

2021 ACYOA Juniors Fall Retreat Guidebook



DIOCESE OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH (EASTERN)
Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries

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Dear Pastors, Parish Council Chairs, Youth Advisors and ACYOA Seniors Chairs,

The Diocese of the Armenian Church (Eastern) is pleased to offer day-long retreats for ACYOA Juniors this coming fall! Since we were unable to gather for overnight events such as camp and sports weekend due to the ongoing pandemic, Jennifer and Kathryn are hosting several in-person gatherings for the ACYOA Juniors to help reunite our youth for a fun day. If your parish is unable to attend these retreats, we welcome you to plan and execute your own day-long retreats for the youth of your community.

In this guidebook, our department has provided the nuts-to-bolts instructions of planning and running a retreat to equip you with the resources needed to hold a retreat for your ACYOA Juniors. The lessons in this guidebook are also easily adaptable for building an ACYOA Seniors retreat. You will find a sample schedule, a registration form, a sample Code of Conduct, and detailed lesson plans for icebreakers, team-building activity, engaging group discussions, and a scripture study. We hope this will assist you in the execution of a day-long retreat that can be organized and led by your parish leadership. *Please keep in mind that this guidebook contains the raw materials of each presentation; clergymen and facilitators should feel free to add their own personality and modify the sessions to meet the specific needs of their audiences!*

We will be available by phone or email throughout the planning stages of your retreats if you have any questions or need additional guidance. We hope that the contents of this guidebook lead you to fruitful discussions, fun fellowship, and a deepened strength within your ACYOA Juniors.

We look forward to hearing all about your ACYOA Juniors Fall Retreat!

Warmest regards,

The Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries

Jennifer Morris, JenniferM@armeniandiocese.org, 248-648-0702 and
Kathryn Ashbahian, KathrynA@armeniandiocese.org, 215-452-8322

(INSERT PARISH OR REGION NAME) **ACYOA FALL RETREAT**

SATURDAY, (INSERT MONTH, DAY, YEAR)

11:00 AM	Registration and Welcome
11:30 AM	Morning Service
11:30 - 12:00 PM	Session 1: Icebreakers
12:00 - 1:00 PM	Lunch & Group Photo
1:00 - 2:00 PM	Session 2: Talent Tower
2:00 - 3:00 PM	Session 3: Say Anything!
3:00 - 3:15 PM	Break
3:15 - 4:15 PM	Session 4: Scripture Study
4:15 - 4:45 PM	Vespers/Personal Prayer
5:00 PM	Pick-Up

(INSERT PARISH OR REGION NAME) **ACYOA Fall Retreat** (INSERT MONTH, DAY, YEAR)

Sample Registration Form*

(Please modify questions and fields based on the age group of participants)

PLEASE NOTE: All local, state, and CDC guidelines at the time of the retreats will be observed. Masks may be required when indoors, regardless of vaccination status. Participants will be e-mailed confirmation of the relevant guidelines prior to the day of the retreat.

Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____ **Age:** _____

Sex: Male Female

Parish: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City: _____ **State:** _____ **Zip Code:** _____

Home Phone: _____

Participant Cell Phone: _____

Participant Email: _____

PRIMARY PARENT/GUARDIAN	SECONDARY PARENT/GUARDIAN
Name:	Name:
Cell Number:	Cell Number:
Email:	Email:

_____ Yes, my *Code of Conduct* has been read and signed by me (and a parent, if applicable).

**Please note: If you'd like to go completely digital with your retreat, you may create an online registration form using [Google Form](#). Participants can submit their registration using the registration link you send them.*

CODE OF CONDUCT

1. As members of the ACYOA, we are part of a Christian youth organization and expect Christian standards of behavior at all times. Therefore, all participants and chaperones shall be treated with respect and dignity at all times.
2. We are a community – we all need to clean-up after ourselves, share the facilities, and treat the facilities with respect. The destruction, misuse, or abuse of property will not be tolerated. Those found responsible for such behavior will be held financially liable.
3. Be on time and follow the schedule! You are expected to participate in all activities.
4. Participate in discussions, share your ideas, and remember to listen to others. Everyone deserves a chance to speak, and everyone deserves to be heard.
5. Proper dress and language are expected at all times. Participants will not use foul or abusive language, including words of a sexually explicit or violent nature.
6. No weapons of any kind, firecrackers, or inappropriate audio/video recordings are permitted.
7. Participants will not partake in any form of drugs and/or alcohol while participating in the retreat. This includes but is not limited to: alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, illegal drugs, cigarettes, e-cigarettes, cigars, snuff, chewing tobacco, vaporizers, hookahs, etc. (and their accompanying paraphernalia).

