

Caretakers

OF OURSELVES & OTHERS!

Session 4 – Teens



Caretakers of God's Creation

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



What will teens learn?

Objective: Youth will gain a better understanding of our place in Creation as individuals and as human beings. They will look at this in relation to the Nativity of Christ and God's love for us.

How long will it take & ages?

1 hour and teenagers

What do you need?

- Bibles
- Journals
- Post-it Notes
- White board
- Video
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SpLMpu2-MXo>
- Copies of Handouts



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 how we consume things in the world around us. We also discussed how this relates to fasting and being a better caretaker of creation. Do you remember anything else from last time we talked? Take some time for discussion."

The most important, impressive and magical of all the things God created is us – people, human beings. We have the ability to do things which no other creature can: though hyenas may laugh, they don't seem to have a sense of humour. Though birds can sing, they don't compose operas. Unlike anything else in the universe we can think – not only that, we can think about thinking! As we read in the book of Genesis, man and woman are the crown of God's creation. So caring for creation means caring for each other, and for ourselves. Read Genesis 2: 4-25. **Take the time to look at the related creation icons from the folder as you read and look at what is depicted.** https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1bn049M-cU4ODJbwpcYQj5SqFuVd322Qm?usp=share_link.

How special are we? On December 25th/January 7th we celebrate the Nativity of our Lord – Christmas. We believe that God Himself became a human being, just like us. Think of it – God identifies completely and totally with us, with you, and with me. So if God thinks this highly of us, we should certainly think just as highly of ourselves and others, and treat others, and ourselves, with dignity, respect, love, and compassion. **Take a moment to ask them what they think about this. Ask them if they have ever heard, "Created in the image and likeness of God."**

Caring for ourselves and each other is undoubtedly the most important way that we care for God's creation. And one of the most important needs that each and every one of us has is the need for community. The English poet John Donne famously said that "no man is an island." None of us is self-sufficient, we all need others, and this truth is part of our traditional Nativity and celebration. **Use the white board. Ask the teens to brainstorm as many ways as they can how they can be better caretakers of themselves and of other people.**

I'm sure many of you know about our traditional Ukrainian Christmas Eve Holy Supper (Свята Вечеря). One of the beautiful things we do is to leave an empty spot at the table to remind us of loved ones who aren't with us like our deceased family members as well as those who are away at school, for work, etc. The empty place is also there in case a stranger or hungry person comes to the door. It reminds us of those who have no one to share the joy of the holiday with, and that we should be ready to welcome them at our table. The empty place reminds us of what it is to be lonely; to miss the presence of a loved one; to have no one to share a celebration with. **Ask the youth if any of them practice this tradition – maybe they can start!**

We all are lonely at one time or another, but the fact that loneliness is common doesn't make it pleasant, and it can often lead us into temptation. When we're lonely it's easy to be drawn into various types of sinful and destructive behavior, or even just to waste time on social media, watching TV, or surfing the web.

Everyone needs love. The knowledge that I am loved is probably the most important piece of information that any human being has or needs (by the way, it's the central message of Christmas – God loves you). When we feel lonely it might be out of a longing to be with people we love, and people who love us. But it might be because we feel abandoned, ignored, or unloved. **Take a moment to ask them if they ever feel lonely. What do they do when they feel this way?**

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The first step in combating loneliness is to be peaceful within ourselves. Many things can help us cultivate this inner peace such as prayer, active participation in the spiritual and social life of our parish, being involved in sports, being intellectually engaged, and actively ministering to the needs of others (e.g., volunteering for a social assistance agency, joining a service club, visiting the elderly and infirm, etc.).

After God, our greatest, deepest, and most fulfilling relationships will usually be with family members. Though we will definitely experience tension, conflict, and frustration in our families, a healthy relationship with family members is one of the best ways to maintain good mental and spiritual health.

