

2021 ACYOA Lenten Retreat Guidebook

“The Lord is Near”



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

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February 24, 2021

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

In preparation for this year's season of Great Lent, our department has created this guidebook with nuts-to-bolts instructions to equip you with the resources needed to hold an ACYOA Virtual Retreat for both your Juniors and Seniors. The Lenten season provides a wonderful opportunity for our faithful to strengthen their spiritual discipline and to prepare them for the joyful celebration of Easter. This year's retreat sessions will focus on the theme of ***The Lord is Near.***

This past year has proved to be quite challenging, given the ongoing pandemic and restrictions on large group gatherings in our parish communities. We have strived to provide ministry virtually through our #StayHomeStayConnected and #FellowshipFromHome series through Diving Deep Discussions, Monday Meditations, Teen Talks, Camp Connections, Virtual Camp, and more. We would like to thank our primate, Bishop Daniel Findikyan, for his support of our virtual ministries initiatives. In addition, we would like to thank Fr. Stepanos Doudoukjian for his guidance and feedback when reviewing these materials in their final stages.

In this guidebook, we are providing our parishes with detailed lesson plans for this year's ACYOA Virtual Retreat. You will find a sample schedule, Registration Form, a sample Code of Conduct, Zoom suggestions, detailed lesson plans for icebreakers, a bible study, and engaging group discussions. We hope this will assist you in the execution of day-long virtual 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 presenters should feel free to add their own personality and modify the sessions to meet the specific needs of their audiences!*

We are so lucky that in this time of unprecedented separation that we have the technology we need to stay connected and continue building relationships. 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 between your ACYOA Juniors and ACYOA Seniors.

We look forward to hearing all about your ACYOA Virtual Retreat!

Warmest regards,

The Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries
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(INSERT PARISH OR REGION NAME) **ACYOA VIRTUAL RETREAT**

SATURDAY, (INSERT MONTH, DAY, YEAR)

10:00 AM	Morning Service
10:30-11:00 AM	Session 1: Icebreakers
11:00-12:00 PM	Session 2: Exploring Lazarus Saturday
12:00-1:00 PM	Lunch Break
1:00-2:00 PM	Session 3: Bible Study
2:00-2:30 PM	Vespers

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

Sample Registration Form*

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

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, participants are a part of a Christian youth organization and are expected to have Christian standards of behavior at all times. Therefore, all participants, chaperones, and speakers shall be treated with respect and dignity at all times.
2. Participants should log in on time and participate in virtual activities with enthusiasm and respect.
3. Participants should turn off and put away their cell phones during the retreat to minimize distractions.
4. Participants should find a quiet space in your home to be fully engaged in the virtual activities.
5. Participants should dress appropriately for all virtual activities.
6. Participants will not partake in any form of drugs and/or alcohol while participating in the virtual 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).
7. Participants will not use foul or abusive language, including words of a sexually explicit or violent nature, neither verbally nor in the Zoom chat feature.
8. Participants will not share any inappropriate audio/video recordings while I am participating in virtual camp.

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:** _____

Zoom 101 - Getting Started

1. Click on **MEETINGS**. When ready, find your scheduled meeting and click on **START**. Once you are logged on, look in the bottom left corner of your screen and make sure your audio and video are on. Simply click on the icon of the audio or the video to turn on or off.
2. In the top right corner of your screen, you can change to the **GALLERY** or **SPEAKER** view. **GALLERY** will show everyone's face in small boxes on one page (though you may have multiple pages if you have many participants), and **SPEAKER** will spotlight the current person who is speaking while the other participant boxes are off to one side.
3. In the bottom middle, you will be able to **MANAGE PARTICIPANTS**: this pop-up window will enable you to see all of the participants on the call, including those who are in the wait room. You can start or stop a participant's video here, or help them be muted or unmuted.
4. All participants will enter the meeting and be placed in a **WAITING ROOM**. This is a new safety measure implemented by Zoom. You will need to **ADMIT** participants to the meeting. You can *ADMIT ALL* or *ADMIT* them one by one. Participants will enter late, so be sure to keep an eye on this. You have the ability to lock the meeting to prevent anyone new from joining.
5. There is a **CHAT** feature where participants can type questions, comments, or paste links to websites or articles. You can "chat" one-on-one with people privately, or chat publicly with the whole group. Make sure you tell your participants to be mindful of who they are sending their chats to, as it is sometimes tricky to tell who you are directing the message to. You can disable the chat, so participants can only chat with the host and co-hosts. This is suggested for diocesan-wide programs and lectures.
6. You can click on the three dots in the top right corner of a participant's picture and **RENAME** the participant (i.e. if only their phone number shows up). You can also click on these three dots to start or stop their video or audio.
7. You have the ability to make additional participants the **CO-HOST** (or **HOST**), so they can then assist with monitoring the meeting (i.e. admitting people from the waiting room, turning on/off video/audio for participants, etc). This is recommended for larger meetings and in case you lose your internet connection.
8. You have the ability to place participants in **BREAKOUT ROOMS** if the presenter would like to use this feature. You can create as few or many breakout rooms as you like and may assign participants or allow them to be randomly assigned. You can use Excel to create these rooms in advance or wait to see who logs on.
9. You have the ability to create **POLLS** with multiple choice or single choice answers if the presenter would like to use this feature.