Any serious violation of these rules by participants will be evaluated on an individual basis and dealt with quickly and firmly and may result in expulsion of the virtual retreat. Parents and pastors will be contacted after the retreat to discuss any inappropriate behavior.

**I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE CODE OF CONDUCT,
AND AGREE TO ABIDE BY THE ABOVE INFORMATION.**

Participant Name PRINT: _____

Participant SIGNATURE: _____ **Date:** _____

Parent/Guardian SIGNATURE: _____ **Date:** _____

SESSION 1: Introductions and Icebreakers

A NOTE TO FACILITATORS: Be sure to go around and have everyone introduce themselves with their name, age, and their answer to the special question (i.e. favorite ice cream, favorite hobby, personal hero, etc.). Select one or more of the icebreakers below, based on your registration numbers and time available.

1. **Three Objects:** Ask participants to introduce themselves with their names, age and to share three objects that they could not live without in their daily lives, and ask them to explain them to the group.
2. **Interview:** Divide participants into pairs. Ask them to take three minutes to interview each other. Each interviewer has to find 3 interesting facts about their partner. Bring everyone back together and ask everyone to present the 3 facts about their partner to the rest of the group. Do a new round with as much time you have left in the Icebreakers session.
3. **Spectrum:** In this activity, participants will line up in the center of the room. The facilitator will shout out a question pointing to the right or left side of the line that corresponds with the choices. The middle of the line will be designated as neutral or indifferent. The participants will move their body accordingly in the line to visually show their response. Encourage participants to be honest and not influenced by their friends' responses. The facilitator will call on a participant from each side of the line to explain their answer, which will help the participants get to know each other better and help them gain confidence in speaking and sharing with the group. Try to call on as many different participants as possible during this icebreaker.
 1. Would you rather be really tall or really short?
 2. Would you rather have a kitten or a puppy?
 3. Would you rather live in the dark or in blinding light?
 4. Would you rather read books or write stories?
 5. Would you rather travel into the future or back to the past?
 6. Would you rather go mountain climbing or skydiving?
 7. Would you rather eat cake or eat ice cream?
 8. Would you rather take an art class or a music class?
 9. Would you rather play sports or watch sports?
 10. Would you rather be a bird or a fish?

SESSION 2: Talent Tower - A Team Building Activity

A NOTE TO INSTRUCTORS: This team-building activity is meant to be fun and challenging, so don't worry if your participants get rowdy or goofy! Walk around the room as they are building their towers to supervise and ask leading questions for them to ponder.

PREP: Split into groups of 5-7 people.

MATERIALS: Hand out equal amounts of the following items to each group:

- Newspaper
- Tape
- Scissors
- Water cup
- Blindfold
- String

GOAL: To create the tallest freestanding structure using EVERYONE on the team using only newspaper and masking tape.

RULES: All participants must help each other and contribute to building the tower despite their restricted abilities. EVERYONE has to help, both mentally & physically. All participants must work within the guidelines of their restricted abilities. Use the following restrictions:

- One person must be blindfolded
- One person must hold a very full glass of water in their dominant hand
- One person must have their ankles and knees taped (or tied) together
- One person must have their mouth taped shut
- One person must have both their hands taped (or tied) behind their back

ACTION: Restate the goal of the activity. Give the groups 20 minutes. Build the Tower!

- Comment when you see people being excluded or not helping
- Comment when you see excellent teamwork
- When time is up, have the participants sit & present their towers to the group

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: After everyone has presented their towers, discuss the following questions:

- How did the activity go?
- What was challenging about the activity?
- What did you notice about everybody's abilities?
- What did you do to encourage one another?
- What was the most frustrating? How did you overcome moments of miscommunication?

IN CLOSING: Read the following passage from 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 and discuss:

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. **13** For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. **14** Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. **15** If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. **16** And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. **17** If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? **18** But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. **19** If all were a single member, where would the body be? **20** As it is, there are many members, yet one body. **21** The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” **22** On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, **23** and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; **24** whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, **25** that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. **26** If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. **27** Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. **28** And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. **29** Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? **30** Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? **31** But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

SESSION 3: Say Anything!

A NOTE TO INSTRUCTORS: Depending on the size of your retreat, this session can be whole-group or can be broken up into small-group discussions, with appointed leaders in each group. Make sure that your groups are about 5-8 people in size so everyone has ample opportunity to share and contribute to the discussion.

