

2022 ACYOA Juniors Fall Retreat Guidebook

“SEEKING PURPOSE”



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

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Welcome Letter

October 17, 2022

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

The Diocese of the Armenian Church (Eastern) is pleased to provide an ACYOA Juniors Fall Retreat Guidebook for our parishes! This year's retreat sessions will focus on the theme of ***Seeking Purpose***.

In this guidebook, our department has provided the nuts-to-bolts instructions of planning and running a day-long retreat to equip you with the resources needed to hold a day of fun and fellowship 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 if you have any questions or need additional guidance as you plan your retreats. 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 Retreats!

Warmest regards,

The Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries

DiocesanYouthMinistries@gmail.com

Sample Schedule

(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: Identity Tapestry |
| 2:00 - 3:00 PM | Session 3: The Purpose and Peace of Prayer |
| 3:00 - 3:15 PM | Break |
| 3:15 - 4:15 PM | Session 4: Scripture Study |
| 4:15 - 4:45 PM | Vespers |
| 5:00 PM | Pick-Up |

Sample Registration Form

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

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

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

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, cannabis, 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. **Think Quick:** This is a very simple game that can help people learn and reinforce each other's names while having fun. Ask the group to stand in a circle and have each person say their name. Now, throw a tennis ball to someone in the group. They have 2-seconds to call the name of someone and throw the ball to them. If they cannot remember a name, then that person is out of the game. The round ends when the only people left know everyone's name in the group.
2. **Wrapped Around Your Finger:** Pass out 3 foot pieces of string or ribbon to each participant. Let them know that this game provides everyone a chance to share information about themselves that they want the group to know. Direct them while they are talking to wrap the string or ribbon around their finger and talk about themselves continuously until they run out of string or ribbon. Ask everyone to talk and share information about themselves such as their name, age, where they're from, school/work, favorite ice cream, favorite hobby, personal hero, etc.
3. **Yurt Circle:** Watch an instructional video here: <https://youtu.be/HNSsYqtWrTo>
 - a. Directions:
 - i. Have everyone stand in a circle and take a hold of the rope or webbing.
 - ii. Using communication within the group, the group needs to fully lean back, having each member on their heels (with their toes in the air). The teacher should stress the importance of everyone participating and not yanking on the rope. If students start yanking on the rope or not putting effort, they should be immediately taken out of the group.
 - iii. Once the group has success, you can try these alternatives:
 1. Have the group sit as a group using the yurt circle.
 2. Have the group stand back up using the yurt circle.
 3. Count off the students by 2s. Have 1s lean back and 2s lean forward. Only do this if they are showing success and good communication.
 - b. Things You Can Discuss (if you want):
 - i. If someone slips, the whole circle will collapse. If someone bends, the whole circle will collapse. If someone lets go... Well, you get the idea. Everything must work perfectly for this to work! The group must fully trust each other.

- ii. If you want to discuss symbols, you can discuss the circle itself. Circles mean that there is only one team, and that everyone is equal!
- iii. Life is a constant balancing act when working with other people. Sometimes you need to pull more and sometimes you need to let up, just like when you're in the circle.
- iv. Is it easier to trust some people and not others? Explain? Does the situation matter?
- v. How do you increase your trust for someone?
- vi. Can you think of examples of when trusting someone might not be a good idea?

SESSION 2: Identity Tapestry

A NOTE TO INSTRUCTORS: This session is a cross between an icebreaker, a team-building activity, and a discussion starter! It is meant as a hands-on activity that produces a visual discussion topic for participants to reflect upon. Have participants break down into smaller groups for discussion questions if you have a very large group.

CONCEPT: You will be building an [Identity Tapestry like this video here](#), only using markers and paper. (This video is for reference only— you do not need to show it to your participants.)

PREP: You will need to prep this activity *BEFORE* your participants come to church. This session starts off as a whole group, but can split off into groups of 6-8 people for the discussion questions if you feel the group is too large.

MATERIALS: Have a long piece of craft paper rolled out and taped to the wall. Have multiple markers on hand for participants to use when drawing their lines. On separate post-it notes placed randomly along the craft paper, write the following questions:

1. I am an Armenian Christian.
2. I love my parents.
3. I wish I had a different name.
4. Getting good grades is important to me.
5. I love my country.
6. I have never left this country.
7. I live with a specific regret.
8. I have lost a loved one.
9. I am a good friend.
10. I have fallen out with a friend.
11. I excel at sports.
12. I struggle with feeling appreciated.
13. My faith affects my life every day.
14. I prefer staying home rather than going out to socialize.
15. My family doesn't understand me.
16. I like having a plan.
17. I cannot stand structure.
18. I am fortunate.
19. I worry often about things out of my control.
20. I don't trust most people.
21. I volunteer for those less fortunate than me.
22. I make time for hobbies.
23. I enjoy being silly.