Zoom Suggestions for the Retreat Moderator/Facilitator

1. Log on 10-15 minutes early before the scheduled start time to ensure your internet connection.
2. Admit the presenter(s) from the waiting room first. This will allow him/her to get settled, and for you to review the flow of the introduction, prayer, and how they would like to handle questions, etc.
3. Check the chat settings. Use the drop down arrow to enable the chat with the host/co-host only feature.
4. Update your screen name to your first and last name.
5. At the start time, admit participants from the waiting room. Say hi, welcome, wave and smile. Allow for idle chit-chat and greetings of familiar faces from your parish.
6. Continue to check the waiting room and admit participants.
7. About 3 to 5 minutes after the scheduled start time, go ahead and start with an official welcome and introduction, and make sure your session is recording.
8. Recordings will be saved to your Computer or in your Zoom account. You will need to choose.
9. Take screenshots throughout, and select the best 5-10 for PR.
10. Monitor the chat room, and respond accordingly. Make note of questions to share with the presenter at the appropriate time, as it is hard to keep track of and scroll through in the Zoom chat log. Ask the presenter to share highlights from their presentation.
11. Participants can use the raised hand feature, and their usernames will move up in the participant list (out of ABC order) to keep track of who raised their hand first. Click on their screen to "lower their hand" after they ask a question.

Sample Zoom Opening Remarks for Retreat Moderator/Facilitator

Good morning and welcome. We are so happy to have you join us this morning for our ACYOA Retreat! Before we get started, let's review a few Zoom housekeeping reminders.

We want everyone to participate as much as they feel comfortable. When called upon, please take yourself off mute. We ask that you remain on mute throughout the call if not speaking. If you accidentally go off of mute, we will mute you to avoid distraction from the main speaker.

We ask that everyone's screen name appears with their first name and last name. You may be removed from the meeting if we are not able to identify you.

We have disabled the chat feature in this meeting and encourage you to use the raised hand feature, which you can find at the bottom left of the "Participants" or "Reactions" panel on most screens. Once you have been verbally called upon, we will clear your raised hand.

We will be using the poll feature during the meeting to gage your thoughts. These polls will be anonymous. During the Zoom polls you will have one minute or less to cast your vote by clicking on your desired answer when the poll is launched and appears on your screen.

We suggest that you select "speaker view" when a speaker is presenting and "gallery view" when we are in a group discussion. Please note that we are recording this session and we will be taking screenshots, both of which may be published. Should you not wish to appear on video or photos, then we suggest turning off your video.

We will monitor the waiting room throughout the meeting, so do not worry if you get bumped off or need to hop off and then back on. Please feel free to text or email me during the meeting should you need any assistance.

We are looking forward to a fruitful retreat, and thank you for your participation today!

SESSION 1: Introductions and Icebreakers

A NOTE TO INSTRUCTORS: 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. Raise Your Hand

This first game is called Raise Your Hand. We will have a list of statements based on people's experiences, values, or opinions that can either apply to participants or not. If the statement applies to the participant, he or she will utilize the Raise Hand button of Zoom to raise their hands. Alternatively, you can get participants to simply raise their hands, or even take a stand, if you're on Gallery View on Zoom.

