

Unit #1: Foundations

Orthodox Journeys: *Living a Sacramental Life*

Lesson Plan Overview

✠ Week 1: Introduction

In this first week, we'll explore what the words *sacrament* and *sacred* mean, and how, as Orthodox Christians, we are called to live holy lives, guided by Jesus Christ's teachings and commandments, being sacramental.

- What is a Sacrament? (*How do we define "sacrament" or "sacred"?*)
- How am I impacted, affected, changed, transformed by sacramental things?
- Why do I need the sacred?
- How am I sacramental?

✠ Week 2: A Life of Prayer

It is common to hear, in American Christian vernacular, the idea of a 'personal relationship' with God. If God has expectations of us, what are they? We use prayer as a means to stay connected with God.

- Why do we want to have a relationship with God?
- How does prayer help us grow closer to God?
- What is sacramental about prayer?
- How is prayer an expression of love - for God or for other people?

✠ Week 3: The Eucharist

When we receive the Eucharist at the Divine Liturgy, we receive Jesus Christ. By eating and drinking from the chalice, we partake of Christ Himself, bringing Him into our bodies and making Him part of our very existence.

- How does the Eucharist nourish our spiritual health?
- Why did Jesus give us His Body and Blood to eat?
- What does it mean to you to have the gift of the Eucharist?
- What is an appropriate response after receiving the Eucharist?

✠ Week 4: Orthodoxy & Death

The Church teaches us that man was not made to die. Death is an imposition upon our nature. God is the source of life, and death entered the world, ironically, in humankind's effort to become like God.

- How does Jesus destroy the power of the devil and death?
- How can we live to prepare for death?
- What did the disciples do when they learned that Jesus rose from the dead?
- Why are we called to live without fear?

✠ Wk 5: In the Midst of the Church

Our liturgical experience rises above the ordinary or common conversation we have outside of church. The conversation or dialogue we have in church can be the foundation for everything we do during the week.

- Who can sing in church?
- What's your favorite hymn or song to sing in church?
- How can we incorporate these hymns into our life at home?
- Why do you think singing is so important for us as Orthodox Christians?

✠ Week 6: Doer of the Work

God pronounces that everything He creates is good. He commands us to be fruitful - bearing His image - being creative and fruitful in the world. Our existence should be directed toward good purposes.

- What does it mean to be 'fruitful and multiple'?
- How can we be creative for the glory of God?
- Why do we have "things" blessed by our priest?
- Is it possible to be creative like God? How?



How to Use This

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Ask open-ended questions, while encouraging the children to think, share their experiences or ideas about the lesson as they relate to their lives as Orthodox Christians.

Tips & Hints

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- Feast on the appointed days
- Receive Confession regularly
- Read scripture daily
- Love others without reservation

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There are many ways to learn more about these and other topics. Some include:

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Unit #2: Physical Sacramental Expressions

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Lesson Plan Overview

✠ Week 1: God Abides in Us

God wants us to be His followers, even in the difficult moments when someone isn't nice to us. How can a spirit of goodness shape our relationship with each other and God when there's so many bad things in the world?

- Why do I need to be nice to other people?
- What happens if someone is mean to me?
- How should I react if someone is mean to me?
- What does Psalm 23 say about goodness?

✠ Week 2: Images of God

Our church and home are filled with icons, so that makes us good Orthodox Christians, right? As followers of Jesus Christ, we're called to be icons of God in our words, thoughts, and deeds - resembling the saints in our icons.

- What are the parts of an icon?
- How am I an image of Jesus Christ?
- Why do we have icons?
- What can I do with my icon?

✠ Week 3: A Living Temple

Being the Body of Christ is hard work, ensuring we turn from sin and temptations which distract us from God's teachings while the shape of our church reminds us of the journey we're on in life - growing closer to God.

- Why do our churches look like they do?
- How am I the Temple of God?
- What purpose does the iconostasis serve?
- Does God live in our church?

