



*Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese
of North America, Metropolitan PHILIP, Primate*
DEPARTMENT OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION
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**2007 Creative Festivals Lesson Plan:
Grades 1-3**

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.
2. To encourage student understanding of themselves as members of the Body of Christ with Christ as the Head of the Church.
3. To help mediate student growth as Orthodox Christians in an increasingly diverse world and among diverse Orthodox Christian populations and jurisdictions.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Discuss that the Church is not just a building we go to on Sundays but a group of people who are baptized Christians and who believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God Who rose from the dead.
2. Hear that the Church is the Body of Christ and each Orthodox Christian is a member of the Body of Christ.
3. Say Christ is the Head of the Church and we are members of His Body.
4. Demonstrate themselves to be the Body of Christ with Christ as the Head.
5. Sing the Communion Hymn “Receive the Body of Christ.”
6. Draw or write three ways they can become more active members of the Body of Christ
7. Draw or write three ways they can share their Faith with others.

TIME: 45 minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Icon of Christ (Pantocrator)
- Photo or illustration of chalice and spoon used for Holy Communion (If possible, take a “field trip” to the church and have the priest or deacon show them the chalice and spoon.)
- Chalkboard and chalk or large sheets of paper and markers
- Music for Communion Hymn: “Receive the Body of Christ; Taste the Fountain of Immortality”
- Communion Prayer said by the faithful before Communion

For the students:

- Sheets of drawing paper or writing paper for each student
- Pencils for each student; crayons
- Large beach ball
- 2 bean bags or balls

FOR THE CATECHIST:

There are many layers of meaning to the words “Body of Christ.” You will need to consider how much your students already know and how much they are able to absorb. The six-year-old may not have attained the same fullness of understanding as has the eight-year-old. Yet, you’ll want to challenge all the students under your care.

Consider also the advice from Sr. Magdalen about using the words body and blood with young children and how you will approach any discussion of the Eucharist without distorting the Truth of our Orthodox Faith. (See “The Body of Christ is Holy Communion.”) The important thing is that students

understand the Church not as building only; rather, they should know the Church as the gathering of Christians who become members of the Body of Christ with Christ as its Head. Those who rightly believe and rightly glorify God attain to the unity of the True Faith.

Suggested Readings:

Sr. Magdalen: *Children in the Church. An Orthodox Perspective.*
The Orthodox Study Bible, Ephesians, pp. 436-452.

THE LESSON PLAN

OPENING:

Gather students around the icon corner to pray “Our Father.” Ask them to remain standing and lead them to an area for the Team activity.

INTRODUCTION:

Draw upon the students’ experience as members of a sports team or club to explain the word member. Remind them that each sports team usually has a head coach and each club has a leader or president. Since some students may not be a member of a team, you might create two make-believe teams and have an activity such as a bean bag toss or other relay-team activity. This might be a good icebreaker. Have the students identify the designated leader and the individual member that makes up the group.

Tell students to keep in mind the idea of a group of people who do something together as you prepare for the Creative Arts Festival.

Read aloud the verse for the Creative Arts Festival and tell the students you will help them understand what some of the words mean, such as “Body of Christ” and “unity of the faith.” Then the students will need to think about what they want to draw or write about. Explain that this verse comes from St. Paul’s Letter (Epistle) to the Ephesians. The Ephesians were people who lived in Ephesus, a city in Greece.

CONTENT:

The Church as People. Talk with the students about what a church is. Some will think of the church as a building; some might say it’s a place where we go on Sundays. Some might refer to church as the place where we get Holy Communion. Allow them time to express their understanding. You might list or draw their phrases on a chalkboard or large sheet of paper.

Introduce the idea, if it was not already mentioned, that the Church is a group of people. These people come to a building to pray, sing to God, and to receive Holy Communion. You might pose these questions:

- What do we call the people who come to church? (Christians)
- How did they get to be Christians? (They were baptized.)

Some students might say that they are Orthodox; and you might add that they were Chrismated with Holy Chrism and are now members of the Orthodox Church.

- Why do these Orthodox Christians who come to church call themselves Christians? (Because they believe in Jesus Christ)
- Who is Christ? (Answers will vary. Help students to proclaim Christ as the Son of God Who died on the cross and who rose from the dead. Emphasize Christ’s Resurrection and that He died to save us from sin and gives us eternal life.)