This is a great activity to not only break the ice, but to get your team to know a little bit more about one another. You can provide opportunities for discussion in between for people to explain their responses. Plus, it doesn't hurt that it highlights the Raise Hand feature of Zoom if your team recently started to use the application. Here are some sample statements. Feel free to get creative and make up your own.

Raise your hand if you...

1. Have attended Hye Camp or St. Vartan Camp
2. Have participated in a retreat before
3. Have watched Badarak online
4. Have a pet
5. Binge watched a series on Netflix or Hulu
6. Have ever broken a bone in your body
7. Learned how to cook in quarantine
8. Cut your own hair
9. Play a musical instrument
10. Know how to speak Armenian
11. Have performed in a school musical or play
12. Like to eat cold pizza
13. Traveled out of the United States before

2. Everything from A-Z Icebreaker

The larger team will be broken up into multiple smaller teams via Breakout Rooms on Zoom.

Once they are in their breakout rooms, participants will have 10-15 minutes to find items in the room that they are calling in from (or, shall we say, Zoom-ing in) that starts with each letter of the alphabet.

They will need one item for each letter, and each item can be used once only. For example, they can use Apple for A, and Book for B.

Each team will also select one recorder to write down what each item they have found for each letter.

Once their time is up, the facilitator will bring the team back to one call, and the recorders from each team will share what they came up with.

3. Something in Common

This simple Zoom icebreaker will also take advantage of Zoom Breakout Rooms. Let Zoom automatically assign the participants into groups of 3 or more, and give them 5 minutes to find 3 UNIQUE things that they have in common.

Within those 5 minutes, participants also need to choose the most unique thing that they have in common with their partner, which they will share with the larger group once they go back to their larger meeting.

Make sure that there are always THREE people in a breakout room, or more, for safety purposes.

4. Guess Who?

Start by getting participants to think of a unique and interesting fun fact about themselves.

Then, using the Chat option on Zoom, have each person send the fun fact (or favorite song, hobby, etc.) only to the facilitator (and not to Everyone).

Once the fun facts have been collected, the facilitator will read each of the fun facts to the group, and as each fun fact is read, the larger team will try to decide who the fun fact belongs to. (This might be a good time to use the Polling or Annotations options on Zoom.) The objective for the team will be to try to connect the fact to the right participants as many times as possible.

5. Most Recent Photo

In this activity, have participants pull up the Photos app on their phone and look at the most recent photo they took. Have each participant share their photo, and briefly tell the story behind the photo. This is a great way to get participants to share how they've been spending their time over this social distancing period!

Source:

<https://www.summitteambuilding.com/icebreakers-10-activities-to-energize-your-zoom-meetings/>

SESSION 2: Exploring Lazarus Saturday

A NOTE TO INSTRUCTORS: This session will be a whole-group presentation, led by a clergyman or lay-leader. Encourage participants to be in “gallery view” in Zoom so that everyone can see each other, respond to questions, and interact in discussion.

Introduction:

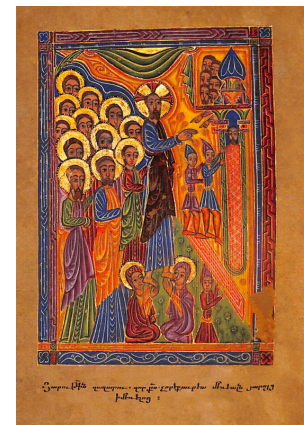
Start by doing a “round robin” of asking participants what they know about Lazarus Saturday. See if anyone can recall the details of this gospel story, and its deeper significance.

Icon Study:

In Armenian, **Սրբանկարչութիւն** (*Su'rankartjutyun*) or **Պատկերագրութիւն** (*Badgerakrutyun*) is the meaning of iconography.

Icons are beautiful, illuminated paintings to depict scenes from the Bible. It was through the viewing of icons that the faithful of the early church learned about The Scriptures, as very few people had personal bibles to read. Icons are holy images that help tell a holy story, allowing viewers to understand a biblical narrative in a deeper way. Studying icons can help visual learners understand a biblical story through the use of characters, colors, settings, and theological details. In viewing each icon, ask participants what stands out to them, what colors are used, how characters are positioned, what elements are the same or different from one icon to another, and what the overall story the icon is trying to tell them.

Using two or three of the icons below, walk participants through the elements of the icon, and see what aspects of the story they can piece together through viewing these holy images. Remind participants that they don't have to be specialists in iconography in order to dissect and appreciate these images!