24. I am ashamed of my past.
25. I try to empathize with others.
26. I use clothing to express myself.
27. I value my free will.
28. I constantly put others before myself.
29. I am creative.
30. I doubt my capabilities.
31. I cherish my siblings.
32. I love listening to music.
33. I read often.
34. I look forward to going to college.
35. I feel close to God.

GOAL: Every participant will get a chance to walk the length of the Identity Tapestry, meaning that they will start from the left hand side and work towards the right hand side, taking a marker and connecting a line from the first post-it to all the post-its that they identify with. Once everyone is given a turn, the group will stand back and reflect on the Tapestry as a whole, seeing how many people went to certain post-its, and seeing if there are any posts-its that are less traveled to.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: After everyone has participated in and reflected on the finished Tapestry, discuss the following questions:

1. *What did you learn about yourself during this exercise? What did you learn about your peers?*
2. *How do we create our identities? Is it environmental? Internal? Or both?*
3. *What part of your identity do you think people first learn about you when you meet them?*
4. *In what ways has being a part of the Armenian Church played a role in shaping your identity?*
5. *Can you remember a time where God helped you find meaning, joy, and purpose in the midst of trouble or stress? Explain.*

IN CLOSING: Read the following passage from Romans 8:31-39 and discuss:

31 What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? **32** He who did not withhold his own Son but gave him up for all of us, how will he not with him also give us everything else? **33** Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. **34** Who is to condemn? It is Christ who died, or rather, who was raised, who is also at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. **35** Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will affliction or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? **36** As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." **37** No, in all these things we are more than victorious through him who loved us. **38** For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, **39** nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

SESSION 3: The Purpose and Peace of Prayer

A NOTE TO INSTRUCTORS: This session is meant to be a whole-group lecture, led by a clergyman or equipped lay leader.

OVERVIEW: This session is meant to discuss the peace that comes from making prayer a habitual part of our everyday lives. With robust, worshipful experiences and a consistent prayer life, Armenian Christians can solidify their identity in Christ and find purpose in an often chaotic world.

OPENING: Have participants compare and contrast two heartfelt prayers – St. Gregory of Narek’s 89th Prayer and Job’s reflections to God in Job 13:22-28 (see below for text).

- **St. Gregory of Narek, Prayer 89:** “God and Lord, life and creator, merciful, compassionate, light, longsuffering, God who bears no grudges, all merciful, generous God who loves mankind, savior, blessed, praised, glorified, storehouse of steadfastness, bulwark of faith, good without guile, radiance without darkness, pardoner of sins, healer of wounds, creator of unknowable mysteries, the most approachable of the unreachable refuge from despair, your name is proclaimed, God the Son, and your Father’s with you, mighty and awesome, and your almighty Holy Spirit worshiped with you, glory and thanksgiving forever. Amen.”
- **Job 13:22-28 (MSG):** 20-27 “Please, God, I have two requests; grant them so I’ll know I count with you: First, lay off the afflictions; the terror is too much for me. Second, address me directly so I can answer you, or let me speak and then you answer me. How many sins have been charged against me? Show me the list —how bad is it? Why do you stay hidden and silent? Why treat me like I’m your enemy? Why kick me around like an old tin can? Why beat a dead horse? You compile a long list of mean things about me, even hold me accountable for the sins of my youth. You hobble me so I can’t move about. You watch every move I make, and brand me as a dangerous character. 28 “Like something rotten, human life fast decomposes, like a moth-eaten shirt or a mildewed blouse.”

Once both prayers are read, discuss the following questions:

1. *Why do you think these prayers look so different?*
2. *Could you define prayer, given what you have read in the examples above?*
3. *When do you most feel like praying? When do you least feel like praying?*
4. *What comes easier to you: praying alone or with people around?*

LECTURE: As we saw in the passages we just discussed, prayer comes in a lot of different forms, with a lot of different emotions. Prayer is just like any other mode of communication you use today. It connects you to the person to whom you are trying to grow closer. You call your parents on your cell phone. You email your teachers. You text your friends. You Instagram message classmates. Constant communication

develops a meaningful, intimate relationship with whom you are speaking. The same thing occurs when we pray to God. When we share our joys, frustrations, confusions, and celebrations with God, we make his loving and powerful presence the center of our lives. As a constant practice, prayer grounds us, gives us purpose, and helps us have a clear mind when we face our everyday triumphs or trials.