Christians as members of Christ's Church.

Remind students that Christ told us He would send the Holy Spirit to the people. This happened on Pentecost. (Students should be familiar with this event, based on last year's Festival theme.) With younger students, you might ask them to make the Sign of the Cross with emphasis on the words Holy Spirit. Sometimes we say that the "birthday of the Church" was on Pentecost when the Holy Spirit appeared as tongues of fire on the disciples.

Tell students that *people* who were baptized Christians became members of the Church. They were first called Christians at Antioch in Syria!

Refer to the exercise where you talked about/formed teams in the Introduction of the Lesson Plan. Help students to articulate that we are *members of the Orthodox Church* because we are baptized Christians and we are Chrismated in the Orthodox Church. Just as members of a team work together to win the game, the members of the church work together to grow closer to Christ and do what He wants for His people.

The Body of Christ.

Print the phrase *Body of Christ* on the middle of the chalkboard or in the middle of a large piece of paper. Say the phrase aloud and ask students to repeat it. Explain that in the Epistle the phrase *Body of Christ* doesn't mean Jesus's actual arms, legs, hands, feet, stomach, or chest. Instead, St. Paul uses the phrase *Body of Christ* to talk about all the people who are baptized Christians and who believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died on the Cross and rose

from the dead to save us from sin and give us eternal life. St. Paul would say that all these people are members of the *Body of Christ*.

You might also say, "The Body of Christ is one way to talk about the baptized people of the Church."

You might then say, "The Church is the Body of Christ." (Students could repeat this.) You might state this in equation form: The Church = the Body of Christ. When we say "The Church," we mean the Body of Christ. When we say the "Body of Christ," we mean "The Church."

Christ is the Head of the Body.

Pose the serious questions: How can a body have no head? How can a head have no body? Direct students' attention to Christ as Head:

Tell students: We know that the Church is all the people who are the *Body of Christ*. Who is the Head? Some students may say that Christ is the Head of the Body, but you will most likely need to convey this for students to repeat: Christ is the Head of the Body (The Church).

Christ is the Head of the Church and we are *members* of His body.

Show this for kinesthetic learners by having everyone stand in a circle to represent "members" of the Church. This is the Body of Christ. (Since we are a conciliar church, form a circle.) Then stand in the middle of the circle and raise an icon of Christ as Pantocrator above the heads of the *Body of Christ*.

You can show this visually by placing a paper icon of Christ at the top of a page where you have drawn people as members of the church.

The Body of Christ in Holy Communion.

Show a picture of the chalice and spoon used in Holy Communion (or take the children into the church and have the priest or deacon show them the chalice and spoon). Students will know what these are and why they are used in Church. Ask students to verbalize *why* they come to Communion. Help them articulate that as Orthodox Christians we come to receive Christ Who loves us so much He asks us to come to Him in Holy Communion. You might consider the age and maturity of your group of students with regard to their understanding about Body and Blood of Christ. Sister Magdalen writes in *Children in the Church Today. An Orthodox Perspective*:

When we speak about Holy Communion to very young children, they sometimes react negatively to the expression “the body and blood of Christ.” This occurs in discussions rather than in the context of the liturgy itself. Probably it is enough for them to hear the Words of Institution at the liturgy, and the priest’s words as they receive the Holy Gifts. At other times we can speak of Christ coming to be within us, or of receiving Christ. We should certainly never deny that we receive Christ’s body and blood, but sometimes our “explanations” only cause children to imagine flesh and bones, and they feel distaste. Christ comes to us in the form of bread and wine because He condescends to us, and knows how difficult it would be for us otherwise to partake of His life. (p. 64, *Chapter 6, Liturgical and Spiritual Life*)

You might ask for direction from your parish priest regarding the way to phrase this for any students in your class who might be upset by the words body and blood. You can emphasize that we all are members of the Body of Christ with Christ as the Head of the Church, provided you have explained that St. Paul did not mean Jesus’s physical body.

Ask students to recall the words of the hymn sung during Communion: “Receive the **Body of Christ**. Taste the Fountain of Immortality” and sing it during class. Use also the prayer recited just before Communion by the faithful:

“I believe, O Lord, and I confess that Thou art truly the Christ, the Son of the living God....I believe also that this is truly Thine own most pure **Body**, and that this is truly Thine own precious Blood....”

