

How Orthodox Christians Share Their Faith.

Leader's Guide

Level: Elementary & Middle School

Overview: The purpose of this lesson is to examine different ways the Orthodox Church does mission work and how these things all work together to share the Faith. This will be done through the following:

- Reading Scripture that reinforces the underlying principal behind this concept.
- Engaging in a discussion about how and why we love others as a way to share the Faith.
- Sharing a story of how mission ministries have worked together to help establish the Church in Albania.
- Participating in activities that reinforce the various aspects of Orthodox missions ministries and in prayer and support for those ministries.

Read: *John 13:31-35*

When he had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, "Where I am going, you cannot come." I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'

Discussion Questions: How do you show your love for others?

Why is it so important for us to love others?

How would you describe Christ to someone who had never heard of Him before?

How would you demonstrate who Christ is to them?

Story *Reintroducing Albanians to Christ*

Imagine if your classroom or church hall was being used to store food for animals. Imagine the altar destroyed. Imagine your family having to bury their icons in the backyard so they don't get arrested for having them. Imagine going to school and having your teacher tell you that anyone who believes in God is crazy or dangerous. Imagine, that because of all of this, no one around you seems to believe in God. No prayers before meals. No Christmas. No place to go for help if you are scared or going through hard times. Imagine how lonely that would feel. This is exactly what the country of Albania was like a just a little more than twenty years ago.

From the 1940s to the 1990s, a government was in power in Albania that made all religion illegal. For nearly 50 years this government destroyed churches, put Christians in prison, and taught that religion was bad. When that government lost power in 1990 nearly no one in Albania believed in God. Not only had people lost their Faith, but they were starving. Hospitals and clinics could not provide good care for people and important things like roads, buildings, and powerplants were falling apart.

It was into this dire situation that Archbishop Anastasios was sent to help rebuild the Orthodox Church. You see, before the government had banned religion Albania was full of Orthodox Christians and hundreds of Orthodox churches. In 1990, Albania was home to over three million people. How do you re-introduce three million people to Christ?

Archbishop Anastasios needed a plan and he needed some help. Thankfully, the Church has been sharing the Faith with people for over 2,000 years and the Saints of the Church who have done this best in the past have shared their wisdom with us so that we can continue their work.

We know that Christ is Truth, Hope, and Love. Archbishop Anastasios needed to show this to an entire nation of people. He knew he could do this by helping them to rebuild their lives as he worked to rebuild the Church. By the grace of the Holy Spirit, and by working closely with the worldwide Orthodox Church, especially with the Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC) here in the United States, Archbishop Anastasios was able to see the Church in Albania rebuilt and hundreds of thousands of people find joy and hope in the Faith.

To do this, the Archbishop welcomed numerous Orthodox missionaries. Many were sent by OCMC from the United States. For years, they lived with the Albanian people learning their language, serving those in need, and teaching the Faith. Those missionaries would welcome teams of short-term volunteers to help with important projects like running youth camps and establishing outreach ministries. As churches began to be rebuilt and ministries began to grow, priests were needed. The Archbishop opened a seminary and missionaries began training Albanians to become priests and church leaders.

Donations from around the world also came in to help build these churches along with a seminary for training priests. These gifts also helped to establish schools and even a university. As these amazing things unfolded more and more people saw all that the Church was doing for the Albanian people. The Truth, Hope, and Love of Christ was being shared and many became interested in the Faith. As they were welcomed into the Church through Holy Baptism, they would tell their friends and family and the Church would grow more.

Guided and strengthened by the Holy Spirit, the Church reached out to the Albanian people

in many ways. All of this outreach worked together to share the Faith and re-establish the Church in Albania.

Exercises: ***Exercise 1 - Charades***

Materials

1. ***Scissors***
2. ***Stapler***
3. ***A copy of the attached prayer chain handout for each student***

To reinforce the idea that the Faith is shared in different ways and that these strategies are all connected, have each student cut out the links in the prayer chain handout. Once they have cut them out, have them staple the missionary link into a loop. Feed the team member link through the missionary loop and then staple the team member link into a loop as well. They should then be connected. Continue with all the links until each student has built a prayer chain of mission ministries.

Explain that each of these things works together to share Christ with the world, just like in the story you read earlier. Instruct each student to take their prayer chain home. Every night, before bed, have them take off one of the links and read it (out loud to their families if they are comfortable) and to pray the prayer on the link

Exercise 2 - Coin Boxes

We use the 40 days of Great Lent to prepare to celebrate Pascha. We do this by fasting, by spending more time praying, and focusing more on helping others instead of worrying so much about ourselves. Over these next 40 days, as you prepare for Pascha, remember those people who are preparing to become missionaries. Each day, pray for them. As you fill up your coin box, think about how the money that you collect will help people to become missionaries through the Orthodox Christian Mission Center.

DID YOU KNOW?

Orthodox missionaries come from parishes just like yours. They live and serve in countries around the world for years at a time. They learn the language of the people they help so they can share the Orthodox Faith with them.



PRAYER FOR MISSIONARIES

O God, our God, Who sent Your Only-Begotten Son for our salvation, send down Your Holy Spirit upon all Orthodox missionaries, that they may proclaim Your Good News and share Your love. May their service glorify Your Most Holy Name. Amen.

DID YOU KNOW?

Every year, nearly 150 Orthodox Christians from across the United States volunteer to serve on short-term mission teams. Team members teach the Faith, offer healthcare, run youth camps, and build things like churches and schools.



PRAYER FOR TEAM MEMBERS

Most Holy Trinity, travel with Orthodox team members. Keep them strong in body and soul so that they may be a light to those still in darkness. Grant that they may fulfill Your command to make disciples of all nations. Amen.

DID YOU KNOW?

There are Orthodox priests serving all over the world, even in places like Africa and Asia. Sometimes, these priests have two or more parishes. Often, they have to walk to these churches because they can't afford cars. They love it when people from America visit them.



PRAYER FOR MISSION PRIESTS

O Lord Jesus Christ, fill the hearts of all Your priests with love for You. Give them strength that they may labor in Your earthly vineyard for the salvation of our souls and the glory of Your Honorable and Majestic Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

DID YOU KNOW?

One of the best ways to share the Faith is through action. Every year, Orthodox Christians just like you donate money to help build wells, schools, and churches for people in need. They also get medicines for the sick and help care for orphans.



PRAYER FOR LOVING OTHERS

Christ my God, grant that I may love You with all my heart, with all my mind, with all my soul, and with all my strength, and my neighbor as myself, so that I may glorify You the Giver of every good and perfect gift. Amen.

DID YOU KNOW?

Our Orthodox Church is growing all over the world! New churches are built all the time. Priests are needed for these churches. We help by sending people from different countries to special schools called seminaries so they can learn how to be priests.



PRAYER FOR SEMINARIANS

O Christ, the Giver of light and wisdom, who opened the eyes of the blind man and transformed the fishermen into wise teachers of the gospel through the Holy Spirit, shine in the hearts of seminarians so they may abound in every good work for Your honor and glory. Amen.