

GOD PROVIDES

HIGH SCHOOL LEADER'S GUIDE

Theme: Seek First the Kingdom of God

Objective: To recognize and understand that during times of hardship, we can find peace by seeking first God's Kingdom and trusting that God provides.

Overview:

- Opening Prayer for Missions
- Activity #1 – Worries In A Hat
- Activity #2 – Read Matthew 6:25-34
- Activity #3 – Read and discuss the Saint in Focus
- Closing Prayers & Assemble OCMC coin boxes.

Materials: Prayer for Missions, sheets of paper, writing utensil, and OCMC Coin Boxes

Note to Teachers:

The Orthodox Christian Mission Center sends missionaries to bring the Good News of Christ to the ends of the earth. Missionaries are ordinary people who followed Christ's commandment to "seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness." Amidst the challenges and turmoil our world faces, missionaries are called by God to go and bring healing of both soul and body to those in need. He has prepared them for their ministry and will provide the tools needed to care for the whole person. Together with the local leaderships within the communities that they serve, they share the peace that is found in God's kingdom. Let us look to those who participate in the mission of the Church as we transcend the troubles of our times. They are examples for how we too can spread the peace of God's kingdom to those around us.

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Opening Prayer:

Prayer for Missions

God of Truth: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, hear our prayer for those who do not know You, that they may come to a saving knowledge of the truth and that Your Name may be praised among all peoples of the world. Sustain, inspire, and enlighten your servants who bring the Gospel. Bring fresh vigor to wavering faith; sustain our faith when it is still fragile. Continually renew missionary zeal in ourselves and in the Church, and raise up new missionaries who will follow You to the ends of the world. Make us witnesses to Your goodness, full of love, strength, and faith for Your glory and for the salvation of the entire world. For you are a merciful and loving God and to You we give glory, to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Activity #1:

Worries In A Hat

This is a teambuilding exercise that promotes unity and fellowship within the group. Pass out sheets of paper and have each person (students and leaders) write down a personal worry or struggle then collect them in a hat. Next, shuffle the sheets of paper and have a student randomly choose one from a hat. If they received their own, have them take another paper. After each person has one, take turns reading aloud. Let the reader try to explain how this worry or struggle might have an impact on the person's life. Do not allow any comments until all the readers are done. Have the group simply listen.

After all the worries have been read and elaborated, discuss what some of the common worries or struggles were. If the group is comfortable, have the readers share a similar worry or struggle from their own life.

Remember: Let the students know all that is shared stays within the group. As brothers and sisters in Christ, it is important that we respect and love each person here. There

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may be times when participants feel vulnerable and slightly uncomfortable. Encourage them to explore more about it to learn or gain insight about themselves. Let this lead into today's discussion.

Activity #2: Read Matthew 6:25-34

Explain to the students that the reading in this lesson is from Jesus's Sermon on the Mount found in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus teaches His disciples and followers about how to live a life dedicated to God. Our focus of this lesson is found in Matthew 6:33, seeking first the Kingdom of God in times of hardship. If possible, separate the scripture reading into parts to have your students take turns reading out loud. Help facilitate discussion following the reading. Especially focus on verses 31-34:

31 Therefore do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" 32 For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

Questions:

- What is this passage about? What does Christ say about facing our worries?
- When He says, "do not worry about tomorrow," what is He asking us to do?
- Who do we have to help us face our struggles?
- How might be distracted from seeing God's provision evidenced in our lives?
- What are some ways we can actively seek out the Kingdom of God during times of worry and struggle?

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Discussion: (Reflect on this rather than read to your students)

Explore with your students how life is like a road trip or journey. On this journey, we strive to reach our destination: God. Along the way, we encounter “speed bumps” that slow us down or keep us from reaching our goal. They can be things we need like food, water, or shelter. Other times, they are struggles or conflicts like breaking up with a boyfriend/girlfriend, losing a loved one, arguing with a parent, failing an exam, not getting into a college, etc.

Encourage your students to share any struggles that they are facing, even if it's small. Be sensitive that some may be apprehensive to share their own.

Remind your students that we all encounter struggles that life has thrown at us. Sometimes they come out of nowhere, or, often times, it seems like one worry comes after another. When we focus on our struggles, we start to rely on ourselves to solve our problems. This shifts our focus away from God.

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you” (Matthew 6:33). We are reminded that our Heavenly Father does not want us to worry. God knows what we need even before we ask for it. He gives us food to eat and water to drink. He gives us our family, friends, teachers, and priests to help us during troubling times. We also have the Church as a place to meet Christ and His deep love for us. God loves everyone and calls out to us daily, ready to provide what we need to overcome our struggles. We need only to seek Him out through prayer and lay our worries at the His feet. When we do this, we grow our trust in Him. With this trust, we find peace; knowing that God will provide.

Ask your students to share examples of how God provides for them during times of struggle.

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As we direct our lives towards God, He wants us to share His peace with those struggling around us. He calls on us to be “missionaries” and serve as loving witnesses and stewards of our Faith to a world seeking His Kingdom. Some people may dedicate months, years, or even their whole lives to serving as missionaries full-time. Some are clergy and seminarians, doctors, educators, and even craftsmen, each with the purpose of uniting people to Christ. Today, the Orthodox Christian Mission Center supports over 25 OCMC missionaries serving in communities around the world. They are in places like Albania, Romania, South Korea, Guatemala, and more. Ask the students to keep the missionaries in their prayers this coming Lenten season, asking that God brings them and everyone they serve peace.

Activity #3: Saint in Focus

Read the life of St. Maria of Paris

Read aloud or have the students to take turns reading portions of the life of St. Maria of Paris. Reflect on how her life is an example that we can follow.

