

Sharing the Good News: Orthodox Christian Mission

Education Materials in Connection with the Orthodox Church in America's Mission Appeal

Lesson Outline- Teacher Guide

Developed through a combined effort of the Orthodox Church in America's
Department of Youth, Young Adult, and Campus Ministry and Department of Christian Education.

Purpose: These lessons are intended to be a short addition to your regular church school program and used in connection with the Orthodox Church in America's Missions Appeal. They can, however, be used at any time. They are designed to help instill the understanding of mission within the Orthodox Christian Church.

To discuss the mission of the Church as well as our own missionary responsibilities in more depth, see the 7-session study unit "Teach All Nations" available from the Orthodox Christian Publications Center (*phone*: 973-331-9190) or online in *The Hub: Resources for Youth and Young Adult Ministry* at <http://yya.oca.org/TheHub> in the *Study Units/Guides* section under *Catechetical Themes*.

Objectives for Students and Families:

Choose the objectives that will best fit your program.

1. To define the Gospel of Jesus Christ as "The Good News."
2. To list reasons why God wants us to share the Good News about Jesus with other people.
3. To define the words "mission" and "witness."
4. To retell examples of how the saints and others have witnessed in the past.
5. To list examples of ways in which they can witness to Jesus Christ in their daily lives.
6. To explain how their own parish was established.
7. To write about how their family and other families in their parish have helped the Church in North America grow.
8. To list ways families can help others learn about Jesus Christ and His Church.
9. To plan and organize a project to support missions physically and/or financially.

Useful Texts:

Scriptural Texts

- Matthew 28:1-10 (Account of the Resurrection)
- Matthew 28:19-20 (The Great Commission)
- Acts 4:20

Articles:

- "Our Children Are Evangelizers," available on The Hub at <http://yya.oca.org/TheHub/Activities/Projects/ChildrenAreEvangelizers.htm>
- "I'm New Here," available in the Resource Handbook for Lay Ministries at http://www.oca.org/pages/min_orgs/Resource-Handbook/Parish-Development/imnewhere.html
- "27 Things to help rediscover the call for your parish to be again a mission parish," available online at http://www.oca.org/pages/min_orgs/2003missionappeal/27things.html

Lesson Ideas:

Select activities that are most appropriate to your group's age and size, as well as the time you have available, and the resources/materials at your disposal.

Pre-school/ Kindergarten/ Primary (Grades 1-4)

Ask the students, "What were some good things that happened to you recently that you would like to share with us?" Call on volunteers for answers. Teacher continues by relating something exciting from his/her life that involved receiving good news. For example, "One of the happiest things that happened to me was the birth of my cousin Debbie's baby. It was really good news and, as soon as the baby was born, we couldn't wait to share the news with others." Continue by asking students for examples of good news they received in the past few months. After students volunteer answers, ask, "Why do you think we always want to share good news with others?" Record answers on chalkboard or large poster board. Conclude this segment by emphasizing the following: "When we receive good news about someone or something, we always want to tell others about it. Can you imagine how excited Jesus' friends were when they found out that He had been raised from the dead? That was certainly good news, and they couldn't wait to share it with others." Review how the word Gospel means good news.

Read the story of Jesus' Resurrection from Matthew 28:1-10. Ask the students: What was the good news that we heard in this story? Ask, "How do you think everyone felt as they were taking Jesus down from the cross and burying Him? [Sad, upset, etc.] Why do you think they felt this way? [They loved Him and felt that they would never be able to talk to or be with Him again.] Why do you think they thought the message from the angel was good news?" [It meant they would get to see Him, talk to Him, and learn from Him again.] They became the "first witnesses" to the Good News.

Conclude the session by stating: "Jesus' resurrection is good news for all people. It shows us that God loves us, cares about us, and shares a whole new life with us."

