

# THE LIGHT OF CHRIST

## 9TH - 12TH GRADE LEADER'S GUIDE

**Theme:** *"I have set you as a light..." (Acts 13:47-49)*

**Objectives:**

- **Introduce** the idea of *being a light* to others for the love of Christ.
- **Establish** a connection between *being a light* to all people and the words of Acts 13:47.
- **Understand** how we open our hearts to *be a light* to others and help those who are sharing Christ's love to all people around the world.
- **Challenge** the students -- Christ commands us to share our faith, to *be a light* to all people. Praying each day for our brothers and sisters around our world is also a way of sharing our faith.
- **Identify** the ways that the love of Christ impacted the life of Fr. Evangelos and how he has become a light to those around him. Connect how the Good News spread throughout the region in the Scripture verse, with how Orthodoxy is spreading in Guatemala.
- **Act** by making the connection that Christ shared His gifts by helping, healing, and saving people. We can help people by collecting funds during Great Lent. Putting money in the Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC) Coin Boxes supports the work of the Mission Center so that many others are empowered to be a light to all nations.

**Lesson Overview:**

- Begin with **A Prayer For Missions** prayer.
- Read the Scripture verse in Acts 13:47-49.
- Activity #1 Meet Fr. Evangelos - Read Fr. Evangelos' story.
- Activity #2 Student Work Sheets & Discussion Questions.
- Activity #3 Assemble & Discuss OCMC Coin Boxes.
- End with a closing prayer.

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### Lesson Materials:

Bibles, copies of the Prayer for Missions, handouts, writing utensils (pencils, markers, etc.), and OCMC Coin Boxes.

**Opening Prayer:**      *See the attached prayer*

**Scripture Verse:**    **Read Acts 13:47-49 from your Bible**

*For so the Lord has commanded us: "I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth." Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region.*

Introduce the idea of *being a light* in this passage. **Emphasize** that:

- Christ commands us (all of us) to *be a light* and to proclaim the Good News to all.
- The Good News of the "Word of the Lord" is that Christ offers us salvation.
- We are to declare to all the nations the wonderful things that God has done for us.
- It is important to have faith in Jesus Christ and to show respect for others when we share our faith with others.

**Activity #1:**      **Read Meet Fr. Evangelos**

Read the short story about Fr. Evangelos, Vicar of the Orthodox Church in Guatemala. Learn what it means to share the light of Christ and discuss the challenges he has had to face as a spiritual father and leader of a growing Church under the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Mexico.

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Ask the students to look at the pictures and read the captions. Discuss their impressions about the Guatemala mission (reference the teacher notes for more information). Ask the students how the Church in Guatemala is different from their own community.

*\*This is a great opportunity to highlight the lesson objectives to **Understand, Challenge,** and **Identify** listed in the **Objectives** section on **page 1**.*

### **Activity #2: Reflection Questions**

Pass out the Reflection Questions handout and discuss using the talking points below.

*The following are possible talking points for each question:*

**Question #1** - Some responses may include being a good listener, patient, caring, compassionate, or seeing all of those around us as a brother or sister in Christ! Approach others like Christ would and keep those people in our prayers. We should feel comfortable speaking about Christ and our Faith as well. Whether they are friends or not, live near us or far away, they are brothers and sisters, and we should pray for them daily.

**Question #2** - Fr. Andrés Girón was a *light of Christ* for Fr. Evangelos.

**Question #3** - Discuss what your students shared. Highlight the point that the Guatemala mission is only 12 years old. Ask them if they knew there were Orthodox Churches in Guatemala and were they surprised by how quickly they are growing. Compare that to how old your parish community is or how long your students have been Orthodox.

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**Question #4** - Have the students take a moment to think about their interactions with their friends, teachers, parents, and how they approach them, including people they do not like. Discuss what it would take for them to *be a light* for someone they do not like or that does not like them. How does this compare to hanging out with a **stranger from Guatemala** and *being a light* with them?

**Question #5** – In the Scripture verse, Saints Paul and Barnabas shared the light of Christ with Gentiles (strangers). They rejoiced and told others, and Christianity spread throughout the “region.” We receive the light again and again every Pascha (Easter). With whom do we share the light?