✠ Week 4: Set Apart in Service

Why are certain people called to serve God as deacons, priests, and bishops? What are their responsibilities for our community and how can we support their efforts and good work?

- How do we serve God?
- How are priests supposed to live?
- Why does our bishop wear strange clothes?
- Is ordination something I'm being called to consider?

✠ Week 5: Deny the Earthly

Disciplining our bodies is important for our relationship with God, helping us focus on the things which bring us closer to God. The devil will tempt us all the time with temporary pleasures that distract our attention.

- Why can't we do everything we want?
- What does disciplining our bodies mean?
- How is abstinence vital for our salvation?
- Are we supposed to suffer in life?

✠ Week 6: People of Peace

The world is a crazy place and sometimes we want to run and hide - yet, as Orthodox Christians we are called to engage the world with peace and love, being Christ's messengers, serving those in need.

- Why do we pray for peace in the world?
- Does God not hear our prayers for peace?
- Why are peacemakers blessed?
- How can we find peace in life?



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Unit #3: Fruits of the Spirit

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✠ Week 1: All Things Possible

God wants us to have faith in Him, by being obedient to Him - in His love, He gives us the free will to choose how we will live our lives. As His followers, we work through doubts and struggles to find the faith necessary to truly live.

- Why is faith a critical thing to possess?
- Does God work in our life if we have doubts?
- What is a healthy relationship with God?
- How does faith work?

✠ Week 2: Give from the Heart

Giving of ourselves is best experienced with a free and willing heart. We're not obligated to help anyone, yet if we want to grow closer to God, being generous starts with love and compassion for ourselves and others.

- What does it mean to give with your heart?
- Why does God love a cheerful giver?
- Who were Ananias and Saphira?
- Is it possible to give too much?

✠ Week 3: Restoration to Life

Confession is hardly something to dread - like a good cleaning, it can freshen our soul, restoring us to a clean slate when we truly repent to God. Our struggle against sin is real, and so is God's unending mercy to free us from sin and death.

- How often should we go to confession?
- What if our priest judges me?
- What does Psalm 50 have to do with repentance?
- Does God really forgive me?

✠ Week 4: Trust with Patience

We anticipate many things, wanting to control what happens, so we get what we want. If we let go, and allow God to act in our life, we have the possibility of experiences on a deeper level, which are ultimately for our salvation.

- Why am I impatient for things I want?
- What does it mean to trust God?
- What is God trying to teach me by waiting?
- Is hope a realistic feeling?

✠ Week 5: Wise and Innocent

Wisdom isn't an abstract concept, it's something which balances our emotional and rational thoughts to make a decision centered on God. Seeing the big picture requires, humility, faith, and wisdom from God.

- What is wisdom?
- How does God want me to take advantage of the moment?
- Do reason and emotions have a balance?
- Can I be wise and still get what I want?

✠ Week 6: Sacred Happiness

Is the joy the same as happiness? The excitement of moments in life come and go, while God's mercy and love are constants in a world of disappointment. Joy is an expression of gratitude found through faith in God.

- What is joy?
- How does it feel to experience God's love?
- Why is happiness fleeting?
- Doesn't God want me to be happy?



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Unit #4: Godly Celebrating

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✠ Week 1: Godly Feasting

We often hear about the fasts of the church year with great attention and focus - yet, the Orthodox Faith also has times set aside for feasting and rejoicing in God's blessings, moments to give thanks to God.

- What does it mean to feast like God?
- What is true joy?
- How does Christ's mercy inspire our celebrations?
- Is it possible to over-indulge while feasting?

✠ Week 2: Rising in New Life

For many of us, our baptism took place when we were infants - our calling as followers of Christ centers on His commandments and living a life of holiness and growing closer to God. Being baptized into Christ, let us put on Christ.

- What is our calling as Orthodox Christians?
- Are we really supposed to be saints?
- How did we die at our baptism?
- Does our baptism ever get renewed?

