

Leave PEOPLE & THINGS BETTER THAN YOU FOUND THEM!



Caretakers of God's Creation

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



Session 3

What will teens learn?

Objective: Youth will take a deeper look at how they consume things from the world around them, how that relates to fasting and being Caretakers of God's Creation. The Nativity Fast will be connected to this introspective discussion

How long will it take & ages?

1 hour and teenagers

What do you need?

- Bibles
- Journals
- Post-it Notes
- White board



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!

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

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Discussion Starter. Begin by saying, "Last month we discussed the beginning of Genesis. We talked about how God is interconnected with all of His creation and how we are all connected. After mapping out our social eco-system and looking at the Creation Icons, you were asked to journal on the following questions:

- How can this apply to my life How can this apply to my relationship with God?
 - How can this apply to being a caretaker of God's creation?
 - What did you come up with. Has your view of being a Caretaker of God's creation changed at all?
- Take some time for discussion.

At the very beginning of the Bible we read how God created everything – light, darkness, the earth, the heavens, animals, vegetables, minerals, everything. Finally, he created us, human beings, and then told us to "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Genesis 1:28). **You could pause here at relook at the Creation Icons.** In other words, creation is a gift of God, Who gives it to us for safekeeping. We are responsible for the earth, its animals, plants, minerals, oceans, mountains, atmosphere – everything.

We have just started the Nativity Fast, the forty-day fast before the feast of the Birth of our Lord in Bethlehem. **Take a moment and ask the participants if they know about the Nativity Fast. Can they name any other fasting periods during the year?** Some people think that fasting is old-fashioned, or unnecessary, or something so difficult that you'd have to be a superhero to actually do it. But if we think about it we see that following the Church's fasting rules makes us better caretakers of God's creation. How? **Give a moment for some answers from the youth.**

Food is our most intimate association with other life on the planet, and our food systems are the primary ways through which we create or destroy ecosystems. Are we eating just to consume, without any knowledge of where our food came from or gratitude for the ecosystems that provide it? If so, we're contributing to ecological disaster.

If we're conscious of food production systems and make efforts to eat local foods, accept diverse and seasonal diets, and eat thoughtfully and with gratitude, we'll naturally favor food systems that are ecologically sustainable. When we limit our consumption of meat (as we are called to do during the four fasting periods of the year as well as most Wednesdays and Fridays) we eat lower on the food chain, which as we know is better for the environment. And we should do our best never to waste food. **Take a pause and use the whiteboard – Put two columns. In column one put "no thought" and title the other "with thought". Take a few moments and ask the participants to add something to each column that they do or could do concerning how they eat food.**

It's even more important not to waste water. Many of us in wealthy countries expect to turn the tap and have clean water come out, sometimes from water sources that are miles away. This is a wonderful privilege. Each of us should be a fierce advocate for the cleanliness and sustainability of our water sources. If at all possible we should never drink or purchase bottled water, as the used bottles contribute to the degradation of the environment and the water itself can be contaminated by chemicals which leach out from the plastic and are injurious to our health.

Besides food, we might think about fasting from hydrocarbons as well. Petroleum and other fossil fuels are a non-renewable resource. When we buy food which has been transported thousands of miles by transport truck, or use our car when it isn't necessary, we're not being good caretakers of God's creation.



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Another important way we harm the environment is through the uncontrolled use of our computers and smart phones. Ronald Diebert, in chapter four of his book *Reset, Reclaiming the Internet for Civil Society*, writes that

*One Google search accounts for 0.2 – 7 grams of CO2 emissions – the latter roughly equivalent to boiling a cup of water with an electric kettle or driving a car fifty-five feet. . . an e-mail has an estimated carbon footprint of about four grams of CO2 emissions, an e-mail with a large attachment as much as fifty. Sending sixty-five e-mails is roughly equivalent to driving one kilometre in a car. . . the worlds' e-mail usage generates roughly as much CO2 as having an extra seven million cars on the roads. **Stop here and ask what the teens think about this.***

By now I'm sure we all understand that fasting isn't some old-fashioned thing that "religious" people do because they think it's going to make God love them more (after all, God loves us no matter what we do or don't do). Fasting is a way in which we improve ourselves by cultivating our self-discipline, as well as improving the world around us by being concerned with how our decisions about what and how and how much we consume – whether this be food, water, resources, energy, or entertainment – will impact God's creation.

Over twenty years ago at Teenage Conference one of the guest speakers told us how his grandmother used to say "Leave people and things better than you found them." If we think about our responsibility to God and our neighbour, about being caretakers of God's creation and of each other, one way we can do this is through our consistent, conscientious and creative fasting.

Wrapping it Up!

Praxis: Break up into groups, if you have a large number of youth. With a small group maybe break into pairs or groups of three. With a very small group let them work together.

Share the suggestions of "How we can leave things better during the Nativity Fast". Ask the groups to come up with other ways that they can keep the fast as Caretakers of God's Creation.

What can we do during this Nativity Fast to help the environment?

1. Follow the Church's fasting regulations; refrain from meat and dairy products entirely or in part; limit the amount that we eat; do not consume "junk" food; try to eat foods which have not had to be transported for long distances.
2. Do not drink or purchase bottled water (unless necessary); do not waste water.
3. Don't take unnecessary trips in the family car; use public transportation when it is safe and available; try to avoid single-use plastics and all types of unnecessary packaging.
4. Limit our internet, e-mail, and smart-phone use; limit or completely avoid streaming movies or television shows; limit our use of social media to the absolute minimum.



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Wrapping it Up!

Taking it Home!: In their journals, have the youth make a section for the Nativity Fast. Ask them to journal concerning the ways they are being better Caretakers during the Fast. We are asked to increase our prayer life during fasting periods. What better way to be a caretaker than to pray for others.

Have they teens add a section for special intercessions during the fast. They can also use the Nativity Prayer Challenge provided by the American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese. https://www.acrod.org/assets/files/PDFS/Bishop/prayer_challenge2022/Prayer%20Challenge%202022%20OLD%20CALENDAR.jpg

Additional Activities:

1. In preparation of the Nativity of our Lord, discuss with the youth the importance of what they may have just learned concerning the creation of man and the birth of Christ. Advent/St. Phillip's Fast is a time of fasting, preparation and missions. If we are made in the image of God – how could we help our fellow man during this time of fasting? Ask the youth to brainstorm for charitable projects to take part in or initiate and in doing so reflecting the image of God. Provide the youth with possible suggestions such as donating time or items to a local youth center, elderly center or halfway house.

2. Devise a project in which the youth can write or make icons of their patron saint, an iconographic window into heaven and a concrete reflection of their saint and in turn themselves living the life of God.

3. Perhaps have your teens organize a trip to visit your parish elderly/shut ins. You can bring them gift baskets with some essentials and treats. You could also contact a local elderly center or retirement home. You can make a visit to sing carols, bring treats, or just visit! Call ahead and ask what their residents are in need of.

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

