

2026 ACYOA JUNIORS LENTEN RETREAT GUIDEBOOK



**“FOLLOWING THE
GOOD SHEPHERD,
HEEDING GOD’S
VOICE IN OUR LIVES”**



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents	Page 2
Welcome Letter	Page 3
Sample Schedule for Day-Long Retreat	Page 4
Sample Schedules for Two-Day Retreat (two options)	Page 5-6
Sample Registration Form	Page 7
Sample Code of Conduct Form	Page 8
Introductions and Icebreakers	Page 9
Session 1: The Lord is My Shepherd - <i>Strong Enough to Follow</i>	Page 10-13
Session 2: Lost Sheep & Loud Voices	Page 14-15
Session 3: Rod, Staff, & The Valley	Page 16-17
Session 4: Dwelling in Safety - <i>The Table is Set</i>	Page 18-20
Scripture Readings	Page 21-22



February 3, 2026

Dear Pastors, Parish Council Chairs, Youth Advisors, and All,

We are overjoyed to share the 2026 **ACYOA Juniors Lenten Retreat Guidebook** with parish leadership across the Eastern Diocese. The content is drawn from the sessions that will be offered in various regions. Since not all youth may be able to attend in person, we encourage you to use this guidebook to plan and host retreats for the ACYOA Juniors in your parish community.

Inside, you will find practical tools and resources for running a retreat, including:

- Sample schedules
- A registration form and a sample Code of Conduct
- Icebreakers
- Four engaging session lesson plans and discussion questions

Think of this as a starting point: clergy and facilitators are encouraged to add their own style and adjust the sessions to fit the needs of their group best.

We are available throughout the planning process to answer any questions or provide additional guidance as needed. We hope this resource will inspire meaningful discussions, foster fellowship, and strengthen the faith of your ACYOA members.

We look forward to hearing about the retreats you host in your parishes! Reach out to me, call me with your experiences. 😊

Sirov in Christ,

Serien Keleshian
Youth and Young Adult Ministries Program Administrator



(INSERT PARISH OR REGION NAME) ACYOA LENTEN RETREAT

SATURDAY, (INSERT MONTH, DAY, YEAR)

11:00 - 11:20 AM	Registration and Welcome
11:20 - 11:35 AM	Morning Prayer Service
11:35 - 12:05 PM	Icebreakers
12:10 - 1:30 PM	Lunch & Group Photo
1:30 - 2:15 PM	Session 1: Strong Enough to Follow
2:15 - 2:30 PM	Break
2:30 - 3:15 PM	Session 2: Lost Sheep & Loud Voices
3:15 - 3:30 PM	Break
3:30 - 4:15 PM	Session 3: Rod, Staff, & The Valley
4:15 - 4:30 PM	Snack Break
4:30 - 4:50 PM	Evening Prayer Service
4:50 - 5:50 PM	Session 4: Dwelling in Safety: The Table is Set (additional time included if bonfire is desired)
5:50 - 6:00 PM	Clean Up & Depart



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

DAY 1 - FRIDAY, (INSERT MONTH, DAY, YEAR)

5:00 - 5:30 PM	Registration and Welcome
5:30 - 6:00 PM	Evening Prayer Service
6:00 - 6:45 PM	Icebreakers
6:45 - 7:45 PM	Dinner
7:45 - 8:00 PM	Group Photo
8:00 - 9:00 PM	Session 1: Strong Enough to Follow
9:00 - 10:00 PM	Bonfire/Board Games/Snack Time
10:00 - 10:30 PM	<i>Optional:</i> Guided Meditation/Reflection
10:30 - 11:00 PM	Prepare For Bed/Quiet Time
11:00 PM	Lights Out

DAY 2 - SATURDAY, (INSERT MONTH, DAY, YEAR)

