

GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES

OCMC Mission Sunday

Middle School Lesson: 6th - 8th Grade

Theme: *“Go and Make Disciples, Baptizing and Teaching Them”*

Lesson Goals:

- **Introduce** the students to the ‘Great Commission’ (Matt. 28:19-20). Explain that mission work is essential to being the Church and obeying Christ’s teaching.
- **Teach** the students through Romans 10:14-15 the reason we send missionaries out into the world and what the message means.
- **Illustrate** modern-day Orthodox mission work with the story of the Jones missionary family and the mission in Kingdom of Tonga.
- **Explain** how beautiful churches *“proclaim, with the eloquent silence of beauty, that God had come to dwell amongst humanity.”* (His Beatitude ANASTASIOS of Albania, *Orthodox Mission, Past, Present and Future*, p.194.)
- **Challenge** students to be involved in missions.

Lesson Overview:

- Opening Prayer.
- Introduce the lesson by explaining that today is OCMC Mission Sunday.
- Read together the story of the Jones family, OCMC Missionaries serving in Tonga, and St. George Orthodox Church in Tonga. Discuss how missionaries are bringing the fullness of faith to the Tongan people.
- Explain that the Tongans are well-prepared to receive the Orthodox faith.
- Challenge your students to be involved by taking a coinbox home and saving to support missions. Brainstorm other ways to serve.

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Lesson Materials:

- Bible with Old and New Testaments;
- Laptop and Projector, if available (if not available, print out the lesson as pdf)
- Internet access, if available
- OCMC video on the Jones family*
- Pencil and paper
- Coinboxes and letter for parents
- Google Maps and Google Earth link for South Pacific. See **Additional Resources** for links and address of the Tonga mission..

*For digital resources of this lesson visit: www.ocmc.org/resources/educational-materials

Lesson Overview

Opening Prayer

Let us pray to the Lord. Lord, have mercy.

Lord, bless our time together to learn of your mission work in the world. Open our minds and hearts to all the beauty and peace found in Your Way of salvation and love. May we walk in Your Way at home and abroad, drawing us and those we encounter ever closer to each other and to you.

Amen.

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Lesson Procedure

Introduce Mission Sunday:

Today is **OCMC Mission Sunday**, recognized and set aside under the **Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States** for all Orthodox churches to focus on this essential practice of the Orthodox faith.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into the world for a reason. He told how He would save all people and reunite them to God. He gave all the people a commandment to take part in this sacred mission.

Have your students volunteer, assign readers, read out loud together, or set up Read Teams* to review the following two passages from the Bible.

1. Matthew 28, known as the 'Great Commission.'
2. Romans 10:14-15.

* Two-person student teams can alternate reading aloud, switching each time there's a new verse.

Read Scripture Passages

Bible Verse 1

Matthew 28:18-20 (NKJ) "The Great Commission"

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

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Bible Verse 1 (cont...)

Exegesis (How Teachers can interpret the Bible Verses to their students.)

Christ did not come to save only a few people. He came to save the whole world! At the Ascension, His parting words to His Church was to complete this work; to bring the Gospel message of truth to all people, baptize and teach them, and to remain close to Him. This is the Great Commission for all Orthodox Christians to follow. It is the Gospel reading during our Baptism. A call for all of us to fulfill Christ's last and great command as His missionaries.

***Word Origin:** *(Reference Bible Verse 2 for more words if necessary)*

- **Nations** - ἔθνη (ethnae, éthnē), does not refer to political boundaries, but tribes or people groups that share a common culture. Many political nations contain dozens or even hundreds of ethnic groups with their own language and customs.
- **Gospel** - εὐαγγελίζω (evangelizo, ev-an-ge-lí-zo) – good news, the truth, the teachings of Jesus Christ. Christians are Christ's disciples, messengers of His truth, ambassadors of God's beloved Son (Col. 1:12-13).

Talk About It!

Teachers Facilitate Group Discussion:

Teachers, prompt discussion amongst your young adults. Reference the Exegesis Section as needed based on your class's discussion. Ask, "*What do these verses mean?*" Get their feedback and expand as needed. Points that they need to understand:

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Bible Verse 1 (cont...)