**Question #6** - They can commit to pray each day for missionaries and the Church in mission regions. They can *be a light* to their neighbors here in North America. They can participate in the OCMC Coin Box program and encourage their community to become more involved in missions, maybe even sending a team from the parish to another country!

### **Activity #3: Assemble & Discuss OCMC Coinboxes**

Have your class assemble the OCMC Coin Boxes and discuss how these funds will be used to support the ministries of the Mission Center to spread the Gospel around the world. Send the coin boxes and parents' letter home with the students. Ask them to pray for missionaries who are sharing the light of Christ. Give the students an assignment to find ways to *be a light* to others during the weeks of Lent; fill and then return the coin boxes at the appropriate time. Extra coin boxes are available by emailing a request to [coinbox@ocmc.org](mailto:coinbox@ocmc.org) or calling 904-829-5132 or 1-877-GO-FORTH (463-6784).

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### Follow-up:

Start collecting the coin boxes on St. Thomas Sunday (the first Sunday after Pascha). Remind your students of their role in spreading the light of Christ around the world. Once collected, return the funds to OCMC by a check with a note identifying the name of your parish.

### Closing Prayer:

Lead your students in a closing prayer. Please include Fr. Evangelos, the clergy and Orthodox faithful living in Guatemala, and the work of OCMC and OCMC missionaries who share Christ's light throughout the world. Visit <https://www.ocmc.org/how-we-serve/missionaries> for the current OCMC missionaries serving around the world.

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### A Note to Teachers:

**The Orthodox Church in Guatemala experience rapid growth when** a group of tens of thousands of Guatemalan and Mexican peoples came into the Orthodox Church under the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Mexico. Many of the converts are descendants of the ancient Mayan people who live in Central America. The Mayan people suffered near-genocide when hundreds of villages were destroyed and hundreds of thousands of Mayans were killed during years of civil war. Fr. Andrés Girón, a former Catholic priest, was a charismatic leader in the land reform movements. He unified the diverse Mayan communities and, in 2010, brought tens of thousands of Mayans into the Orthodox Church. This was one of the largest mass conversions in the history of Orthodox Christianity in the Western Hemisphere. According to Fr. John Chakos, OCMC Mission Specialists to Guatemala, *"this massive influx of native people is probably the greatest ministry challenge facing the Orthodox Church today."*

**The San Andrés (St. Andrew) Seminary** in Aguacate (a-gua-ka-te) opened its doors in 2017. In 2021 the seminary moved to Huehuetenango (vey-vey-te-nan-go), means "Place of the Ancients" in Spanish, where a new and larger facility is being constructed. The new center was renamed the *"Saints Peter and Paul Seminary and Formation Center."* The new center is needed to accommodate the hundreds of catechists who come for retreats and seminars. Several OCMC missionaries serve in Guatemala, helping these young communities grow by serving as teachers, translators, and assisting with sacraments when able. One of OCMC's primary objectives is to support and equip local churches to train their own clergy and leaders. We seek to establish vibrant eucharistic communities and share the *light* and faith in Christ with all people. The Orthodox in Guatemala are hoping to share the light of Christ and the Orthodox Faith with other Central and South American communities.

*\*For more information about Guatemala, please reference the 4th - 8th grade lesson.*

# MEET FR. EVANGELOS

## SHARING THE LIGHT OF CHRIST IN GUATEMALA



*Fr. Evangelos baptizing a young man while visiting one of the many Orthodox communities throughout Guatemala & Southern Mexico.*

Fr. Evangelos is a beloved and hardworking priest. He devotes every day to furthering the work of Orthodoxy throughout Guatemala and southern Mexico. Following in the footsteps of St. Paul, Fr. Evangelos travels from village to village to serve the Divine Liturgy and care for the physical and spiritual needs of the people. Often, he will arrive at a community after a two-hour drive, celebrate the Divine Liturgy with hundreds of people, and

then perform any number of sacraments. It could be 25 baptisms, 5 weddings or 100 chrismations. When he's finished, Fr. Evangelos packs up the car and moves on to the next community.