8:00 - 8:30 AM	Wake Up
8:30 - 9:00 AM	Breakfast
9:00 - 9:15 AM	Morning Prayer Service
9:15 - 10:00 AM	Session 2: Lost Sheep & Loud Voices
10:00 - 10:15 AM	Break
10:15 - 11:00 AM	Session 3: Rod, Staff, & The Valley
11:15 - 11:30 AM	Break
11:30 - 12:30 PM	Session 4: Dwelling in Safety - The Table is Set
12:30 - 1:30 PM	Lunch
1:30 - 2:00 PM	Pack Up, Clean Up & Depart



(INSERT PARISH OR REGION NAME) ACYOA LENTEN RETREAT*

**If following this schedule, be sure to remind participants to bring a church-appropriate change of clothes for Sunday Badarak*

DAY 1 - SATURDAY, (INSERT MONTH, DAY, YEAR)

2:00 - 2:30 PM	Registration and Welcome
2:30 - 2:45 PM	Midday Prayer Service
2:45 - 3:30 PM	Icebreakers
3:30 - 3:45 PM	Group Photo
3:45 - 4:45 PM	Session 1: Strong Enough to Follow
4:45 - 5:00 PM	Break
5:00 - 6:00 PM	Session 2: Lost Sheep & Loud Voices
6:00 - 7:00 PM	Dinner
7:00 - 8:00 PM	Session 3: Rod, Staff, & The Valley
8:00 - 10:00 PM	Bonfire/Board Games/Snack
10:00 - 10:30 PM	Evening Prayer Service + Reflection Time
10:30 PM - 11:00 PM	Prepare For Bed/Quiet Time
11:00 PM	Lights Out

DAY 2 - SUNDAY, (INSERT MONTH, DAY, YEAR)

8:00 - 8:30 AM	Wake Up - Get Ready
8:30 - 9:00 AM	Session 4: Dwelling in Safety - The Table is Set
9:00 - 12:00 PM <i>(depending on when Badarak is in your parish)</i>	Jhamerkoutioun/Divine Liturgy/Badarak
12:00 - 1:30 PM <i>(depending on when Badarak ends)</i>	Attend Fellowship/Coffee Hour
1:30 - 2:00 PM	Reflection/Wrap-Up
1:30 - 2:00 PM	Pack Up, Clean Up & Depart



(INSERT PARISH OR REGION NAME) **ACYOA 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 Forms](#). Participants can submit their registration using the registration link you send them.*



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

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 from 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:** _____



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, group dynamics, and time available.*

Shepherd Says

Rules:

- One leader is the “Shepherd”
- Only follow commands that start with “The Shepherd says...”
- Add physical actions (jump, kneel, spin, freeze, etc.)

Twist:

- Introduce a “false shepherd” giving wrong commands
- If you follow the wrong voice, you sit out for one round

Find Your Flock

Rules:

- Hand each person a card with an animal or sound
- No talking—only make the sound
- Find your matching “flock”

Lost Sheep Hunt

Rules:

- Hide small sheep cutouts or cotton balls
- Each group gets a basket
- Find as many “lost sheep” as possible

Twist:

- Some sheep have questions or challenges attached.

Follow the Shepherd

Rules:

- One volunteer leaves the room.
- The group chooses a “shepherd.”
- The shepherd leads subtle movements (clapping, snapping, tapping).
- The volunteer returns and tries to identify the leader.

Debrief: What made the shepherd easy or hard to recognize?

Click [HERE](#) to view additional icebreaker ideas.



SESSION I: THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD: *STRONG ENOUGH TO FOLLOW*

Thought: Who am I following?

Leader Introduction:

This retreat is an opportunity to slow down, disconnect, and redirect, all while having fun of course. But in order for this retreat to be meaningful, we need to get into the retreat mentality, and following in the theme, we need to allow ourselves to be led. We'll be having different types of conversations and discussions, which will only be as impactful as you allow it to be! With that being said, this is a safe space to bring up respectful questions and thoughts.

