

2022 ACYOA Juniors Lenten Retreat Guidebook

“To Whom Do I Belong?”



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

Table of Contents

- I. Table of Contents - Page 2
- II. Welcome Letter - Page 3
- III. Sample Schedule - Page 4
- IV. Sample Registration Form - Page 5
- V. Sample Code of Conduct Form - Page 6
- VI. Session 1: Introductions & Icebreakers - Page 7
- VII. Session 2: To Whom Do I Belong? - Page 8 & 9
- VIII. Session 3: Giving It Up? Fasting During Great Lent in the Armenian Church - Pages 10 & 11

March 14, 2022

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

For use during 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 Juniors Lenten Retreat at your parishes. 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 ***To Whom Do I Belong?***

We have been focused on virtual ministries the past two years, and are looking forward to resuming many of our in-person ministries in the coming months. We would like to thank our primate, Bishop Daniel Findikyan, for his support as we work together in *Building Up the Body of Christ*.

In this guidebook, we are providing our parishes with detailed lesson plans to help facilitate an ACYOA Juniors Retreat. You will find a sample schedule, sample registration form, a sample Code of Conduct, detailed lesson plans for icebreakers, and two sessions with engaging group discussions. 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 presenters should feel free to add their own personality and modify the sessions to meet the specific needs of their audiences!***

As always, we are 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 Retreat!

Warmest regards,

The Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries
*Kathryn Ashbahian, KathrynA@armeniandiocese.org, 215-452-8322 and
Jennifer Morris, JenniferM@armeniandiocese.org, 248-648-0702*

(INSERT PARISH OR REGION NAME) **ACYOA 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: To Whom Do I Belong?
12:00-1:00 PM	Lunch Break
1:00-2:00 PM	Session 3: Giving It Up? Fasting During Great Lent in the Armenian Church
2:00-2:30 PM	Vespers

(INSERT PARISH OR REGION NAME) **ACYOA 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.*

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

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 be on time and participate in all 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 dress appropriately for all activities.
5. 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).
6. Participants will not use foul or abusive language, including words of a sexually explicit or violent nature, neither verbally nor in writing.
7. Participants will not share any inappropriate audio/video recordings while I am participating in the retreat.

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 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 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. Stand Up

This first game is called Stand Up. We will have a list of statements based on people's experiences, values, or opinions that can either apply to participants or not. 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. Here are some sample statements. Feel free to get creative and make up your own.

Stand up if you...

1. Have attended Hye Camp or St. Vartan Camp
2. Have participated in a retreat before
3. Have the VEMKAR app downloaded on your cell
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 a special family recipe
8. Cut your own hair
9. Play a musical instrument
10. Know how to speak Armenian or another foreign language
11. Have performed in a school musical or play
12. Like to eat cold pizza
13. Traveled out of the United States before

2. Commonly Unique

Place 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 partners, which they will share with the larger group once they go back to their larger meeting.

3. Photo Gallery

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 get to know each other in their everyday lives.

Source:

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

SESSION 2: To Whom Do I Belong?

A NOTE TO INSTRUCTORS: This session will be a whole-group presentation, led by a clergyman or lay-leader.

Show **ONE** the following YouTube video to introduce the topic of digital addictions:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rzUb_GeLDg8

OR

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ta5_CQ15rLw

Utilize the following talking points to quickly present the ideas from the Wall Street Journal [article](#) “Digital Addictions Are Drowning Us in Dopamine” by Anna Lembke:

- Technology and social media are great! Until they’re not.
- We have never been more saturated with screens and technology than we are right now.
- Otherwise healthy individuals who may not have experienced trauma, poverty, or socioeconomic hardships are experiencing extreme levels of depression and anxiety. One possible culprit? Too much dopamine.
- Dopamine is a neurotransmitter that acts as the messenger between neurons. The brain releases dopamine when you do things you enjoy, like eating a cookie, listening to a favorite song with the windows rolled down, kissing a loved one, or watching a great movie.
- Aside from making us feel “happy,” Dopamine aids many bodily functions, including things like digestion, memory and focus, blood flow, heart and kidney function, and much more.
- Too much Dopamine, however, plays a role in feeling over-alert, feeling delusional, forming addictions, and developing obesity, to name a few.
- We live in such abundance these days – with so much stimulation through social media, television, video games, online shopping, the food cravings delivered right to our doors, etc. – that we live with an overabundance of dopamine drops. When we *stop* these things, we actually feel the symptoms of withdrawal that one would feel from addictive substances.
- “It’s only after we’ve taken a break from our drug of choice that we’re able to see the true impact of our consumption on our lives.”
- Point of the article and video? Take longer breaks from your “digital drug of choice” so that your brain can balance its pleasure and pain receptors, giving you the chance to enjoy life’s little pleasures again!