Link to icons: <http://www.armenianmanuscripts.org/page-9/page-40/>

Scripture Reading:

Read John 11:1-45 (NRSV). Discuss the important elements:

- Jesus is concerned for his friends.
- Hearing of his death, Jesus states that he will wake Lazarus.
- Martha's deep faith that Jesus would raise her brother.
- Mary weeps at Jesus' feet, and Jesus is moved with emotion.
- Friends and curious villagers follow the sisters as they go to the grave with Jesus.
- Jesus weeps at the loss of his friend.
- Lazarus has been dead for four days, and Martha remarks on the bad smell.
- Men roll away the stone, and Jesus prays to God.
- Jesus says, "Lazarus, come out!" and Lazarus walks out of the tomb, covered in his burial cloths.

Spiritual Application and Talking Points:

The significance of Jesus Christ raising Lazarus from the dead lies in its foreshadowing of Christ's own resurrection eight days later. Though Jesus will suffer and die, he ultimately defeats death through his own death and resurrection. With his victory over death and the grave, he promises us all victory over death, too. As one of our own Easter hymns proclaims: *"Christ is risen from the dead! By dying he trampled on death and by his resurrection he has given us the gift of life. To him be glory forever. Amen."*

Jesus shows both his humanity and divinity in this story: he weeps for a dear friend, feeling all the emotions of grief and pain that comes from losing someone you love, yet he raises his friend from the dead, showing his divinity and victory over death. Just like he did for Lazarus, Jesus weeps for the things that kill and destroy us, and he triumphs over the darkness that consumes us. The story of Lazarus gives us hope.

This hope is fulfilled when we celebrate the glorious resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ on Easter Sunday. Christ conquers the grave himself, and in doing so, conquers death for us, too. He destroys the things that seek to keep us in darkness.

During this season of Lent, we take the time to really focus on our faith and to uncover the things that keep us from being close to God. As we bring these things out of the darkness and into the light, we celebrate that fact that Christ triumphs over the darkness in our lives, drawing us out of the grave and into his holy light.

As we approach Easter, continue to draw upon the lessons learned in your Lenten journey. Keep your faith central to all you do, and when you feel darkness or despair, just remember: the Lord is near.

Discussion Questions, if time permits:

1. Describe the emotions felt by Jesus, Mary, and Martha. What do each of their reactions tell you about their faith?
2. Imagine being in Lazarus' position. What would you be thinking when you came out of the grave? What questions would you have for Jesus?
3. We are all in need of healing in a variety of ways. What is one thing that you have prayed to Jesus to heal within you?
4. How does the story of the resurrection bring you hope? Explain.

SESSION 3: Bible Study

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 breakout room on Zoom. Make sure that your groups are no more than 5-8 people in size so everyone has ample opportunity to share and contribute to the discussion. Please note: there should always be three or more people in a breakout room at a time. For safety reasons, make sure that two people are never alone in a breakout room on Zoom.

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. **5** Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. **6** Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. **7** And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. **9** Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. **Philippians 4:4-9 NRSV**

1. Read Philippians 4:4-9. What are some words or images that stand out to you?
2. Describe the emotions you experience when you read this passage. Is there a particular word that makes you feel a certain way? Explain.
3. Write down three things that make you worry.
4. Write down three things for which you are thankful.
5. Write down three things that bring you peace.
6. What are some of the first things that come to mind when you hear the words true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, or commendable? Describe.
7. Describe the things in your life that distract you from thinking about these things. What are some ways you could redirect your attention towards growing closer to God?

Closing Prayer:

Create a free account on <https://padlet.com> and make a new padlet, choosing a background that goes with the theme. Then share the link with participants, instructing them to add their own prayers by using the "+" on either the middle or bottom right of the screen.

Using Padlet, create your own prayer from the reflections you made in the previous questions. Start by telling God what you worry about, what you are thankful for, what brings you peace, and what you hope to learn through deepening your faith in him. Post the prayer to the Padlet wall, and review the prayers that others have written so you can keep their prayers in mind during your own daily prayers.

In closing, remind participants even though Lent is a specific period of time in our Church's calendar, the heart of Lent is something that we can embody throughout the year. In Christ Jesus, we always have the opportunity to address our shortcomings, learn from our mistakes, and grow stronger in our faith.