1. When Jesus commanded his disciples to go to all nations, where was he telling them to go? He was telling them to go and make disciples of everyone regardless of background and identities. Reference the exegesis word origin of “nations”.
2. When did Jesus give to the Church the Great Commission? Emphasize the importance of the Feast of Ascension and the last charge He gave each of us to take responsibility for sharing His message of love and salvation.

Possible Reflection Questions:

- **Question #1** - What is the Great Commission? Why is it important?
- **Question #2** - What does it mean to “make disciples” in the context of our daily lives as middle schoolers?
- **Question #3** - How can we support those being baptized or coming into the faith, and teach them how to observe Christ’s commandments?
- **Question #4** - Where can we seek support and guidance when facing challenges or uncertainties in sharing our faith with others?

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Bible Verse 2

Romans 10:14-15 (NKJ)

How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!"

Exegesis (How Teachers can interpret the Bible Verses to their students.)

St. Paul, in Romans, explains why it is necessary to send out missionaries. "How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?" Missionaries must be sent to preach if the nations are to come to know Christ.

"How shall they preach unless they are sent?" - sent by whom? By Jesus, of course, through His Church. Missionaries cannot go on their own. The Church must send, equip, supply, and pray for missionaries to proclaim the gospel of peace.

The Prophets in the Old Testament foretold that Jesus was coming and why. Isaiah prophesied an everlasting salvation, righteousness for all the peoples (Isaiah 52:1-8). As God's people are promised comfort from their suffering, they are told, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news" of the reign of God (52:7) and "all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God" (52:10). The Apostle Paul expands on this discourse to ask three questions of the Church and prompts her to send those who bring that good news to all the nations.

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Bible Verse 2 (cont...)

What does “gospel of peace” mean? In the ancient world, the term εὐαγγελίζω* (ev-an-ge-lí-zo) meant “news of victory”. For example, a herald might come to an ancient city to say, “A king has won victory here and is establishing his kingdom, and this is the plan and these are his commandments.” So, today we call this truth we are to tell people, “the gospel of peace.”

The victory comes, not as a victory with weapons, but a victory won by the power of mercy and love. New subjects in this kingdom are not won with violence but drawn by its beauty, which radiates through the “beautiful feet” of its ambassadors, messengers, who bring the “gospel of peace” to them.

As ambassadors, we act as representatives of Christ and His message to the world, proclaiming the good news of salvation. We serve as missionaries, equipped by the Church and empowered by the Holy Spirit to bring hope and invite others to join the kingdom through love and mercy, not force.

***Word Origin:** *(Reference Bible Verse 1 for more words if necessary)*

- **Missionary** - messenger or witness. The English word “missionary” is derived from the Latin **missio**, which means “to send forth” or “sending” and corresponds with the Greek word ἀποστέλλω (apostello). The term apostle is derived from Classical Greek ἀπόστολος (apóstolos), meaning “one who is sent off. The literal meaning in English is therefore an “emissary” or “messenger.”
- **Prophet** - one inspired by God through the Holy Spirit to deliver a message. The English word prophet is the transliteration of a compound Greek word derived from pro (before/toward) and phesein (to tell); thus, a προφήτης (prophētēs) is someone who conveys messages from the divine to humans.

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Talk About It!

Teachers Facilitate Group Discussion:

Teachers, prompt discussion amongst your young adults. Reference the Exegesis Section as needed based on your class's discussion. Ask, "What do these verses mean?" Get their feedback and expand as needed. Points that they need to understand:

St. Paul's asks four questions. What are they?

- How can they call on Him if they don't believe in Him?
- How can they believe in Him if they have never heard of Him?
- How are they to hear without a preacher?
- How can someone preach unless they are sent.

Sent by whom? By Jesus, of course, but also by His Church. Missionaries cannot go on their own. The Church must send, equip, supply, and pray for missionaries to proclaim the gospel of peace. OCMC is the Orthodox Mission Agency in the United States.

What does the "gospel of peace" mean?

Possible Reflection Questions:

- **Question #1** - Who are the 'beautiful feet' that are being described in the passage? What does it mean to be an ambassador of Christ?
- **Question #2** - How would others be able to tell if they are Christians?
- **Question #3** - Why is it important for someone to be sent to share the Gospel?