In a time where we have been isolated and disengaged with one another due to the pandemic, we want to bring our youth back into the folds of deep, meaningful conversations. We believe this activity will foster intimate discourse amongst their peers in a safe and purposely anonymous format. This is an exercise in allowing them to freely share what is weighing on their hearts and minds without feeling judged. It also gives them the opportunity to see things from the varying perspectives of their fellow teenagers and learn from shared experiences. This activity will hopefully provide participants a foundation of articulating their thoughts so that they can have deeper conversations about their faith when the situation arises.

Make groups of at least 5-8 people. You'll want to have groups that are big enough to provide anonymity and diversity, but small enough to provide intimacy when discussing answers. Give each person a stack of index cards (or slips of paper, if it's easier) and a pen. Each person will get the chance to be the "Question Ringleader," and that person gets to read the question prompt to the whole group. Everyone will then write their answers on their index cards and turn them in anonymously to the Question Ringleader. The QR will then shuffle the cards and read each of them outloud. Participants will then discuss the varying answers and grapple with the big idea.

Question examples:

1. What do you think the world needs more of and why?
2. Do you think social media helps make/maintain friendships? Why/ why not?
3. What TV shows or movies have challenged your way of thinking? Explain.
4. What's something you wish adults understood about teens today?
5. At what point do you think you will start feeling like an adult?
6. What are your negotiables and non-negotiables in a friendship?
7. What do you think makes your generation unique?
8. Who has been a helpful mentor in your life? How have they helped you?
9. Have you ever questioned your faith? Explain.
10. If you could have an endless supply of something, what would it be?
11. Describe a tough situation that turned out to be a blessing in disguise.
12. What would you like to accomplish before the end of your life?
13. What three adjectives best describe your faith right now?

SESSION 3: Scripture Study

A NOTE TO INSTRUCTORS: This is the plain text copy of the Scripture Study handout titled "Above All, Clothe Yourselves with Love." Print the handout on a two-sided sheet of paper, and encourage your participants to actively write their thoughts down as they go through the study.

INTRO: Over the course of the past two years, we've experienced one of the biggest struggles that we will see in our lifetimes. The pandemic abruptly changed the way we live, work, learn, and relate to one another. As Armenian Christians, our greatest calling is to be in communion with each other and God, so our separation forced us to get creative with how we interacted with friends, family members, and parishes. Now that we are beginning to come out of the fog of the past two years, it is time to start mending our social wounds and tending to the hard work of relating to, serving, and loving our fellow humans. With some hard work and honest introspection, each of us can strengthen our faith and revitalize our personal relationships within our parish communities.

REFLECT: Think about the last time you felt lonely or sad. Take a moment to recall how you felt physically, mentally, and spiritually.

ANALYZE: Describe who or what you turned to during this time of isolation or darkness. How did you overcome these feelings?

LIST: List some of the biggest burdens that are currently weighing on your heart:

READ: 12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (COLOSSIANS 3:12-17)

RESPOND:

1. This passage from Colossians encapsulates what it means to live sincerely and lovingly in community. What words or phrases stand out to you the most?
2. Why do you think "love" is the path to perfect unity? Can any of the characteristics in verses 12 and 13 be performed without love? Why or why not?
3. When was the last time you had a hard time forgiving someone? What finally released you from the hurt in your heart? How do you feel about that person now?
4. Describe a moment where you felt a profound sense of peace. What did it feel like? How can you use that peaceful experience to ground you when you are feeling stressed and anxious

5. In what ways do you rely on your faith and your church community to help navigate you through some of the burdens you listed above?

CULTIVATE: Life can and *will* throw you many curveballs. The next time you feel overwhelmed, lonely, or full of doubt, remember to give yourself patience and grace. To help cultivate the four attitudes of a hopeful spirit, Dn. Yervant Kutchukian suggests the following steps:

1. Cultivate a lived life of prayer and scripture reading. You cannot draw from your reserves if you don't have reserves.
2. Read the Psalms. They offer so much hope in times of despair, so much light in the darkness. The more you read, the more you will find ones that comfort you, and you can return to them frequently.
3. Remember what God has already done for you. There is an important word in theology called "anamnesis"-- the remembering of things from a supposed previous existence. In the Church, this means that we remember the promises that God has already made and kept. God is still working in our lives, even when we feel distant from him.
4. Do your best to actively and intentionally connect with people who create hope for you. These people are physical embodiments of God's love for you. Resist the urge to withdraw into yourself as you go through something hard, and seek these people out in your moments of need.

Finally, in regards to the fourth point above, think of one person in your life who lives with a hopeful spirit, who spreads God's love, and who makes you want to be a better person. Write their name on the line below. Say a prayer of thanksgiving for this person, and ask God to give you the strength to emulate their best characteristics.