Who are the people he serves? They are the descendants of the ancient Mayan civilization, which lived in Central America. They suffered greatly from civil war which lasted decades. Fr. Andrés Girón, a heroic figure who fought for the Mayan people, shared the light of Christ with them. In 2010, when he led thousands of people into the Orthodox Church, Fr. Evangelos was one of the handful of clergy to join him. Sadly, Fr. Andrés fell asleep in the Lord in 2014. Fr. Evangelos was elected to take his place as vicar of the Guatemala mission because he had vision, a charismatic spirit, and a strong work ethic.



*Fr. Evangelos preaching on the Good News of Jesus Christ.*



# MEET FR. EVANGELOS

## SHARING THE LIGHT OF CHRIST IN GUATEMALA

The Orthodox mission has grown rapidly over the last 12 years. Fr. Evangelos is their spiritual father. He continues to share the light of Christ with over 135 Orthodox communities in Guatemala -- tens of thousands of faithful -- and another 25 communities -- with 3,000 more faithful -- in Southern Mexico.

It is a great challenge to care for the needs of so many. Fr. Evangelos has just five local clergy whom he assigns to various areas of the mission. The village elders have become the resident catechists for their parish. They provide reader services, until a priest can come to perform the sacraments. As OCMC Missionary, Fr. John Chakos said, *"these catechists are the backbone of the Orthodox Church."*



*At a recent catechists' retreat in Huehuetenango, more than 100 catechists came to learn how to "share the light of Christ" with their villages. Nevertheless, the catechists cannot fill the tremendous need for more priests and frequent sacraments. More people must be trained, both as priests and as skilled lay leaders. "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few..."*



# STUDENT WORKSHEET

## SHARING THE LIGHT OF CHRIST IN GUATEMALA



*In addition to his many duties, Fr. Evangelos is also the spiritual leader of ten young seminarians. These young men come from all over the mission, attracted by his "light and joy".*



*In 2021 the Church transferred the small seminary of San Andrés to a new location in Huehuetenango and renamed it the "Saints Peter and Paul Seminary and Formation Center." Construction is nearly complete through the efforts of the catechists. Rotating groups of 20 catechists at a time take turns working for a few weeks.*



*His Eminence Metropolitan ATHENAGORAS also blessed and opened the doors of the new Holy Protection Church in Xican in the village of Mayaland. The seminarians helped to complete the iconostasis and prepare the church for the celebration. The church is beautiful and the students can take pride in knowing that they built it with their own hands.*



*At the end of 2022, Fr. Evangelos had the great joy to receive Metropolitan ATHENAGORAS, of Mexico and Central America. He came to the mission to ordain two seminarians as deacons in the Church. Now, there is one vicar, five priests, and two deacons. There is a tremendous need for more priests.*

# I HAVE SET YOU AS A LIGHT

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

**Jot down some of your thoughts and share them as a class.  
Use a separate sheet if necessary.**

1. What does it mean to be a *light* for someone else? Who shared the light of Christ with you?
2. After listening to the story of Fr. Evangelos, identify who was a *light* in his life and shared Christ with him?
3. Did you know there were Orthodox Churches in Guatemala? Did you study about the Mayan civilization in school?
4. How can you be a light in your daily life at school?
5. In the Scripture verse, Paul and Barnabas shared the *light of Christ* with the Gentiles (non-Jewish or strangers) and they rejoiced and told their family and friends about Jesus Christ. Who have you shared the *light of Christ* with?
6. What can you do in your parish and your home to remember your Orthodox brothers and sisters who live in other countries like Guatemala, Africa, Indonesia, etc.?

# A PRAYER FOR MISSIONS

God of truth and love, 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 them 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; 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 the salvation of the entire world.

Through the prayers of St. Paul, St. Photini, Ss. Cyril and Methodios, St. Kosmas, St. Innocent, St. Nicholas of Japan, and all the missionary saints, have mercy on us and save us.

Amen.

T O T H E E N D S O F T H E E A R T H