✠ Week 3: A Life of Dedication

We are all called to an ascetic life - one where we take up our cross and follow Christ. Some leave the world, joining a community to focus solely on the Christian life. We too can answer this call to face the struggle more intensely.

- Why do people become monastics?
- How are we called to live in, but not of, the world?
- What if I want to become a monk or nun?
- Why should I dedicate my life to God?

✠ Week 4: Putting Aside Sin

Preparing for the Great Fast or a major feast is not an ordeal or negative experience. Fasting is intended to strip away the earthly distractions so we can get back to the basics - a life centered on God with humility and simplicity.

- How does fasting transform my life?
- Do we want to put aside sin?
- How can I let go of sinful behavior?
- Does God love me if I sin again?

✠ Week 5: Transformations

We can affirm the goodness of God through blessings in church of flowers, water, oil, fruit, honey, candles, icons, and many other things. We bring these items into our homes as a reminder that God create the world in love.

- Why does the church bless certain things at the liturgy?
- What do we do with blessed items?
- How can we receiving God's blessings in our life?
- Why do we encounter God through blessings?

✠ Week 6: In God's Time

God acts in our world in His time, for our benefit, as means to bring us closer to Him. Do we allow Him to work in His way, or do we struggle and insist on doing things our way - eventually realizing it won't work like that.

- When will God give me what I want?
- How does God act in His time for our benefit?
- Do we allow God into our life?
- Why is patience so important for our spiritual growth?



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Unit #5: Faith and Works

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Lesson Plan Overview

✠ Week 1: Be Fruitful Always

God commands creation to be fruitful and multiple. Are we being fruitful with our talents and financial resources for the glory of God? Or are we hoarding and setting up expectations upon which we judge others and the world?

- Am I bearing fruit in my life?
- Does God expect me to give all of my money away?
- Are we preventing others from encountering Christ?
- What does 'be fruitful and multiple' really mean?

✠ Week 2: In the Fear of God

Healthy fear of God is expressed in awe, amazement, and gratitude for His mercy and love. As His creatures, we have a place in creation to worship and give thanks for the mercy and love with which He blesses us.

- Why should I fear God?
- As a creature, what are my limitations before God?
- How is God beyond description?
- How is it possible for me to know God?

✠ Week 3: Faithful to the End

Being faithful is a struggle, turning away from the temptations of the devil and the cares of the world which constantly thirst for our attention. Even if we fall or get distracted, God wants us to be faithful in our desire for Him.

- Why do I have struggles in my life?
- Why do I sometimes doubt God is there for me?
- Is it ok to get angry with God?
- What does it really mean to have faith in God?

✠ Week 4: Merciful Like Christ

Giving a financial donation only goes so far if we aren't making a real connection with others. Our lives are relational, based on mercy and a willingness to be like our Savior Who - though sinless - came to die for us, so we can live.

- How can I live a life of mercy like Jesus Christ?
- Are we willing to satisfy the needs of others?
- Why are their poor people?
- If I give a dollar, do I still have to help?

✠ Week 5: Diligence with Love

St. Ephraim's Prayer teaches us how to live a life centered on God's love. The prayer reminds us it will take effort to grow closer to God, yet with God's help we can truly rid ourselves of sin and become His children filled with holiness.

- Do we have to love others?
- What is a spirit of humility?
- Why is St. Ephraim's Prayer so important?
- How can the words of prayer come alive in my heart?

✠ Week 6: Sealed in the Spirit

The Seal of the Holy Spirit unites us to the Church, making us members of Christ's Body. As followers of Jesus Christ, we have a responsibility to be obedient to His commands, living a life sealed in the Spirit.

- What is the seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit?
- Do we say "Amen" to God's grace in our daily life?
- What if my words and deeds aren't holy?
- Do I have a choice to be a Child of God?



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Unit #6: Sacramental Relationships

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Lesson Plan Overview

✠ Week 1: Being Passionate

Being passionate about things in life is a good thing - it means we have a focus and desire to accomplish something. When that passion gets out of control, it can cause us to sin, separating us from God and each other.

