

# Caretakers OF THE DEAD

## Session 5



Caretakers of God's Creation

Consistory Office of Youth & Young Adult Ministry  
Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA



### What will youth learn?

Objective: Youth will look at the "invisible" aspects of creation, including their soul. Youth will consider how caring for their soul is connected to creation around them and its deeper meaning during the Great Fast.

### How long will it take & ages?

1 hour and youth ages 8-12

### What do you need?

- Bibles
- Journals
- Post-it Notes
- White board
- Icon St. Holy Myrrhbearers & Descent into Hades (provided in Google folder)
- reading - Death & Dying: Talking With Kids, Elissa Bjeletich Davis
- <https://blogs.ancientfaith.com/raisingsaints/death-dying-talking-kids/>



### For Session Leader

**Opening:** Using the post-it notes, ask participants if they want to add any types of caretakers to their post-it note wall. Let them know that no answers are incorrect. Each session, they can add to the board.

**Discussion:** Use the text provided to begin the discussion. Allow time for questions. Take time to be acquainted with the text, so that you are not reading to your group but presenting!

**Preparation:** Read the article by Elissa Bjeletich Davis as preparation for your discussion.



Adapted for use from Teenage Conference  
Fr. Bohdan Hladio, Natalie Kapeluck, Sarah Bailly

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**Discussion Starter:** Have you ever known someone who has died? Do you mind sharing who that person was? Do you mind sharing what that was like? Give youth time to respond. Do not push for any responses. This is an opportunity to see where your youth are at on the topic. Use your white board to write down any new words such as cemetery, panahyda, parastas, myrrhbearers, etc.

Begin by looking at the icon of the Holy Myrrhbearers and Descent into Hades. With each icon, ask the youth what they see.

Begin with, We know that Jesus "conquers" death on Pascha/Easter. What does that mean? Give time for responses.

God didn't create death. He created life. But because of Adam and Eve's sin of eating from the tree, death became a part of our reality, death entered into creation. This happened when Adam and Eve had to leave Paradise and the world was now broken or fallen as we might say.

God loves us and cares for us. He wants us to love and care for each other. When someone we love dies, that love does not end. Although we can no longer hug that person or tell them we love them, we still want to show our love for them. Most of us don't like to think or talk about death. Death can be scary. It can be sad. That is ok. As we just mentioned, God created life!

But as human beings we know that there is no way to get around the problem of death. As Christians we know, as we will begin singing this month, that "Christ has trampled down death by death," that He has become "the firstborn of the dead." Our celebration of Pascha is nothing if not a celebration of Christ's victory over death. This is where we find joy and hope! **give the youth a moment to reflect and comment.**

But people still die and are still in the graves. How are we to understand and think about this? One of the ways we Christians do this is by caring for the dead. And how do we care for the dead? Practically and prayerfully.

On Good Friday as well as the second Sunday after Pascha we'll hear about the Holy Myrrhbearers, the women who, along with Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, took Jesus down from the Cross, prepared His body and buried him. This teaches us that we should treat the bodies of the reposed with respect, that we should offer a dignified, Christian burial to those who have died. **Ask the youth what they know about the Holy Myrrhbearers. Take a moment at read Mark 15:43-47; 16:1-8. Take time to look at the icon and discuss. Here is a video that explains the icon. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dp02v7pjUds> Depending on age, you may only want to show small parts of the video. Ask the youth if they have been to a funeral. What was it like?**

Following the Myrrhbearers' example, one important and meaningful way we show our respect for the dead is by attending their funerals and helping out in any way we can. **Ask the youth if they have been to a funeral. What was it like?** Traditionally, when someone dies, people from the community or the parish bring food to the house of the deceased so that the grieving family won't have to concern themselves with cooking and can have time to properly grieve. Helping out in Church with singing, serving, or acting as pallbearers when asked are wonderful ways of caring for the dead as well. **Pause and ask if they know what pallbearers are.**

Even just attending a Panahyda or Funeral service and offering condolences to the family are meaningful acts and always appreciated. Sometimes people feel uncomfortable, because they're not sure what to say. Just saying "I'm sorry, accept my condolences," or even just holding someone's hand is enough. Your presence is more important than your words. Making a special card or picking out some flowers is a beautiful way to show someone that you love them and care for them during a funeral. **Stop and ask the youth if they have visited a funeral home or attended a panahyda. Do they want to share their experience?**



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We care for the dead prayerfully as well. Besides joining our personal prayers to the prayers of the Church at a funeral or memorial service, we remember our reposed family and friends in our daily prayers as well. The Church has set aside specific days and times (the third, ninth, and fortieth day after death as well as the yearly anniversaries; the Soul Saturdays during Lent, etc.) when we are encouraged to attend memorial services and pray for the deceased. **Have you ever attended a Saturday Memorial Service during Great Lent?**