Our first session is "Strong Enough to Follow." Before we dive in, I invite you to respond to this question:

- When you think about "following", do you associate it with strength or weakness? Why?

In a world where we're told to chart our own path, follow our own inner voice, and be independent, it's hard to imagine obedience as a sign of strength, as a sign of discernment and firmness in our decisions and choices.

If we follow a leader (or a shepherd), we're labeled as followers, unable to make our own decisions, simply going with the flow, not having a backbone. When Christ says pick up your cross and follow me daily, that surely requires a backbone. It requires more than just a strong spine but a good core, lats, delts, traps, and while we're at it, good leg strength (for those of you who go to the gym, you know you can't be skipping leg day...).

To follow Christ in the thick and thin is harder than charting your own path. It's easy to live a life with our pleasures and temptations at the forefront, but to live with God at the forefront of our lives is very difficult when we live in a world where He is not regarded as such. How often do we hear about Christians and Christian nations being oppressed?

The beauty in having free will in our lives is that we get to make our conscious choices in what we do, but the difficulty also lies in making those choices: To know if we are following a path for our own pleasures and glory, or to live according to God's guidance for us.

Discussion Break (5 min):

Take the next few minutes to think about the five (5) people you trust most in your life, rank them starting with the person you trust most, and the reasons why they've earned your trust. (Sample list: parent, sibling, best friend, influencer, teacher/coach)

Break into small groups (of 4-5)

Share your rankings and why? What builds trust? (i.e. fulfilled promises) What breaks trust?



Scripture Study (25-30 min):

On the theme of fulfilled promises and trust we're going to start our Bible study on the core of the retreat. Ideally have the participants bring physical Bibles (if not, find a scripture print-out at the end of the guidebook)

Read Psalm 23:1 - "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not lack"

Leader: When the world says you need to plan everything to a 'T'- what you're going to wear, what you're going to eat, what you're going to study, where you're going to go to college; Christ affirms that you don't need to be anxious about anything. God, who has created everything in heaven and earth, in all of His might and greatness, knows and takes care of each and every thing you need.

Why does David (the one writing the Psalm) describe the Lord as his Shepherd?

- Shepherds needed to be very responsible, protective against danger, observant, and see everything going on around them because they hold the lives of all the sheep in their hands.
- *Additional Note: David was a shepherd from a young age; he knew the responsibility that came with taking care of the sheep of the family.*

How would you describe sheep?

- Sheep are trustworthy. They fully trust that their shepherd will lead them and protect them. If they follow a shepherd who doesn't have their best interests in mind, their lives are at stake.

Read Luke 12:22-32

Leader: Think about the references Christ makes in the Gospel according to St. Luke. First, He describes the ravens. They don't plant or harvest food, or- in our modern understanding- they don't go grocery shopping or stock up nor do they have fridges or pantries.

(Consider going outside, pay attention to the birds)- Think about birds: they don't plan, they don't have a rational mind that can come up with and discuss deep thoughts and ideas, and God takes care of them.

- How much more does God take care of you, a creation built in His image, initially created as a co-creator with God?

If outside, prompt the group to look around at different living things:

- What is this doing to stay alive?
- What *isn't* it worrying about?
- What does this tell me about how God sees me?

Leader: Moving another layer deeper: OK, birds are creatures with a heart and brain. How about a plant? A flower? Christ affirms that even the lilies of the field don't do any exhausting labor or

work, and yet their natural God-given setup is more glorious than the gold, ivory, silk, and cedar of Solomon's clothing or his grand court.

Leader: Looking at the flowers of the field, beautiful, and taken care of without exhausting labor.

- Where does your worth and value lie?
Being a child of God, the depth of love, taking the penalty for our sins, all is where our value lies.
- How does that contrast with where the world says your value comes from? (School, grades, extracurriculars, etc.)

If flowers are still too precious and pretty, consider just the grass that grows everywhere, here one moment, then cut and burned the next, yet God takes care of it, providing it with dew and keeping it plentiful.

