

# St. Ambrose Catholic Homeschool Co-Op

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is a co-op?**

A homeschool cooperative (co-op) is a group of like-minded families who meet together and work cooperatively to achieve common goals. Co-ops can be organized around academics, social time, the arts, activities, crafts, service work, or projects — or some combination of these. As St. Ambrose Catholic Homeschool Co-op is an enrichment co-op, children attending St. Ambrose must complete their core subjects at home or in another program as it does not provide the full slate of state-required subjects.

### **Where and when do you meet?**

St. Ambrose Catholic Homeschool Co-op meets at the Basilica of Sts. Peter & Paul from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. on Fridays, from mid-August until mid-May, primarily utilizing the St. Dominic Religious Education Building. Morning assembly begins promptly at 8:30 a.m., morning classes are 8:45-11:45 a.m., Mass is at noon, lunch is from 12:30-1:15 p.m., and afternoon classes are from 1:15-3:30 p.m. We follow the local Catholic school calendars for Fall Break, Christmas Break, and Spring Break and/or Easter (when they are different).

### **Who can join?**

Families committed to homeschooling their children in the Catholic faith are welcome. They must be practicing Catholics and registered parishioners of a Catholic parish near their home in the tri-state area.

### **What is a practicing Catholic?**

A practicing Catholic is someone who at a minimum attends Sunday Mass every week and is a registered parishioner of a local Catholic parish. A practicing Catholic makes a religious assent of the mind and intellect to the Magisterium of the Catholic Church, which is summarized especially in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

### **What if my spouse isn't Catholic?**

As long as one parent is a practicing Catholic (see above) and the children are being raised Catholic, the other spouse does not have to be Catholic.

### **What is VIRTUS? Why do I need to do it?**

The Diocese of Knoxville requires all adults ages 18 and older to complete youth protection training called VIRTUS. Classes are offered periodically throughout the year; a co-op core committee member will communicate dates and times to those who need training. The Basilica and core committee each require a copy of the VIRTUS certificate once training has been completed. Volunteer paperwork and background check paperwork are also required by the Basilica. For more information please visit [www.virtusonline.org](http://www.virtusonline.org)

### **What is expected of me?**

At least one parent or guardian must attend co-op the entire time their children are at co-op. Parents can volunteer to teach a class that fits their talents or will be assigned to assist in a classroom or work in the nursery each period as the needs of the co-op dictate. Per VIRTUS requirements, at least two VIRTUS-trained adults must be present in a classroom at all times. Each parent will be assigned cleaning

duties multiple times per year. Families also are expected to volunteer to help implement our two fundraisers, selling Advent candles after Masses in the fall and a bake sale in the spring.

### **Do I have to stay at co-op?**

Each child at co-op must have a VIRTUS-trained parent/guardian on campus the entire time they are attending co-op classes. Parents may not necessarily be assigned to the classroom(s) their child(ren) are in.

### **Who will be teaching my children?**

Most of the teachers are homeschooling parents with an interest or training in the subjects they teach. Some classes are taught by other members of the Catholic Church community who have expressed a desire or offered to help, and they also must be VIRTUS trained.

### **What classes do you offer?**

Classes vary each school year, but the core curriculum St. Ambrose Co-op focuses on for students in grades 1-8 is Latin, Theology, Science, and the Arts. Past courses have included public speaking, drama, art, music, history, STEM, astronomy, anatomy, chemistry and physics. Children ages 3-5 attend a pre-K/Kindergarten class called Little Lambs focusing on school readiness, reading skills, arts & crafts, and age-appropriate religious instruction.

### **What about high school?**

High school age students take hour-long courses in Latin, Theology and Science (such as Biology, Physics, or Chemistry) or Social Studies (such as Personal Finance, Government, or Economics), depending on what registered students need.

### **What about babies and toddlers?**

St. Ambrose Co-op is blessed to be able to utilize the Basilica nursery during co-op hours. Per State of Tennessee rules, nursery size is limited to 8 if a child younger than 7 months is present, and 12 if children are older than 7 months but younger than 2 years. Mothers with babies and toddlers will not be asked to lead teach but may be asked to assist in a classroom and will need to leave their little ones in the nursery during that time.

### **How long are classes?**

Students in grades 1-8 and Little Lambs take four 45-minute classes each morning. High school students take three hour-long classes each morning. Afternoon classes vary in length depending on the subject.

### **Do my children have to take all courses offered?**

St. Ambrose Co-op requires all students in pre-K to high school to attend all morning courses offered for their grade level.

### **How is my child placed in classes?**

Little Lambs (ages 3-5, pre-K/Kindergarten) must be potty-trained. Children in elementary-age classes must be age 6 by Sept. 1 and be able to read and write. Latin class placement will depend on previous Latin experience and/or a teacher recommendation.

### **How do I register?**

Returning families may register Feb. 1-28. Registration is then open to new families from March 1-April 30. New families must attend an open house or plan a visit during co-op hours before April 30. All families must complete an application. When the application has been approved and the family is committed to joining St. Ambrose Co-op, they must complete a registration form for each child (babies through high schoolers), read and sign a copy of the handbook, sign all waivers, and pay the registration fee. Then they will be invoiced for all class fees.

### **Why do you not accept late registrations?**

As the St. Ambrose co-op is run by a core group of five homeschooling mothers – with a total of 29 children and 65 years of homeschooling experience -- who are volunteering their time and talent to run the co-op, they need ample time to set class sizes, find teachers, choose curriculum, and purchase supplies in order to be ready to start on the first day of classes in August. For those families moving to the area after June 1, the core committee will decide on a case-by-case basis whether they will be able to join.

### **How much does it cost? When is money due? Whom do I pay?**

Co-op registration fee is \$150 per family due at registration for the following school year, with an early-bird discount of \$50 off for those paying in full by March 15. Checks should be made out to Joseph Pricer (co-op treasurer), or contact him to arrange payment by credit card. These fees cover building rental, insurance, cleaning supplies, community outreach, service projects, and an appreciation dinner for our priests.

Co-op class fees vary depending upon the class, ranging from \$5 to \$60 per child per class. Class fees will be due by July 1. St. Ambrose provides all books, materials, and school supplies needed and therefore needs to be able to purchase these materials over the summer. For those unable to pay in full by July 1, they must contact Treasurer Joe Pricer well in advance to work out payment options.

### **Why can I not get a refund if I leave co-op?**

As our classes are set and books and materials are obtained well before classes start, we cannot issue refunds for those materials.

### **How do I keep up with announcements and information?**

The primary means of communication is a platform called Slack, available as a phone/tablet app and as a website on a personal computer. The core committee will ensure your family is connected to Slack. Families are expected to check Slack regularly (as least weekly) as this is where announcements, homework, questions, and other information is posted. Weekly announcements are also made at 8:30 a.m. on Fridays during morning assembly.