The Bible doesn't give us one, single, simple explanation on how to pray well. The Early Church took it upon itself to formulate the words and patterns and places of prayer that we know today, based on how the first Christians were doing it. This is where we get our liturgy. Liturgy allows everyone to be involved, in many different capacities. In a world that is constantly changing and challenging us, participating in the Divine Liturgy every week gives us a routine and a firm foundation with our Armenian Christian community. This type of routine helps us develop mental, spiritual, and emotional peace!

Along with celebrating the Divine Liturgy every week, it is important for us to continue our prayer life on our own so that our prayers are even stronger when we gather for Badarak. When you pray at home on your own, you are strengthening the larger witness of Christ in the world. Personal prayer has been a practice of Christians as long as liturgical prayer has.

Prayer, however, doesn't always come easy to us. We are not all poets like Saint Gregory. Sometimes, the only prayer we can utter is the one that Jesus himself gave to us—the Lord's Prayer. We often race right through it without even considering its words or their deep meaning, but it simply and profoundly expresses everything we need to say and ask of our heavenly Father.

ACTIVITY: Have participants read Matthew 6:5-15 out loud. After the reading, have all participants recite the Lord's Prayer in both English and Armenian. When you are done, go through each line of the prayer and really dissect it. For each line, have participants come up with a different way of saying the same thing (i.e. Creator of all, who made and resides in paradise, your name is holy and heavenly).

If time permits, ask the following discussion questions:

1. *Jesus chastises people who make a spectacle of their prayer, saying that they don't need so many words to let God know what they need. Why do you think Jesus told them to "pray in this way" instead?*
2. *Do you think the Lord's Prayer covers all the essentials of the Christian faith? Why or why not?*
3. *One of the most striking parts of this prayer is the notion of God's will done "on earth as it is in heaven." What does this mean for earth? What does this mean for heaven? What are some tangible ways you could make heaven present on earth?*

SESSION 4: Scripture Study - Consider the Lilies

A NOTE TO INSTRUCTORS: This is the plain text copy of the Scripture Study handout titled "Consider the Lilies." Print the handout and encourage your participants to actively write their thoughts down as they go through the study.

INTRO: With all of today's modern demands, it is easier than ever to get caught up in the chaos of our daily grinds. In an attempt to find steady routines in an ever-shifting world, we become slaves to the things we consume... our morning coffees, our binge-worthy shows, our perpetual purchases. Before we know it, we have lost sight of the things that truly fulfill us, and we become out of tune with those around us.

REFLECT: Discuss the following questions:

1. *Read Titus 3:1-9 (NRSV). What sorts of "passions and pleasures" take your focus away from "the goodness and loving kindness" of God? How are they creating discord in your life?*
2. *What do you think it means to "be ready for every good work"? In what ways would your life change if this became a daily habit?*
3. *Describe a "creature comfort" of yours that you could presumably live without. How would its absence affect your daily life? What might you notice about yourself or your habits after its extended absence?*

INVITATION: As we work to reprioritize our attention towards the inward peace that comes from knowing God, we may find that the things that often stretch us thin or stress us out are not, in fact, beneficial or necessary in any way. When we take away the things that distract us from meaningful growth and purpose, our hearts and minds have more room to seek and find Jesus Christ, our true source of life.

REFLECT: Discuss the following questions:

4. *Read Matthew 6:25-34 (NRSV). What is your biggest worry in life? When does it weigh on you the most?*
5. *Why do you think Matthew uses the nature imagery of "the birds in the air" or "the grass in the field"? Explain.*
6. *What are some realistic ways we can turn our worries into concrete plans of action?*

READ: “Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, **2** to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show every courtesy to everyone. **3** For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another. **4** But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, **5** he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water[a] of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. **6** This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, **7** so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. **8** The saying is sure. I desire that you insist on these things, so that those who have come to believe in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works; these things are excellent and profitable to everyone. **9** But avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.” (TITUS 3:1-9)

25 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink,[a] or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? **26** Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? **27** And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life?[b] **28** And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, **29** yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. **30** But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? **31** Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ **32** For it is the gentiles who seek all these things, and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. **33** But seek first the kingdom of God[c] and his[d] righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. **34** “So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.” (MATTHEW 6:25-34)