- How would you feel if life was only clothing and food?
- When/where do we forget this?
- Does worrying add any value to our life? Does it fix anything?

Transition outside for this one, or sit on the floor:

Read Psalm 23:2 - *“He makes me to lie down in green pastures: He leads me beside the still waters.”*

Leader: Close your eyes, empty your thoughts, and picture this scenery: First, envision a soft and lush green field, like a fluffy pillow, not a bug in sight, a crisp and comfortable day, not too chilly and not too warm, not a cloud in sight. As you bask in the warmth, your mind is free of worries, and there's a steady and peaceful sound of water as a stream flows by. Consider the feelings you feel in that environment.

- What do you feel?
- Does stress melt away?

Take those feelings you felt in the pasture, and think about your life.

- When do you feel that way?
- Where is that place for you? Is there a single place?
- With which people around you do you feel those feelings?

Read Psalm 23:3 - *“He restores my soul: He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.”*

Leader: Even though He tells us the way is narrow and difficult, He is leading us in that path.

Think about someone you trust and love deeply, your parents, grandparents, siblings, or teacher. Then think about someone you just met, perhaps someone off the street, someone with a cool sense of style, or a person who clearly works out at the gym.

- Now imagine that you're in a dark maze, who are you picking to lead you? Why? (allow answer and explanations)

As cool or admirable as this new person seems from the outside, when it comes to the safety of your life, odds are you're picking that familiar face, dad, mom, grandma, grandpa, big sister, brother, whoever! *Highlight their responses-* you pick the person who loves you, who truly cares about your safety and wants the best for you.

In that same light, in the uncertainty and trouble we face, Christ not only leads us, but He restores us. When we fall into traps or feel like we lose track of Him, and we might not feel as close as we once were, He restores us. He brings us back to that warmth, without losing any of it.

Reflection Time (10 min):

Leader: Give everyone an index card, ask them:

- What worries occupy your thoughts most often?

On the other side:

- How can you tangibly give those worries to God? How could trusting in God change/shape your worries and thoughts?

Do your best: you can leave them anonymous, and we'll go through them at the end, to share and grow together

Closing Story:

There was once a Shakespearean actor who was famous for his one-man shows of readings and recitations from the classics. He would always end his performance with a dramatic recitation of Psalm 23. Each night, as he recited, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want," the audience listened intently, and at the end they would rise in thunderous applause.

One evening, just before the actor began his customary recitation, a young man from the audience stood up and asked, "Sir, would you mind if tonight I recited Psalm 23 instead?" Though surprised, the actor agreed, confident that the young man's untrained voice could not compare to his own skill.

The young man stepped forward and recited the Psalm softly. When he finished, there was no applause. Instead, the audience sat in silence, many of them in tears. Astonished, the actor said, "I don't understand. I have recited this Psalm for years, yet I have never moved an audience the way you have. What is your secret?"

The young man replied quietly, "Sir, you know the Psalm. I know the Shepherd."

Closing Verse: Read Matthew 7:13-14: To know the Shepherd, recognize His voice, trust Him, and follow Him requires us to take the narrow gate, but it leads to life. The wide gate is an easy and common option, but it leads to destruction.

SESSION 2: LOST SHEEP & LOUD VOICES

Thought: What pulls me away?

Introduction:

Leader: In our last session, we discussed the strength that following Christ requires. This session, we're talking about something just as real: along the path, sometimes we feel like we get lost in the crowd. We feel pulled in one direction or another, thinking we're taking a shortcut, but ending up further off the path and feeling like we're losing sight of our shepherd. It's in those moments when Christ is desperately searching for us, leaving the 99 faithful who are gathered together, to find the lost sheep. To be lost looks different for each of us; to some, it means doubting God, to others, it means feeling unable to pray from the heart, and to some, it looks like falling into a relationship or friendship that pulls us away from God and the church, leading us into distractions.