You might say,

“When we receive Holy Communion, we receive Christ’s Body and Blood.

It looks like bread and wine, but it is *mystically* also His Body and Blood.

The Church teaches us that this is a Mystery.

This is our One True Faith, handed down from the time of the Apostles.”

You might say,

“When we receive Holy Communion, we become the Body of Christ.”

Everywhere in the United States, everywhere in the world, when Orthodox

Christians are gathered together in Church for Divine Liturgy, they can receive Holy Communion, the Body and Blood of Christ. When all these Orthodox people receive Holy Communion, they make up the Body of Christ and are **united in the Orthodox Faith. They are One Body and One Faith.**

Try not to get into a discussion about whether non-Orthodox Christians can partake of the sacraments in the Orthodox Church for this age group. If a student asks about it, answer honestly and point out our belief that we hold the fullness of faith. If other Christians don't believe the same as we do, then they cannot be united with us.

Each Orthodox Christian is a member of the Body of Christ.

Ask students to say that he/she is an Orthodox Christian who is:

- a member of the Orthodox Church
- a member of the Body of Christ
- a faithful Christian
- a faithful Christian who believes in Jesus Christ as the Son of God Who died on the cross and rose from the dead. (Refer to the Paschal season when we say, "Christ is risen! Indeed, He is risen!")

Summarize: We are all Orthodox Christians who are members of the Orthodox Church. We are the Body of Christ, which is the Church. Christ is the Head of the Church, and we are members of His Body. When we receive Holy Communion (the Body and Blood of Christ), we are united in the Faith.

How can we let other people know about our wonderful Orthodox Faith?

ACTIVITY:

You might pair students to complete the two-pronged exercise that follows: Perhaps a first-grader could work with an older child who is better able to write and spell. Distribute drawing paper, pencils, and crayons to each student seated at a workspace.

1. Draw or write down three ways that you as an Orthodox Christian can become an *active member of the Body of Christ.*

Possible responses:

- To think about all the good things God gives us and to thank Him for everything;
- To be obedient to parents, since this what God wants us to do;
- To pray at church and pay attention during the services or talk to Jesus anytime;
- To be kind to everyone, including animals;
- To take good care of our bodies as well as our belongings;
- To be willing to share with others and not be selfish;
- To receive Holy Communion; to go to confession, if you are old enough.

2. We want to tell others about Christ and our Orthodox Faith. Draw or write two or three ways that you can tell others about Christ and about being an Orthodox Christian.

Possible responses:

- Tell them about the ways you celebrate Pascha or Christmas or your names day;
- Be kind and respectful when talking about other people's beliefs but also proudly tell your own beliefs about your Orthodox Faith;
- Invite a friend to join you at church;
- Behave the way Christ wants each of us to behave. (Example says a lot!)
- By honoring one's parents and not talking back out of disrespect;
- By being honest and trustworthy and doing the work assigned to you;
- By helping an elderly person with some task;
- By helping at church with coffee hour or working on a church project;
- By offering money earned from one's allowance or chores;
- By not arguing or fighting with brothers and sisters or school friends.

Ask students to share responses with the group. You might display their work.

CLOSING:

Gather students into a small circle. Bring out a beach ball to use for a question-and-answer review. Toss the ball to one

of the students who will try to answer the question. Then the student will toss the ball to another student who will try to answer the next question.

What does St. Paul mean when he says the "Body of Christ"? (Not flesh and bones but all the people who believe in Christ and are baptized and who receive Holy Communion.)

Who is the Head of the Church? (Christ)
Fill in the blank: We say Christ is the Head of the Church and we are _____ (members) of His Body.

Why do we go to Holy Communion? (To receive Jesus Christ)

At Communion, we sing a hymn. What are its words? (Receive the Body of Christ; Taste the Fountain of Immortality)

Fill in the missing word in this sentence: When Orthodox Christians receive Holy Communion together, they are _____ (united) in the Orthodox Faith.

Why should we want to tell other people about our Orthodox Faith? (Because Christ wants all people to come to Him and love Him. We should let everyone know about Christ.)

Tell us one way you can be an active member of the Orthodox Church. (Varied individual responses)

Gather students around the icon corner.

Say a closing prayer or sing an "Alleluia" or other hymn customary for your parish.