again participate in receiving the offering during worship and will continue receiving their portion of the Holy Sacrifice.

Once a month, the children attend church together at 11:00am to participate in confession, Communion, the offering, and the Children's Sermon. These experiences teach what textbooks cannot: the Church is not simply a place their parents bring them. It is a community where they belong, and a faith they can actively live.

Finding Their Own Voice

One of the growing strengths of our Church School is the Youth Choir. Students in fourth grade and above have the opportunity to participate, giving young people another way to become actively involved in the life of the Church.

For some, faith begins with a lesson. For others, it begins while singing beside friends. For another, it may be a teacher who remembers their name, a Bible story that suddenly makes sense, an Armenian prayer they recognize from a grandparent, or the first time they feel comfortable participating in worship. There is no single path. That is why giving children many ways to experience faith matters.

In a world filled with screens, advertising, social pressures, and countless voices competing for attention, two hours spent in a community centered on faith, prayer, service, belonging, and reflection can be remarkably valuable. Sunday School does not replace what children learn at home; it strengthens it. It gives parents partners. It gives children mentors. It gives families another place where the values they teach at home can be heard, discussed, and practiced.

Perhaps the Better Question Isn't "Do We Have Time?"

Families are busy. Sundays are busy. Children have sports, homework, activities, and social lives. Parents are tired. Yet childhood is surprisingly short. Eventually, the little child we drive everywhere becomes the teenager making decisions without us. Then, almost before we are ready, that teenager becomes an adult deciding which pieces of childhood are worth carrying into the next generation. So perhaps the question is not simply, *"Do we have two hours for Sunday School?"* Perhaps it is, *"What do we hope our children will carry with them when they no longer need us to bring them?"*

Knowledge matters. Achievement matters. Experiences matter. Yet faith, character, heritage, community, and a sense of belonging deserve our time as well. Bring your children to Sunday School. Give them the opportunity to learn, question, pray, sing, participate, and grow. Years from now, they may not remember every lesson or every Sunday morning. They may,

however, remember something far more important: ***This was my church. These are my people. This was where I learned what I believe.***"

Honoring Those Who Build the Foundation

A strong Church School does not happen because of books and lesson plans alone. It happens because faithful people show up, year after year, investing in children and helping shape the future of the Church.

This year, we are pleased to welcome **Sophia Kazarian** as our fifth-grade teacher and **Sophia Papazian** as a partner teacher in kindergarten. Both bring valuable teaching experience and join a dedicated team willing to invest their Sunday mornings in our children.

At the same time, we pause to remember those whose commitment and service helped build the foundation upon which our Church School stands today.

In Memory

This year we mourn the passing of our longtime Sunday School Superintendent, **Mrs. Alberta Godoshian**. For seventy years, Alberta dedicated herself to teaching and administering Church School programs, helping generations of children learn and grow in their faith. Her contribution to our Church School community is beyond measure. The high standards she set for Christian education, faithful service, and love for our children continue through the teachers who were blessed to serve under her leadership and example. Her legacy lives on in every lesson taught, every child encouraged, and every act of faith passed to a new generation.

Mr. **Craig Tarpinian** passed away in August of 2025 and the loss of such a kind and thoughtful teacher has not been forgotten. Craig taught third grade during his tenure as a Sunday School teacher and is often referred to

by his students as their 'favorite' teacher. He inspired his students to do their best work in a classroom environment that was rich with active, engaged learning