Activity (15-20 min):

Set up a maze with plastic cups, chairs, and whatever you have around. Have the participants partner up. One will be blindfolded (the sheep) and the other will give verbal directions (the shepherd) to get to the shepherd. Have each of the blindfolded participants start from a different area. The challenge is to navigate in the midst of all the voices and obstacles.

- Sheep, what was the most difficult part of the challenge?
- Were you able to distinguish the voice of your partner?
- Was it confusing to follow in the midst of other voices?

- Shepherds, what was the most frustrating or difficult part of the challenge?
- Was your partner listening to you?
- Could they hear you?

A twist: try the challenge by telling the shepherds they are not allowed to use the name of their partner (sheep). Then try again while allowing the shepherd to direct, while using the name of the sheep.

- Shepherds: What was the most challenging part? Were you successful?
- Sheep: What was the most challenging part? Was it hard to distinguish the voices?

Scripture Study (15 min):

Read John 10:1-18; popcorn read so everyone is engaged, or make small groups.

Context: In the passage, John describes the man born blind who is healed by Jesus. Upon the healing, Christ then has a very tense interaction with the Pharisees. This parable is a continuation of the interaction between Christ and the Jewish teachers, with deep rooted Old Testament, prophetic references (Ezekiel. 34, Jeremiah 23, Isaiah 56, etc.) It explores the difference between Christ and the Pharisees.



- What is the difference between the three characters? The “good shepherd”, the thief, and the hired help?
 - The good shepherd protects the sheep, cares about them, carries a rod to fight off predators, and keeps the sheep in line with His staff.
 - The thief wants to cause harm and take the sheep from their loving shepherd.
 - The hireling, or hired help, is a stranger and might be nice, but doesn't truly care for the sheep; they're just in it for their reward.
- What is the difference in their intentions?

Typically, the church fathers teach that this refers to false teachers, those who teach things aside from the Truth, Christ, and pull away from Orthodox faith. This still rings true, but in our modern sense, we can also equate these to other voices who want us to follow them. That might be toxic friendships, social media addiction, gossip, alcohol, vaping, lying, etc. These vices try to pull us away from living a life according to Christ; they don't care about our true well-being. They're destructive, disguising themselves as tools of comfort. When things don't work out, they leave us stranded, or worse, They destroy us. In contrast, the Good Shepherd says He gives life abundantly and truly cares for His sheep, calling them by name. He even promises to willingly put His life down for His sheep, which is fulfilled through His crucifixion.

- How can you, in your daily life, bring in sheep from other folds? (other people to Christ)
- What are ways you can actively live your faith?

Live the virtues:

- Love: help others, avoid gossip, etc.
- Humility/Meekness/Patience: be patient with others, don't rush to be first, etc.
- Gentleness/Kindness: be observant and considerate of others, lift others up, be considerate of the language you use, etc.
- Temperance: Set limits on screen time, social media time, avoid doom scrolling, build good discipline habits (daily prayer, scripture, physical activity, etc.)
- Honesty: Be genuine in your actions and interactions, do not lie, etc.

Others will notice- genuine love and humility speak for themselves!

Reflection (5-10 min):

On a piece of paper, draw three circles: Loud, Louder, Loudest. Label them with the voices you hear the most. This could be people, expectations, fears, social media, internal thoughts, or whatever you think applies.

- Where does God's voice come into play? Why?
- Is it difficult to hear him clearly in the midst of everything else?

Closing Thought: *God usually isn't the loudest voice, but He is the most personal and faithful. Always calling to us by our name, even when we stray.*

Regroup - Rod & Staff:

Leader: David also describes a rod and staff (*show images, or ask them to find images*).

- Why do shepherds carry a rod?
- Why do shepherds carry a staff?

