

# Greatest

## CARETAKER OF ALL!



Caretakers of God's Creation

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



### Session 7

#### What will youth & teens learn?

Objective: To tie together the entire season, bringing youth to a place of action moving forward as Caretakers of God's Creation.

#### How long will it take & ages?

1 hour and youth ages 9- 12 and/or teenagers

#### What do you need?

- Bibles
- Journals
- Post-it Notes
- Icon of St. Nekatarios
- White board
- Man of God

movie

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldUGahNIMRk>



#### For Session Leader

**Opening:** Take time to have the group look at your Post-it Caretakers wall. Take a photo of the finished wall to send to them.

If you have time during this session, watch Man of God, about St. Nekatrios. After the session, discuss how St. Nekatrios embodies being a caretaker of all creation.

**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!



Adapted for use from Teenage Conference Fr.  
Bohdan Hladio & Natalie Kapeluck

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## Session 7 – Youth/ Teens

**Discussion Starter.** Begin by saying, "We discussed MANY different ways in which we can be caretaker of the church.

- Did you try any of the things we discussed. If yes, what and how did it go?
- Is there anything you plan on trying?
- **If you did anything as a group, take time to debrief and discuss what you did, how it went and continuing.**

**Take some time for discussion.**



### The Greatest Caretaker of Them All

Over these past months we've been considering what the "Caretakers of God's Creation" theme means. We've spoken about the many ways we are called to be caretakers, and the many things we are called to be caretakers of.

We've thought about our calling to be caretakers of nature. We've only got one planet, and it is a gift given to us by God so that we might leave it in better shape than we found it. Creation care, ecological sensitivity, sustainable agriculture, clean air and water for everyone – not only those of us alive today but for coming generations as well – these are all things that we as Christians should be concerned about and working towards.

We've seen how taking care of other people is another Christian obligation. As Jesus says in St. Matthew's Gospel, what we've done for the least of His children, we've done for Him. Feeding the hungry, giving shelter to the homeless, visiting the sick and those in prison, etc. are all Christian obligations. Depending upon our personal gifts and circumstances we all have the opportunity and the obligation to take care of our neighbors, whether they are in our family, a friend, a fellow parishioner, or a stranger.

We also talked about the importance of taking care of bodies. We've only got one of these as well, and St. Paul reminds us that our bodies are temples. We glorify God in our bodies. And so we need to treat our own bodies with respect. There's a famous saying that "the spiritual life begins with the stomach," in other words, we need to watch what we eat. Good food in reasonable portions and following the fasting practices of the Church, as well as making sure to do regular exercise and refrain from any activity or substance use that might harm us physically are important ways of caring for our bodies.

Even more important is taking care of our souls. Studies show that people who are spiritually engaged with their faith and their faith community are happier, more successful, and healthier than those who aren't. Prayer, charitable activities, worship, reading the bible, and all those things we do in and around the Church have a positive effect on our own soul as well as the souls around us.

And souls are immortal. Taking care of the dead by praying for them, commemorating them during the Church's memorial services, looking after their graves, etc., is a very blessed activity. When we sing *Vichnaia Pam'iat'* we are praying that God will never forget our reposed brothers and sisters. When we remember them prayerfully we're performing a God-like act.



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Finally, we talked about taking care of the Church. The Church is God's house, and as God is our Father it is our house as well. When we work to make sure that the grounds are well looked after, that the interior of the Church is clean, that the sacred vessels, banners, candles, etc. are bright and shiny, we're showing love and respect for God and for our fellow parishioners. When done in the right state of mind dusting or sweeping the floor are no less "holy" acts than serving the Liturgy or baking the bread for Communion.

Fr. Benjamin Teitelbaum states, 'Jesus taught that at every moment we stand at a crossroad, one leading to life and the other to destruction (Matthew 7:13-14). While most Christians may understand this in terms of their souls, it is also true of our relationship to creation: we are either replenishing, as mankind was first commanded to do with the Garden, or despoiling and abusing – that is, destroying. And we will be judged by such choices.... Therefore, the primary task of any who would heal the wounds we have inflicted on the world and ourselves is to restore the sense of the sacred. To try to do this apart from the spiritual Tradition imparted to us by the grace of God, is to refuse to face one's blindness in attempting to see the problems facing human society.'" Fr. Benjamin is helping us to understand that any solutions we attempt at being good caretakers must come from a basis in our faith and a desire to please and thank God.

If we believe we can fix the ills of the world by our own devices, with no basis in our faith or the responsibility placed on us as caretakers of God's creations, we will never truly find the answers and solutions that we are searching for. We as individuals and the Church need to witness that the 'whole world is a single icon of God', as St. John of Damascus describes God's creation. We can also view our world as God's visual gospel. In every tree, every creature that walks the earth and in the face of every person, we should see God. By recognizing God's grace in each living thing, we should realize that God is asking us to care for His gifts, for His glory, for our salvation and the salvation of the world.

Why do we care about God's creation? Because God cares for His creation. He cares about us. If we think about it this is completely mind-blowing. God, who needs nothing, who is all-powerful, loves us and cares about us. To Him the most important thing is not our sins or our failings, it's not what we can do, even what we do for Him – the most important thing is us, each one of us, Joe and Mary and Fred.

God's creation is His gift to us. Our care for God's creation is the gift we give back to Him.

### Wrapping it Up! Praxis!

Provide the icon of St. Nektarios to place in their journals.

With a larger group, break into smaller groups. If you have a small group of teens, work together.

Give each group one of the topics covered this year: Caretakers of – 1. nature, 2. others (people), ourselves (physically), ourselves (spiritually), the dead, and the church. Give them time to brainstorm ways that they can educate your parish and community about being caretakers of these areas.

Bring the groups back together to share and use the white board to track ideas.

When done, take time to discuss the ideas and agree on a plan of action. Ideas might include making a video about the topic, creating a Caretakers Schedule touching on all the areas, for the youth to be in-charge of for the parish or youth group, creating articles for the church bulletin, choosing one thing from each session and implementing them next year in the parish.

*What can I do?*