Explain that during the month of February the Orthodox Church in America holds a "Mission Appeal" to remind all of the parishes in North America that all Christians are called by God to tell others about Jesus and His Church. Explain that it is also a time when the Church collects money to help support the small mission communities throughout North America that are trying to establish themselves as strong witnesses of Jesus Christ. Make copies and distribute "The Mission of the Church in Our Family" sheet for them to talk about mission with their families. Share their results during the next church school class.

Possible Projects:

- Make "Good News" Cards - Discuss the ways people share good news (they send cards, write letters, call people on the telephone, send e-mails, go and visit them so they can tell them in person, etc.). Restate that Jesus resurrection is THE Good News. Ask the group to think of other things about Jesus that are good news (He became man, He heals people, He forgives people, He gave us the Church, etc.). Have children choose a piece of good news about Jesus that they would like to share with someone and have them make a card for someone (for the Feast of the Nativity, for people in the hospital, for Pascha, etc.).

Intermediate (Grades 5-8)

Important News – Begin the lesson by saying, "There are things we share with people because they need to know about them. For example, our parents tell us to look both ways when we cross the street so that we don't get hit by a car. What do you think are some of the most important things people told you that help you?" [Don't touch hot things, Don't put strange objects in your mouth, Don't talk to strangers, Always say please and thank you, etc.] "As Christians we believe people not only would want to hear about Jesus and His Church, but that they NEED to know about Him. Say, "If we are going to share the Good News of Jesus with others, we have to make sure we think it is good news. Why do you think it is so important for people to know Jesus and to know about His life and teachings? What are some ways we can share this good news?" We can witness by preaching and telling people about Jesus, as well as by doing the good works He commanded. Read Matthew 25:31-46.

My Parish, a Mission? - Ask the parish archivist or priest to lend the teacher any materials that would show your church as it was first established. Invite your priest, members of the parish council, and/or senior members of the parish as guests to this lesson, and lead a discussion on how the parish was founded. Have the students interview a number of founding members and research how the church has grown, any additions to the church property etc. to lead to a discussion on church growth. Ask the questions, how do churches grow, how do they witness, how do they spread the Good News? The students can make collages or create murals depicting your parish through the years. Then ask the students to create a possible plan on how to help the church grow.

Explain that during the month of February the Orthodox Church in America holds a "Mission Appeal" to remind all of the parishes in North America that all Christians are called by God to tell others about Jesus and His Church. Explain that it is also a time when the Church collects money to help support the small mission communities throughout North America that are trying to establish themselves as strong witnesses of Jesus Christ. Make copies and distribute "The Mission of the Church in Our Family" sheet for them to talk about mission with their families. Share their results during the next church school class.

Possible Projects:

- Mission Support – Discuss with the students how they can try to help struggling mission communities. Visit a nearby mission and bring small handmade gifts showing your care and love. Help clean their church, plan a youth activity to bring young people together, plan a fundraiser and donate the money to the OCA Mission Appeal, etc.
- Make a Change for Missions - Create a can at home to collect change for the OCA Mission Appeal. Ask friends and neighbors to contribute loose change to the can. At the end of the month collect all the change, count it, and submit it to the parish treasurer to include with the other money going to the OCA Mission Appeal.

Teens and Young Adults (Grades 9 and up)

Begin this lesson by instructing your students to listen to the following saying and respond individually in their journals. The Saying... "Preach the Gospel. When necessary use words." After the students have had ample time to reflect on this saying, lead the discussion with the following questions: What does it mean to preach without words? How is this possible? In what ways are actions more inspiring than words? Do you know people whose life sets such an example? How does their life emulate this saying?

"If I was not already a Christian, I would become one because...." Have students begin a list of possible endings to this phrase. Be open to everyone's contributions. This is a good time to lead a discussion on what a Christian is. How do they live their lives? What do they do to support their own spiritual growth, that of their family, and especially the spiritual and financial growth of their own parish.