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Bible Verse 2 (cont...)

- **Question #4** - What does it mean to “preach” or “proclaim” the Gospel in our daily lives, beyond just speaking about it?
- **Question #5** - Who do you think is responsible for ensuring that the message of Christ’s love reaches those who haven’t heard it yet?
- **Question #5** - When can you share your faith with others?

Reading Activity: *Meet the Jones Family*

In this next section, your students will have the opportunity to read a short story about the Jones Family, OCMC Missionaries serving in Tonga. The Joneses are among the many individuals and families who dedicate their lives to proclaiming and witnessing the gospel of peace, sharing the love of Christ to all people, and representing the Orthodox Church around the world. Learn what it means to share the Gospel. Encourage your students to read independently or together as a class.

The reading activity is available at the end of the lesson.

Take Home Challenge

First, challenge your students and adult volunteers alike to commit to living the Orthodox life as ambassadors of Christ, in such a personal way that the gospel of peace radiates through them and those around them.

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Take Home Challenge (Cont...)

Next, let's pray, and ask God to help everyone in the class become involved in His great mission work throughout the US and to the ends of the earth. You may choose to offer your own prayer, or you can use the following:

"God, we pray for your guidance in fulfilling Jesus' final and greatest command to make disciples of all nations. Help us to uncover how to utilize our talents in spreading your love to those who have never heard or accepted the Gospel. Amen."

Share with your students the following ways they can begin to act as ambassadors for Christ:

Financially: In addition to the Mission Sunday lesson, OCMC includes coinboxes for students to take home. Distribute the coinboxes to each student and encourage them to collect coins and dollars throughout Great Lent to support the immense needs of mission work. Challenge them to give up something during this time that would allow them to set aside money for missions.

<https://www.ocmc.org/serve-from-home/give>

Supportively: Encourage your students to adopt an OCMC Missionary or Missionary Family. Take their prayer card to place in their home icon corner, sign up for their quarterly newsletters, pray for them regularly, and/or send them letters and financial support. Prayer Cards can be downloaded from the missionaries' webpage.

<https://www.ocmc.org/how-we-serve/missionaries/>

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Take Home Challenge (Cont...)

Emotionally: Encourage your students to talk with their parents about sending a message to an OCMC Missionary. Start by completing a contact request form for one of the missionaries listed on OCMC's website. Send them an email to express gratitude for their work in spreading the Gospel and bringing people to Christ, and mention that their family will pray for them!

Consider sending a message to the Jones family: jonesfamily@ocmc.org

Hands-on: Develop a long-term relationship with one of OCMC's target communities. Learn ways you can help, perhaps going to a field with your family or as a parish for a few weeks. You can contact OCMC to explore further.

<https://www.ocmc.org/how-we-serve/team-experience>

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Additional Activities

Depending on how much time is left for your Sunday School class, consider completing one of following activities with your students to further their understanding of the lesson.

- **Tour the Tonga Mission (Video)**
- **Locate Tonga on a Map**
- **Feet Washing Activity**
- **Write a Letter to the Jones Family**

Visit the **Additional Activities** page for the full activity description.

Closing Prayer

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.

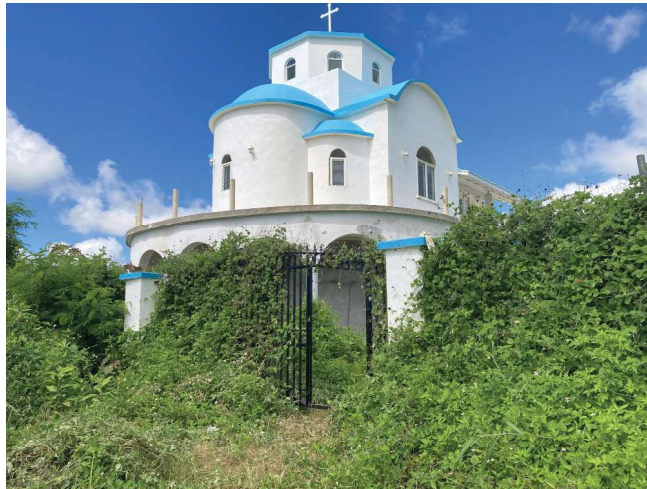
Make us witnesses to Your goodness, full of love, strength, and faith for Your glory and the salvation of the entire world.