- What is holy about being passionate?
- What does temperance mean?
- How can my passions consume me?
- Why do the saints encourage a simple lifestyle?

✠ Week 2: Love as a Christian

A Christian lifestyle is defined by the love we express towards ourselves and others. If we follow Christ and strive to be perfect like our Heavenly Father, our love can resemble that perfect example of love: Jesus on the cross.

- What are the five types of love?
- How is the Crucifixion the ultimate sign of love?
- How can I love like Jesus Christ?
- Who is deserving of my love?

✠ Week 3: A Tempered Self

In a world where anything goes, we as Orthodox Christians constantly struggle with a desire to not stand out. Modesty and self-control do take effort, and have immeasurable benefits towards attaining our salvation.

- Why is self-control important?
- What makes self-control hard to achieve?
- How can the saints inspire our efforts?
- What is wrong about being immodest?

✠ Week 4: Free of Judging

Jesus Christ is the righteous Judge, our Savior, Who is perfect. We, as His followers are none of those things, yet we often struggle with judging our peers as if we were God. Being righteous means accepting our place, obedient to God.

- How was Jesus revealed as God on the Cross?
- Are we justified in our desire to judge others?
- How do we judge ourselves in a healthy way?
- Can we be righteous in today's world?

✠ Week 5: Enduring to the End

The struggle is real, and will persist throughout our lives. Christ has overthrown the devil, so we can turn from his wickedness to follow our Savior who will protect and keep us, remembering us for our efforts.

- Why is it hard to be a Christian?
- Doesn't God understand my needs?
- What do we do when we fall into sin...again?
- Why doesn't God take away these temptations and struggles?

✠ Week 6: United in Christ

The Orthodox Church doesn't have vows or destination weddings because the wedding isn't about an earthly experience. The Church blesses the love of two people so that they can become like the Trinity, centered in God's love.

- Is marriage for everyone?
- Why can't we live together before marriage?
- Why should I be willing to die for her?
- Why should I respect him?



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Unit #7: Living a Sacramental Life

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✠ Week 1: Service in Life

Each of us is called to a vocation or form of service to God in our lives. We might sing, chant, or read in church - or help others through FOCUS or IOCC. Whatever we do, God has blessed us with the means to help others.

- How do we serve God with our talents?
- What are we called to do in service for the Church?
- Why are we supposed to make time to help others?
- Should we only help Orthodox Christians?

✠ Week 2: Bearing Witness

As followers of Jesus Christ, we bear the responsibility of following in the footsteps of the Apostles, saints, and countless believers who professed their belief in Christ. What are we going to do to carry that mission forward?

- Who is called to bear witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ?
- What does it look like to be a disciple in the 21st century?
- Who is going to listen if we live the Gospel?
- What type of witness am I to Christ's teachings?

✠ Week 3: A Thousand Souls

Being kind transcends being nice to others. The legacy of Saints Herman, Seraphim, and Maria remind us that God's love is easily shared with others - even in the face of stark circumstances of certain death - because God's love brings life!

- How can we accept what we have without greed or jealousy?
- Why did St. Seraphim forgive his attackers?
- How can I save others by saving myself?
- Why did St. Maria give her life for others?

✠ Week 4: Gentleness of Heart

Living a sacramental life means having a balanced approach to what we have, need, and want. If we have, we have enough to share, making a difference in the lives of others by giving of God's blessings to those in need.

- What are my expectations in life?
- Why is "me first" self-destructive?
- Is gentleness a sign of weakness?
- How can I be gentle with myself?

✠ Week 5: Mercy and Healing

God's mercy is always available for us to receive, restoring us to a life centered on His love. We can share of God's blessings with others in the same way, extending the reach of God's love, transforming the world by our acts.

- Why do we go to church?
- What does God's mercy look like in our life?
- If God doesn't give us what we want, does He really love us?
- How can I be merciful like God?

✠ Week 6: A Sacramental Life

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