To Believe or Not to Believe - Say, "We've established that we should share the Gospel with others. We, however, must think about what we are saying and how it is important and valuable if we are going to convince others to believe it. Give each participant 3 or 4 index cards. Say, "Write down one thing the Church believes on each 3x5 card. On the opposite side write down why you think it would be important for someone to believe this." Collect the cards and read each one out loud without mentioning who wrote the card. Discuss as a group the benefits of believing this. You may want to discuss what students perceive as the drawbacks as well, since the Christian life is not always easy. As you go through the cards, have them discuss how they could say this to others.

Each of us is called to share the good news of Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection with all people everywhere. The most powerful way we can do that is by leading a Christian life and serving as an example to others-"that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." St. Seraphim of Sarov is often quoted as saying, "Acquire the spirit of peace and around you a thousand will be saved." The saints not only shared their very lives in spreading and teaching the Gospel; they did it with a genuine spirit of peace that impacted others for life.

1. If Orthodox Christian Evangelism takes place most powerfully through our own example, then to what does my life bear witness by its example? What impressions would other people have about my goals and priorities, my faith and my relationship with Christ?
2. What are some concrete ways that I can engage in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ in a) my family; b) with my peers; c) with my community; d) with the world?
3. If a spirit of peace will help save thousands of people, in what areas of my life is a spirit of peace lacking? With what doubts, fears, and struggles of faith do I need to ask help from Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace?

Explain that during the month of February the Orthodox Church in America holds a "Mission Appeal" to remind all of the parishes in North America that all Christians are called by God to tell others about Jesus and His Church. Explain that it is also a time when the Church collects money to help support the small mission communities throughout North America that are trying to establish themselves as strong witnesses of Jesus Christ. Discuss ways in which the group can participate in the Appeal. Make copies and distribute "The Mission of the Church in Our Family" sheet for them to talk about mission with their families. Share their results during the next church school class.

Possible Projects:

- ❑ Greet the visitors at Church for a certain number of Sundays in February. Invite the visitors to attend coffee hour after services and sit with them. For help preparing them to be greeters, review the article I'm New Here (see Useful Texts).
- ❑ Plan a "Fellowship Fest" for your parish using the information in the article, "Our Children Are Evangelizers" (see Useful Texts).
- ❑ Make a commitment to give a portion of earnings or allowances to the Mission Appeal. At the end of the month collect all the funds and submit the check to the OCA Mission Appeal, PO Box 675, Syosset, NY 11791.



The work of the Orthodox Church in America's Department of Youth, Young Adult, and Campus Ministry and Department of Christian Education is funded through the Fellowship of Orthodox Stewards.



The Mission of the Church in Our Family



Mission: God's Call

As a family read Matthew 28:19-20 (The Great Commission).

Orthodox Christians are sent by God to witness to:

- The person of Jesus Christ as the Son of God,
- Jesus Christ's Death and Resurrection,
- The new life open to all through Him, and
- Jesus' teachings about Himself and how people should live.

Our Family Mission Story

Discuss the following questions and statements and share your answers during the next session of church school.

1. How did you and your family come to the Orthodox Christian Church?
2. Did your family come from what is considered a traditional Orthodox country? If so, which one?
3. What are some ways your family expresses its faith at home? In your community?
4. Is anyone in your family a godparent to anyone? What does this mean to you? How does becoming a godparent effect the Church's growth and life?
5. In the Church we refer to other Orthodox Christians as brothers and sisters in Christ. The Church is our spiritual family. What would your family's life be like if you had no spiritual family near you?
6. Discuss as a family the blessings of having a parish to go to as a spiritual home where you can worship, learn more about Jesus and His Church, and be with other Orthodox Christians.
7. As a family share stories about people who have been examples of faith in your life.
8. What are some things your family can do to help others learn about the Good News of Jesus' Death and Resurrection?
9. How has/does your family participate in helping the Orthodox Church grow here in North America?

***Don't forget to assist the Church's missionary efforts by contributing to
OCA Mission Appeal: PO Box 675, Syosset, NY 11791
<http://www.oca.org> and click on 2004 Mission Appeal***