Hand out copies of the [excerpt](#) from *The Return of the Prodigal Son* by Henri J. M. Nouwen. Have participants take turns reading a paragraph from the excerpt, and discuss the following questions:

1. What are some words or phrases that struck you from this excerpt? Can you relate to the feelings outlined in the first two paragraphs? Explain.

2. Henri Nouwen states that ““addiction” might be the best word to explain the lostness that so deeply permeates contemporary society.” What types of addictions are you aware of? Which ones do you and your peers seem to struggle with the most?
3. Do you feel like the self you portray on social media is the “real” you? Why or why not?
4. Has the addiction to social media ever made you feel like you lived in “a distant country”? What aspects of social media make you feel most anxious and overwhelmed?
5. What fears do you have about taking a break from social media? If you’ve ever taken an extended break from it, what have you noticed about yourself while off of it?
6. Recall the story of the Prodigal Son. What insight about ourselves do we gain when we look at the son’s choices? What insight about God do we gain when we look at the father’s reaction to his son returning home?
7. We can easily get caught in a trap of being defined by the world, or by the world we experience through social media specifically. According to Nouwen, however, we remain God’s Beloved no matter how far we wander. Create three statements that start with the phrase, “As God’s Beloved, I...” and list out three truths you know about yourself as a beloved child of God.

SESSION 3: Giving It Up? Fasting During Great Lent in the Armenian Church

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 small group. 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.

Toxic cleanses and detox fasts are all the rage nowadays. Just google “detox” or “cleanse” and legions of websites virtually leap out of the screen, trying to convince you that this juice or this powder or this regime is going to leave you slimmer, happier, healthier, and a more beautiful and successful person. It’s very tempting! These modern fasts compete with other ancient and sacred types of fasting for our attention.

Even though fasting was practiced and advocated by Jesus himself and has always been an important part of Armenian Church life, today many don’t see any use for it. We try to follow the Church’s Lenten discipline by “giving up” meat, chocolate, alcohol, or other treats, often doing so in an effort to lose weight or to trim unhealthy habits rather than following the example of fasting that Jesus left for us. But have we lost the true meaning of fasting over the course of many centuries?

1. What was one of your earliest memories of the Armenian Church’s Lenten season? What are some of the images and feelings that come to mind now when you think about Lent?
2. As you approach Lent, how do you usually decide what practices to follow? What kinds of things have you given up in recent years?
3. Read Psalm 51:16-17 (NRSV). What is David saying about sacrifice? In David’s view, what actually pleases God?
4. Has fasting ever felt like a chore to you? What are some ways to associate fasting with joy and lightheartedness, rather than obligation and drudgery?

In contrast with other ancient churches, there is no single rule or canon in the Armenian Church that instructs us when to fast, how to fast, and exactly what foods to cut out. One can no more mandate one way to fast than one could define one way to pray. Through fasting, what God wants is *us*. If there is any sacrifice that God desires from me it is not this or that offering or ritual, but the complete consecration of my entire life to God. Fasting reminds us of who we really are— God’s beloved children. It refocuses our eyes of faith, recalibrates our lives, and allows us to recognize the gift of God’s life-giving love. The goal of fasting is to trim from our lives all manner of excess - not just food - so that we may focus on what is truly important and life-giving and rededicate ourselves to *that*.

5. Read Mark 12:28-34. According to Jesus, what is the most important commandment?
6. What is holding you back from devoting yourself more wholeheartedly to the Lord? What “clutter” are you overindulging in during your everyday life?
7. Name some tangible things that usually suck up your time during any given week. How can you limit these activities or cut them out entirely during lent, and replace them with things to grow your relationship with the Lord?

8. What do you hope to gain from this year's Lenten season? How can you extend the practices of prayer, patience, devotion, and service beyond Great Lent? Write down two or three goals for yourself.

In closing, consider the words of the great poet and mystic St. Gregory of Narek from his Book of Lamentations: *“Lord of compassion, fount of mercies, bounty of goodness, Son of the one on high, Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy, save us, and love us humans. Look upon my peril. Gaze upon my broken heart. Attend to my misery. See the confusion of my unending anxiety. Come to my aid in my time of mortal torment. Touch me, curing my most wretched infirmities. Lend a kind ear to my pitiful sighs. Listen to the silent cries from the depths of the abysmal grave. May the voice of my failing body in prayer reach your all-hearing ears and since the pledge for my life's redemption is imperishable, so too let your love be also constant. Gently help me, enfeebled with infirmity as I am.”* (Prayer 66B)

This scripture study is based on the article “Giving It Up? Fasting During Great Lent in the Armenian Church” by Very Rev. Fr. Michael Daniel Findikyan (The Treasury, V2N2 2016). You can read the article [HERE](#), and watch a video on Lent [HERE](#).