The rod is a shorter, club-like stick to discipline and defend against predators. The staff is a long pole with a crook that gently guides and redirects sheep onto the path. This shows God's duality as protector and guide as a sometimes firm but not painful discipline. Instead, He brings comfort in a form of loving safety. God doesn't remove the valleys in our lives, but He walks through them with us by guiding us and protecting us. He doesn't wait up above for us to reach Him on a mountaintop.

Reflection + Discussion (15 min):

These questions can be posted around the room, kids can take sticky notes and answer the ones they like, anonymously if they'd like. Then discuss.

- What if the guardrails, the staff, or the rod helping guide us disappear? What rules might seem unfair, but are actually for your safety?
- When has something stopped you from going down a bad path?
- Do you feel like sometimes it's tough to let go of wanting control? Why?
- Do you recognize God more through words? People? Or moments?

Wrapping Up - in personal notebooks:

- Reflect on something God has been nudging you toward or away from.
- When God is with me in the valley, is He walking ahead, beside, or behind me?

Shepherd Keepsake Activity (15 min):

No need to rush this one; take as much time as desired.

Instruction: Create a keepsake with polymer clay that will remind you of this retreat, and a psalm.

- It might be a sheep, an image of Christ's love toward us as a shepherd.
- It might be a shepherd's staff, as a reminder of God's gentle guidance.
- It might be a mountain, a symbol of God's greatness, coming down to our level.
- It might be a lily, an example of God's care for us.
- It might be a chalice or cup, a reflection of His boundless blessings.
- It might be a dove, the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives.

Be creative! :)

SESSION 4: DWELLING IN SAFETY - THE TABLE IS SET

Thoughts: Where does God lead me? What is His promise?

This session can be done in a church or a chapel. Invite the priest to lead, using concrete imagery of the Holy Altar, the chalice, the dove holding holy muron.

Introduction:

Leader: After all this journey talk, having the strength, staying on course, going through the lows, and being redirected. We now come to the culmination, the destination, and the promise. David switches here: he is no longer talking about God just being a Shepherd, let's see what he says...

Scripture Study + Discussion (15-20 min):

Read Psalm 23:5 - *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies: you anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over.*

- What type of character is David describing God as now? Is it a bold move to set up a table to sit at while there's people standing around who want to do you harm?

God is a generous host! He knows and sees the evil of this world. He recognizes the valleys, but He sets up a table, opportunities in our lives, inviting us to Him to enjoy His peace and sustenance not just physically but spiritually. It's very bold! Christ gives a clear sense of security and victory, being the clear choice in the presence of other temptations.

- What do you think this table might be referring to? What meal might we be talking about?

He has His table set up for us, the Holy Altar (*point out altar*), and we are invited to partake every Sunday! Just like Christ with His disciples at the Last Supper, we actively remember and commune in Christ's Body and Blood with the same words. We are invited to a feast, every Holy Badarak, to remember and live Christ's presence in our lives, the depth of His love and sacrifice, and the call to live in Christ not just during a two-hour Sunday Badarak but daily. ("By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." - John 13:35)

- Why does David say that God is anointing his head with oil? That'll be hard to wash out...

In the Armenian tradition, anointing with oil has deep theological significance. Starting at our baptism, we are anointed and sealed with oil, holy *Muron*, which is kept in an *Aghavnee* (Dove), signifying the Holy Spirit and its dwelling as we become adopted as children of God. Historically, soldiers before battle were anointed to escape the grip of enemies. In the Book of James, the sick are anointed (5:14). The anointing is a mark of deep faith, the presence of the Holy Spirit, providing protection and healing.

- Can you think of an instance where anointing was an important action taken in the Gospels?

Christ Himself was also anointed prior to His death, in preparation for His burial, with costly, fragrant oil. The word Christ, from the Greek (*Christos*) and Messiah from the Hebrew (*Mashiach*), literally means anointed one! Someone who is anointed or consecrated is usually chosen and anointed with oil for a specific purpose. Christ was intentionally anointed, as He came to die for us and raise us to life through His resurrection. (*Extra note: this is why he was gifted Myrrh at His birth, which was traditionally used for embalming- foreshadowing and preparation for His death*)

- What are your favorite foods?
- How would you feel if you received a plate of your favorite food- *use their answers (i.e. kebab, boreg, khorovadz, pasta, dessert)*, and the person filling your plate didn't leave a single empty space?

