



*Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese
of North America, Metropolitan PHILIP, Primate*
DEPARTMENT OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION
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**2007 Creative Festivals Lesson Plan:
Preschool to Kindergarten**

THEME:

“...Building up the Body of Christ; until we all come to the unity of the faith.”

Ephesians 4:12-13

GOALS:

1. To help students understand the theme well enough to express it in art, poetry, prose, or photography (check your individual diocese’s rules to see if entries for this age group are accepted in all categories).
2. To feel a special part of the parish family as a member of the Church.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To recognize Christ by His image on icons.
2. To discuss the church as not just a building but made up of the many families who believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God.
3. To hear that they are members of the Church because they receive Holy Communion.
4. To model the concept of unity by building a “church” with blocks together through group play.
5. To experience what it would be like if all the people in the Church worked together.

TIME: 30-40 minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Icon of Christ
- Wooden building blocks, enough for the entire group (or blocks of other materials suitable for building)
- Drawing paper and crayons or photo of each child’s family, masking tape to attach drawings or photos to building blocks (optional items)
- Supplies for use in creating Festival entries as needed

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FOR THE CATECHIST:

The phrases Body of Christ and unity of faith are abstract concepts to the preschool/kindergarten child. You have the difficult task of conveying the intent of the Creative Arts Festival theme in images, words, or actions that the young child can grasp with his egocentric mind. The intention of the Festival theme is unity.

Overall, it is hoped that the catechists will guide students in understanding the importance of becoming a unified presence of Orthodoxy in the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese in North America and in the Orthodox Church on the North American continent in general. For the young child, however, a different approach is needed, and your task will be to connect new learning with what they already know.

The lesson suggested here is hands-on: To “build” a church as a group effort in harmony with one another with the same purpose of mind and for a good result. Each child will work on the project in some way. Each can contribute an idea. No one will be left out.

How the children interact with one another will reflect whether or not they are working in unity. Probably the most difficult part of your task as catechist will be to let the children work for a while without intervention by you to see how they can work together to accomplish their purpose. It is advised that you not interrupt their work but observe for several minutes—unless they behave in ways that are harmful to their persons or destructive to property.

Near the conclusion of their (unified) group effort, you can remark on their ability to share materials, take turns, work out a difficult problem, praise them for their cooperation, etc. When they have finished, you can seat them comfortably on the floor to discuss what they have really done: They worked together and did great work!

You will want to relate this to how the people in families work together and how the people in the Church work together, too. All the people come to church to be together to pray and worship God and to thank God for all the good things He has given us. We receive Holy Communion together and then we are the Church (the Body of Christ). You will want them to understand that the church is not just a building but a group of people who come together to be with Christ. And they receive Holy Communion in the Church.

(This cooperation we are expecting from the children in their work reflects the *synergy—the co-operation between God and humans.*)

THE LESSON PLAN

OPENING:

Gather children around the icon corner to say, “Our Father.”

INTRODUCTION:

Assemble the children in comfortable seating. Read aloud the theme and say you’ll help them understand what it means.

CONTENT:

Helping the children to understand what is meant by the *Body of Christ*.

Direct the children’s attention to the icon of Christ. Ask them to tell what they know about Christ. Help them to articulate that Jesus is the Son of God Who loves us and wants us to love Him. Ask the children why they come to church. Answers will vary. Be sure that someone (even you) mentions that we come to church to pray to God and to receive Holy Communion. You might also say,

“Each of us is part of a family, and we come to church with our family members. The church is made up of a lot of families—a lot of people—and Christ is the head of this big family called the Church. You can receive Holy Communion because you are members of this big family called the Church. Sometimes, it’s not just the building that we are talking about when we speak of the Church.”

If you have only kindergarten students, you might change using the phrase Body

of Christ. You will know whether your students are able to accept this image. If you do use this phrase, tell them that all the baptized Christians in the Church are called the Body of Christ. (Be sure they know that St. Paul didn’t mean the physical body of Jesus such as his chest, stomach, arms, legs, etc.)

Helping the children understand the idea of unity.

You are asked to help children understand the idea of **unity**, which the dictionary defines as oneness in spirit, aims, interests, and feelings; agreement; harmony; parts joined together to make a whole. The children will model the concept of unity by working together (or not) for the purpose of building a church, preferably out of wooden blocks. How they work together will reflect a unity of spirit, with “parts” joined together to make a completed “whole.”