Discussion

- What difficulties did St. Maria encounter as she tried to follow Christ?
- Do we encounter or see the same difficulties today? How are they alike or different?
- What lessons are there for us to learn from the life of St. Maria living in these times of trouble?
- How does Matthew 6:25-34 help us to view this story?

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Closing:

Discuss how God is working in your students' lives and encourage the students to participate in the ministry of missions. Have them assemble and take home OCMC Coin Box to fill and return at a time you decide upon. Share that these funds will be used to support the ministries of the Mission Center to support those who are working to bring God's provision to the whole world. Remind the students of their role in spreading the peace found in Christ and His kingdom.

Closing Prayer:

Prayer of Saint Philaret, Metropolitan of Moscow

This prayer is a wonderful way to end the class and start the week. It helps us to align ourselves towards Christ and place in Him our trust to guide us through the day.

O Lord, grant me to greet the coming day in peace. Help me in all things to rely upon Your holy will. In every hour of the day reveal Your will to me. Bless my dealings with all who surround me. Teach me to treat all that comes to me throughout the day with peace of soul, and with the firm conviction that Your will governs all. In all my deeds and words guide my thoughts and feelings. In unforeseen events let me not forget that all are sent by You. Teach me to act firmly and wisely, without embittering or embarrassing others. Give me strength to bear the fatigue of this coming day with all that it will bring. Direct my will, teach me to pray, pray You Yourself in me. Amen.

SAINT IN FOCUS

THE LIFE OF ST. MARIA OF PARIS

Feast day: July 20

Would you be willing to hide young children in trashcans to provide them with a safe place to live? This was one of the many unselfish acts of Mother Maria of Skobtsova. Elizaveta Pilenko was born into a very rich family on December 8, 1891, in Riga, Livonia, present day Latvia.

At the age of 15, after the unexpected death of her father, her mother moved the family to St. Petersburg. Elizaveta was so distraught after his death that she left her family, became an atheist, and aimlessly wandered the streets of St. Petersburg. A cousin took Elizaveta to her first poetry reading, to help her deal with feelings of anger and grief. It was during this time that she wrote her first two free verse poems, which resulted in the publication of her first volume of poetry, *Scythian Potsherds*, four years later.

At the age of nineteen, in 1910, she married her first husband, Dmitri Vladimirovich Kuzmin-Karavaev, but after short time the marriage ended and Elizaveta's mother moved the family to Anapa, in southern Russia. In the fall of 1913, her first child, a daughter, Gayana, was born. When Elizaveta was twenty-seven, she became mayor of Anapa. During her mayoral term, she was arrested and tried for being a Bolshevik. During the trial she met Daniel Skobtsova, who presided as judge. After her acquittal, she fell in love, and married Daniel. Due to political turmoil, her family decided to flee the country. The first stop in their journey was the country of Georgia, where their son, Yuri, was born. The journey continued through the Balkans, during which a daughter, Anastasia, was born. After five years, their journey culminated in Paris, France.

Three years after they arrived in Paris, Anastasia died of influenza. The stress of her daughter's death caused Elizaveta to dedicate her life to the needs of others. With the advice of her bishop, to take her monastic vows, she asked Daniel for a divorce. An

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ecclesiastical divorce was granted, and she professed her monastic vows in 1932 with the guarantee that she would not live in a monastery. She took the name Maria, after St. Mary of Egypt. Being keenly aware of the needs of society, she founded a social service group called Orthodox Action, which met the needs of the “whole” person. She opened a house for the less fortunate and lonely of Paris. This was just the beginning of her many unselfish acts of kindness. The house provided rooms for the homeless, and many times Mother Maria, because of the lack of space, would sleep by the boiler. One of the rooms was used as an Orthodox chapel, in which Mother Maria painted the icon screen. Divine Liturgies were held on Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays. So many needy people flocked to the house that it soon became too small, and another building was acquired in 1935, serving more than 22,991 meals that year to those less fortunate.

During World War II, when the Nazis took Paris, the house founded by Mother Maria became a shelter for many Jews. She was assisted in her work by a young priest, Fr. Dimitri Klepinin, as well as her son Yuri and her mother Sophia. They helped Jews escape and provided them with necessary documents. On one terrible occasion, the Nazis gathered a huge crowd of Jews into a stadium with little food or water. Mother Maria worked with local trash collectors to get a few children into trash cans and out of the stadium to safe places.

Because her selfless acts went against the extermination plans the Nazis had for all Jews, Mother Maria prisoner 19263 was arrested and, along with two hundred other women spent the last two years of her life in the Ravensbruck concentration camp. To record the deaths at the camp, she would embroider the names of those tortured on a special cloth, to be displayed in the church at in Paris. Many times, she would trade the bread she received so she could have the thread she needed for her embroidery. She never complained, and often she would bargain for the other prisoners. She believed the daily Eucharist gave her the strength she needed to help others.

Two months before her death, on January 31, 1945, Mother Maria was transferred to Jugendlager Youth Camp a kilometer away from Ravensbruck. It was here that no fewer

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than 50 people died daily. The camp was also equipped with a gas chamber that had a capacity of 150 prisoners. Even in the midst of this death, Mother Maria worked on her last embroidery project. It depicted the Mother of God with a crucified child in her arms. Mother Maria felt it would help her to leave the camp alive. On Holy Friday, in 1945, Mother Maria was selected for death and died in the gas chamber. Some even say she offered herself in exchange for another prisoner.

Troparion (Tone 4): St. Maria of Paris

You became a bride of Christ, O venerable Mother,
And offered your body and soul to Him as a living sacrifice.

You exposed the evil side of humanity's ways
By allowing the light of the Resurrection to shine forth from you.

We celebrate your memory in love.

O Martyr and Confessor Maria

Pray to Christ our God that He may save our souls.

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