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.

~ Prayer for Mission (Printable doc. available below)

MEET THE JONES FAMILY

SHARING THE GOSPEL OF PEACE IN TONGA



A beautiful white church overlooks the tropical blue sea of Tonga. It is the St. George Orthodox Church, the first Orthodox church in Tonga. But the grounds are overgrown with weeds, the walls are bare. The floors are dusty and cracked. Construction began in 2009, but since then they have only had a priest for a year and a half. The work on the church stopped due to COVID (2020-2023). No Divine Liturgy has been sung in it for three years.

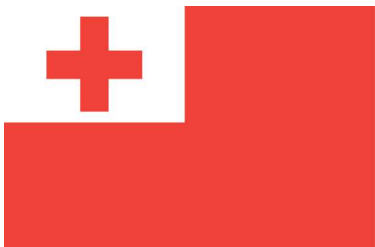
Michael and Megan Jones and their four children (right) have come to change that. The Lord laid on Michael's heart to try to help re-open this church. He was part of the original mission team that worked on the construction of the church. In 2022, their family become missionaries and were sent to nearby Fiji. This was a time of preparation for the mission to Tonga. They recently relocated to Tonga and are working alongside Fr. Bartholomew and Presbyteria Lydia Senibulu, missionaries from Fiji, to clean, repair, and renew services in this church. Even their four children are working, from chopping weeds on the church grounds to chanting the services.



MEET THE JONES FAMILY

SHARING THE GOSPEL OF PEACE IN TONGA

Their preparation really goes back much farther. They look back and see many things they learned, Michael's profession as a carpenter, and their Orthodox life of faith were all preparing them for this. Michael says, *"We came partly because we could, and nobody else was coming."* As Jesus said, we must pray for the Lord to send more workers to His bountiful harvest (Luke 10:2), including asking how He wants us to be part of the work.



Flag of the Kingdom of Tonga.
@WorldAtlas.com

The nation of Tonga itself has been prepared in a beautiful way for the arrival of Orthodoxy. Two hundred years ago, when Methodist missionaries arrived, the King of Tonga became a Christian, took the name George, and dedicated his nation to Christ. He radically changed the way of life, freeing his people from serfdom and establishing a constitution. The people of Tonga cherish their Christian tradition; their motto is *"God and Tonga are our inheritance."*

They have a mix of a good education and understanding hearts. Because of this, when they hear about Orthodoxy, they naturally understand and are drawn to its depth of tradition and beauty. Some community members have already told the Joneses that they see from the beauty of the church architecture that they are bringing a good thing to Tonga. One government official recently told Michael, *"The Catholics always told me that they are the original Church. But as I have researched it, I understand that you are the first Church. My wife and I want to join your parish."* Michael says, *"I don't know why the first Church has been the last to arrive in Tonga. But I feel like God is saying, 'I gave you something, and you have been very diligent with it. Now I am going to give you everything.'"*



Map of Oceania.
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MEET THE JONES FAMILY

SHARING THE GOSPEL OF PEACE IN TONGA



Michael with Fr. Bartholomew preparing for an upcoming service.

The Jones family, Fr. Bartholomew, and Pres. Lydia are living the Orthodox life while building relationships in the community so that they can be the “*beautiful feet*” that bring the gospel of peace in its sacramental fullness to Tonga. They know this will take a long time, because relationships can take years to grow.

The Joneses have two prayer requests. First, for translators to put the services to the Tongan language. They already have a translation of the Bible, but so far, the church services are chanted in English, with a little Greek for tradition’s sake, because there is no complete translation. Second, for more people to come serve.

Will you pray for Orthodox missions in Tonga and the rest of the world? Pray for more people to be inspired to be involved in mission work at all levels. Megan says that she was very hesitant at first about becoming a missionary, but she realized that, like the boy with five loaves, God wanted to her to offer all she had and trust Him to multiply it. What will you offer to God’s service? The Joneses have not been formally trained in theology. Their faith was formed by their Orthodox lifestyle. Now, by living that same life here in their new community, they are being living icons of the Gospel.