Allow an inductive approach here. Give the children an opportunity to figure out for themselves what it means to work in unity.

RESPONSE:

Gather the children around the workspace where you have piled wooden blocks (or other suitable manipulative materials). Explain the task: To build a “church.”

- Each child will help.
- Each child can contribute an idea as to how it should look.
- No child shall be left out.

Allow the children time to work without intervention, unless someone behaves in

a way harmful to others or is destructive to property, at which time you'd have to step in. Observe how the children interact and whether they are working in harmony, working out a way to solve some problem with their building, or whether they are at odds in some way. Perhaps you can affirm something they are doing well, but don't correct them.

If you have time, you may want to have the children embellish the "church" by having each of them draw a picture of their family and attach their pictures to the "church" with masking tape circles on the back of the drawings. (If you have asked the children to bring in photos of their families, do the same with photos instead.) In addition, one child's task (or your task) can be to draw a picture (or provide a photo) of the priest and add it to the church as well.

ACTIVITY:

When the children have completed the project, ask them to sit nearby to talk about what they've just done. You will want to praise them for their efforts in working together. Here are some questions:

- What ways did you work together?
- Who were the builders?
- Who was a really good block builder? How do you know?
- Did the rest of you do good work? Why?
- Did everyone help? Why or why not?

(Children might be able to evaluate themselves: "I know how to build! My friend and I worked together! Nobody

knocked down blocks! Everybody helped!")

- How did some of you solve a problem with making the building?
- Did everyone share the blocks? How did this help with building your church?
- Did some of you not work together? Why not? (Possible reasons for not working well include "I couldn't get it right. We didn't share the blocks. He took all the blocks! She knocked down my blocks on purpose. He didn't want to help.")

As needed, pose these questions:

- Was anyone unkind to you? What did you do?
- How did it feel when someone was unkind or when someone bothered you?
- Were you unkind to someone else when you were building?
- Did anyone get angry?
- What happened when that person got angry? What happened to the building?
- What could you say to the person who was angry?

Talk about the results of working together or not working together:

- What happened when you worked together? (We built the church.)
- What happened (happens) when you argued or didn't share the blocks or let each person have a turn to build or decide what to do? (Things didn't get done, and

we made everybody mad. Some of us felt bad because we didn't have a turn and the church was spoiled, etc.)

- How did you feel when you worked together? (Ask for several responses.)

Explain how good it is when the children (people) work together to finish a job, just like when you're on a soccer team and each person has a job to do. If each player does what he is supposed to do, the team can win. The Church needs its members to do their share and to work together. It's like playing together and being happy together.)

- How did you feel when you saw the building was finished?
- Suppose Jesus was here with you as you worked on your building. How do you think Jesus wants you to behave when you are working together?
- Imagine how wonderful it would be if all the people in the Church worked together. What do you think would happen in our real church if everyone worked together? What if we didn't work together on something? Which do you think is better? Why?

You might then tell the children,

- "When the people of the Church work together and get along, it's what we mean by unity. Everybody shares the work and everybody works together to do something good for the Church. This is how Jesus wants us to behave in the Church."
- What would it be like if people in the Orthodox churches all over

America worked together to make the Church strong? (Answers might be fascinating.)

You can now review why we come to church each week: You might say:

- You have just built a church. This is a pretend church. We have a real church that we all go to. Who remembers why we go to church? (To pray, to receive Holy Communion, to be with Jesus)
- Why can you receive Holy Communion in the Church? (Because you belong to the church, you are a member of the Church, and Christ asks you to come to Communion.)
- Who are the people who go to Church? (All the families who believe in Jesus Christ; all the people who are baptized and belong to the Church)
- So is the church just a building? (No. People are in the church. The people make up the church.)
- Show the icon of Christ. Whom do we see on this icon? (Jesus Christ)
- Who do we say is the Head of our Church? (Jesus Christ)
- Why does Jesus want us to come to church? (To receive Holy Communion, to be with Him because He loves us.)

CLOSING:

You might give these or similar closing remarks:

“I hope you will always remember that Jesus loves each of us, and He wants us to love Him back. Jesus wants us to come to church to receive Holy Communion. We’re very special people because we belong to the Orthodox Church. I hope you will always be Orthodox and always be able to come to church for Holy Communion. This is a wonderful gift that we receive from Christ. Let’s thank Jesus for loving us and giving us His Holy Communion.”

Hold the icon of Christ so each child may reverence it.

Say a closing prayer.