Strong, loving relationships with close friends, friends we can depend on, friends who are true and trusted, is equally important. If you don't have any really good friends try to find one. If you know someone who doesn't have any friends, maybe you're the one they're waiting for. But make sure in either case that they are persons of quality. It doesn't matter what a person looks like on the outside – it's inner virtues like honesty, trustworthiness and faithfulness that matter most.

Being a caretaker of God's Creation means being caretakers of ourselves and the people around us. Loneliness is never pleasant for anyone. Weaving a net of healthy, supportive relationships is important for our spiritual and mental well-being, and for the well-being of the people around us.

Use the whiteboard or have the youth use their journals. Who are people around them who might be lonely and in need of Christ's Love – their love/friendship?

Wrapping it Up!

Praxis: Watch the video, Listen to this song, try to imagine the kind of person who he might be thinking about, and think of how you might be able to help people in your community feel less lonely: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SpLMpu2-MXo>

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. After 5-10 minutes come back together and share.

Share the suggestions of "A New Year of Helping Others". Ask the groups to come up with other ways that they can keep the fast as Caretakers of God's Creation.

As we start the new year, check out the list below, and see if there isn't something you can begin to do which will help you or someone else be less lonely:

- Participate in group activities, like orchestras, choirs, sports teams, church youth groups, service organizations, etc.
- Cultivate healthy relationships with family members and friends. Each of us should have a trustworthy person we can talk to at any time about anything.
- Do you know anyone who struggles with loneliness? Try to get together with them face-to-face every now and then just to talk.
- Is there someone you know of who will be alone on Christmas? Invite them to your Holy Supper and to Church
- Elderly people often feel lonely. Try to visit elderly relatives, parish members, or nursing home residents just to sit and listen. You will bring great joy to their lives.

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Wrapping it Up!

Taking it Home!: In their journals, have the youth make a section for caretakers of me and others. Ask them to journal concerning ways that they can be better caretakers of themselves spiritually, physically, socially and mentally. Then ask them to journal of ways they can be better caretakers of others using the same four prompts.

You can share this article with them about journaling from Orthodox Christian Parenting as a handout.
<https://orthodoxchristianparenting.wordpress.com/2016/02/03/on-learning-the-scriptures-by-creating-a-scripture-journal/>

Additional Activities:

1. Devise a project in which the youth can write or make icons of their individual patron saints as an iconographic window into heaven and something concrete to reflect their saint as an example to follow in living the life of God. Relate this to being made in God's image. We can use our patron saint icons in our prayer corners to deepen prayer and aid in our spiritual health.
2. Create care packages for you local essential workers (fire/police departments, those working in elderly care facilities, emergency room doctors/nurses, emergency responders). Let them know that you are thinking of THEM as they care for others. Say prayers for them. Arrange with these locations for your youth to drop off the care packages and say "thank you"
3. Continue with or start visiting the elderly or shut-ins from your parishes. Have youth make thinking of you cards monthly for these parish faithful.
4. Create RAK (Random Act of Kindness) bags. These should have things like a water bottle, package of crackers, package of cookies, an prayer card, etc. Have the youth take one or two to keep in their cars that they can give to someone who is homeless. You can also take these to a local homeless shelter as a group. If you take on this project, discuss with youth that they should pray for each individual they give these to. They are not "helping" someone but sharing what they have with a brother or sister in made in Christ's Image. For more on this watch this resource and video from YES FOCUS <https://yesnorthamerica.org/servetoday/> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nm7OxRWSTfg>
5. Consider setting up a YES day trip in your city with your youth and youth from other Orthodox parishes <https://yesnorthamerica.org/setting-up-a-trip/>
6. Everyone can make a difference in the lives of others – if they want to. No matter what career path you hope to follow you will have an opportunity to help and serve others. Watch this video message from King Charles of England and think about the many ways we are able to contribute to the health and welfare of others and its relation to Christ's Birth. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AkqN60BqyTQ>

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

