



Wisdom and Virtue in Christ

**Ann Arbor Orthodox Classical Academy
2023-2024 School Year Report
Respectfully Submitted on 03/06/2024 by: Irene Melabiotis (Interim Head of School)**

Our school year began on September 1/14, 2024, with Divine Liturgy to celebrate the start of the ecclesiastical year, followed by a prayer service to bless the efforts of instructors and students for an intellectually- and spiritually-fruitful school year.

Catechism classes are held on Wednesday mornings and open to all children ages two and up. In September 2023 we welcomed 9 children to the program. The Catechism curriculum this year is 'God, My Friends, and Me,' which is published by the Orthodox Christian Education Commission. The focus of the curriculum has been to establish a solid foundation for their understanding of basic Orthodox dogmas, and various concepts about God and His church. We start each school day with prayer, singing the national anthem, and saying the pledge of allegiance. We say the date and read the life of the Saint of the day.

Since the start of the school year, we have covered such topics as understanding and experience God and His creation through our five senses, the important role of our families in our experience with God, the Church as God's house and the Church family as God's family, the importance of one's patron Saint and how Saints are God's friends, learning about how we can nurture different Christian virtues such as having faith, love, kindness, and goodness, and learning about the sacrament of baptism and the purpose of house blessings, as well as major feast days, including the Nativity of the Theotokos, the Nativity of Christ, and Theophany.

Following Catechism class, the children enjoy lunchtime together, as well as recess time. Recess is followed by science homeschool co-op lessons with six students participating. The program is led and organized by two of our homeschooling parents. Over the last several months, the students have learned various scientific topics including those related to plant parts, the conditions necessary for plants to grow, the planets, learning about how different liquids have different densities and polarities, such as oil and water (through making a lava lamp). The result of various chemical reactions, such as the acid-base reaction of vinegar and baking soda that yields carbon dioxide, water, sodium ion, and acetate ion.

For our Microschooling program, we have four students in our joint Preschool to First Grade class. The students engage in our regular classical curriculum following the conclusion of the Homeschool co-op. The curriculum that we have adapted is from Memoria Press. In my humble opinion, I think it is one of the best, all-encompassing classical Christian curricula available to private schools today. We review all materials and adapt them, as necessary, prior to delivering them to the students.

Currently, our Microschooling students meet two days a week, on Wednesdays and Fridays. On Wednesday afternoons following the Homeschool Co-op, as well as all-day on Fridays. The students are exposed to many subject areas (such as music, poetry, art, language/literature, mathematics), but the two main areas are language/literature and mathematics. In the area of language/literature, each week we have a cutting activity and craft related to the read-aloud book of the week, upon which many other lessons and activities are based. The read-aloud books in the curriculum have been expertly-curated and are drawn from older and modern

classics, both of which are important to facilitate a student's entry into the world of traditional literary, as well as to provide them with strong Christian examples.

The read-aloud books are read with the instructor's guided discussions and, through them, students learn about rhyming and the use of literary devices (such as metaphor/simile, repetition, foreshadowing, personification), as well as making story predictions, the contextual use of new vocabulary, and critical thinking skills.

The students have developed their letter recognition and phonics. In mathematics, the students have developed various skills, such as their number sense, their pattern recognition, their estimation skills, their ability to solve word problems (involving addition and subtraction). In both language and mathematics they are meeting and exceeding their learning goals outlined for their respective grade level.

The students have, also, enjoyed the opportunity to develop their skills of memorization (which assists them with developing their ability to grasp concepts of various difficulty, as well as developing their short and long-term memory), through singing songs and reading and memorizing poems, prayers, and psalms. They hone their fine and gross motor skills with movement and/or hand songs (such as 'Baa, Baa black sheep,' 'Jack and Jill,' 'Itsy Bitsy Spider,' and 'Hickory, Dickory, Dock').

In our Microschooling First Grade program, we have focused on developing vocabulary, spelling (through spelling lists, spelling exercises, and spelling tests), independent reading (through reading assessments), writing neatly and accurately, and cursive writing. My son (and currently the only student enrolled in our Microschooling First Grade program) has experienced great gains throughout the present school year in all of these areas, Glory to God.

In our On-Line First Grade program, taught by Mrs. Anna Ramirez (a fellow Orthodox Christian living in Texas), my son Emmanuel (currently the only enrolled student in the On-Line First Grade program) has grown tremendously and under Mrs. Anna's tutelage has excelled in his acquisition of the skills and achievement of the learning goals for spelling, reading, and mathematics.

We are grateful to have had the help of Mr. Paul Gudan (an assistant instructor with the school from September 2023 until January 2024), as well as the willingness of several volunteers to assist the Academy and instructors, as needed, and the frequent in-class assistance of Mrs. Viktoria Grier (from January 2024 to present).

Overall, we are grateful to God that it has been an intellectually- and spiritually-fruitful academic year for both our Catechism students and those enrolled in our homeschooling programs. We look forward to continuing to work with parents to facilitate students' learning adventures for the remainder of the present school year. And we thank you, the Parish Council members of St. Vladimir Orthodox Church, for your continued prayers and support of our Academy.

We humbly ask for your continued support and prayers for our instructors and students to have a successful rest of the school year. Our Academy families appreciate each of you very much and pray that God blessed each of you and your families abundantly for your efforts!

With love in Christ,

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