I bet you'd be very excited and very grateful... and perhaps impatient to dive in. When David says my cup runs over, he is expressing how abundant God's blessings have been, how much He has provided, even in the struggles and valleys. Just like that plate, overflowing with food. Sometimes we forget how generously God provides.

Take a pause and reflect on His mercy, grace, and blessings. Warmth, shelter, food, family, friendship, breath, health, and more.

Reflection: *Make a list of the things you are grateful for that you might often overlook. After taking intentional time to reflect, did anything stand out to you?*

Read Psalm 23:6 - *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

Leader: This is a firm promise, we trust that God has goodness and mercy without limits for us.

- What do you think of when you think of a home? Maybe a safe space?
- Now when we think of the house of the Lord, what place comes to mind?
The church!
- Does that mean we're relocating to live inside the church? What is God's promise?
Not quite, but it does mean that we are given the opportunity to take the goodness, Christ, the communion that we receive in God's home, the church, on Sundays, and live it out daily in our lives. To dwell in the house of the Lord means that He is our safe harbor. God's mercy and safety is not just a promise for this world, but also for our eternal lives, which is why "forever" is emphasized.

Closing Activity - Marshmallow Sheep/S'mores:

Bonfire can be done at night for an overnight retreat, or whenever appropriate!

Leader: In light of the joy and warmth of gathering together under one good Shepherd, we'll be celebrating by making marshmallow sheep and s'mores (*if the space allows!*)



Materials Needed:

- Marshmallows
- Pretzels
- Graham Crackers + Chocolate (for s'mores, or sheep!)

If desired:

- Chocolate chips
- Candy eyeballs
- Oreos
- Coconut flakes

Ending Reflection:

Leader: We've walked a path together throughout this retreat. Beginning with recognizing true strength rooted in Christ, and trusting in Him. Reflecting on how easily loud voices can pull us away, but the Shepherd still calls us by name. We faced the reality of valleys and discovered that God doesn't wait at a distant mountaintop for us, but walks through our troubles with us, with protection and guidance. And we tied it all together with His promise, leading us not to fear, but to abundance. He prepares a place for each of us to commune with Him, even in the presence of difficulty. Now the choice is up to you on how to follow the Good Shepherd and heed God's voice in your life.

SCRIPTURE READINGS (NKJV):

Psalm 23:

1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not lack.

2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures: he leads me beside the still waters.

3 He restores my soul: he leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies: you anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Luke 12:22-32:

22 And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what you shall eat; neither for the body, what you shall put on.

23 The life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing.

24 Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them: how much more are you better than the fowls?

25 And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit?

26 If you then be not able to do that thing which is least, why are you anxious concerning the rest?

27 Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

28 If then God so clothes the grass, which is today in the field, and tomorrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith?

29 And seek you not what you shall eat, or what you shall drink, neither be of anxious mind.

30 For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knows that you have need of these things.

31 But rather seek you the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.

32 Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Matthew 7:13-14:

13 Enter in at the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many there be who go in there:

14 Because narrow is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads unto life, and few there be that find it

John 10:1-18:

1 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that enters not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. 2 But he that enters in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the gatekeeper opens; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. 4 And when he puts forth his own sheep, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. 5 And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. 6 This parable spoke Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spoke unto them.

7 Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. 9 I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. 10 The thief comes not, but to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

11 I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. 12 But he that is a hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep, and flees: and the wolf catches them, and scatters the sheep. 13 The hireling flees, because he is a hireling, and cares not for the sheep.

14 I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. 15 As the Father knows me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.

17 Therefore does my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. 18 No man takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.