A special word needs to be said about cemeteries. The word cemetery comes from the Greek koimiterio whose root-word is “to sleep.” We say that people are “resting” in the cemetery, awaiting the final judgement. This is why we care for the graves of our loved ones, making sure that they are clean, tidy, and perhaps decorated with flowers. We visit the graves of our loved ones and offer prayers on special days such as St. Thomas Sunday, Pentecost, or Memorial Day. Sometimes people die who did not have children or relatives, or perhaps their family now lives far away, and it is a wonderful and loving Christian custom to look after the graves of these people and make sure that the memorial services are held for them as well. **Ask you youth if they have ever been to a cemetery or your parish cemetery. Have a picture of your cemetery to share.**

We sing Vichnaya Pamiat’ – Eternal Memory at the end of every memorial service. This is a prayer that God will never forget the person who has died, and will always keep them in His mind and in His heart. When we do the same, keeping their memory alive in our own mind and heart, caring for them both practically and prayerfully, we perform a Godly, loving act.

This month we celebrate Christ’s victory over death. We will visit the graves of our departed relatives, friends, and fellow parishioners on St. Thomas Sunday, to pray that they too will experience a joyful resurrection. Make sure to take part in this beautiful custom whether you have relatives buried at the cemetery or not. If you know of people who have died but have no one to pray for them make sure to look after their grave and ask the priest to say a prayer for them as well. And throughout the year whenever a relative, friend, or fellow parishioner experiences the loss of a loved one attend the panakhyda or funeral and help out as you are able.

We – each and every one of us – were created in God’s image and likeness. In caring for the dead we show our love and care for one another – the most special and beloved of all God’s creatures, in all God’s creation.



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## Wrapping it Up!

**Taking it Home!:** In their journals, have the youth make a section for Praying for the Departed. They can add in names to be prayed for. Provide small copies of the icons that they may also add into their journals.

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1gWk4twwmXqJJYHfvHLLoX\\_Fvf-TT8qY9?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1gWk4twwmXqJJYHfvHLLoX_Fvf-TT8qY9?usp=sharing)

What Can YOU do!

- If you are able to sing, take some time to learn to chant the memorial and funeral services- ask your priest or choir director for help. People only die once, and a beautifully sung, solemn and prayerful funeral is a fitting testament to a Christian life well lived, as well as a clear symbol of our love for them and for God.
- If your parish has a cemetery, volunteer to help keep it clean and tidy, and especially to make sure that it is well-tended and decorated with flowers for the St. Thomas Sunday, Pentecost, or Memorial Day services.
- If you know of parishioners or even distant family members who died but don't have anyone to look after their graves, take this upon yourself. Make sure the grave is neat and tidy, and make sure to invite the priest to bless the grave when he visits the cemetery.
- Participate in the Soul Saturday memorial services in Church; prepare kolachi or koliva to be offered on behalf of the reposed. You can learn more about this in the Spring Edition of UOC Teen! <https://online.fliphtml5.com/coymw/myyu/>
- Whenever someone in the parish, a relative or the relative of a friend dies, attend the memorial service or funeral.
- Help out in Church during the funeral service by holding candles or the cross, acting as an usher or pallbearer, and/or help prepare or serve the food for the memorial luncheon afterwards.
- Keep a memorial booklet with the names of your reposed loved ones, and remember them in your daily prayers.



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## Wrapping it Up!

### **Additional Activities:**

1. Choose a date for your youth to help with spring cleaning at your parish cemetery. Discuss with your parish council or appropriate cemetery caretaker. This is a wonderful way for the youth to serve God, their parish and the parish family who has fallen asleep in the Lord.
2. Perhaps have the youth dye red eggs that can be placed on the graves at the cemetery on Pascha or during Bright week. You could also invest in flowers from the a local dollar store and put flowers at the graves that are not cared for by family members.
3. Sponsor a Panachida for any youth of the parish who have fallen asleep. Coordinate this with your priest. Have the youth hold candles and prepare any meals for the parish after the service.
4. Teach your youth the hymn Memory Eternal – Vichnaya Pamyat! This is something they will carry with them their entire life.
5. When parishioners fall asleep in the Lord, have your youth make cards to give to the family.

**Prayer:** Finish the session in prayer. You could take sections of the Akathist Glory to God for All Things and use it through out the year at each of your session. You can find it downloadable here <https://www.stvladimirpgh.org/files/112620-akathist.pdf>

