

A House of Prayer for All Nations

Level: High School to Adult

Theme: Orthodox Missions in Mongolia

- Objectives :**
- To familiarize the students with the Mission field of Mongolia – the country, the Church, its people and outreach goals to bring the Orthodox Church to Mongolians.
 - The students will understand how they can be involved in this ministry of building the Church in a region where Christianity is the minority religion.

Teacher Notes: Orthodox Missions - In the mission field, building a place for people to gather and worship God is an important part of establishing the faith. In Mongolia there exists one beautiful Orthodox Church, the community of Holy Trinity in Ulaanbaatar, lead by Fr. Alexy which has just recently (1998) been built. The Church is a place of pilgrimage for nearly 1,000 Mongolians, even though the parish itself is only 160 members. Under the guidance and vision of Fr. Alexy, Holy Trinity is a welcoming and inviting parish that has begun various ministries that have assisted in the growth and development of the community.

Church buildings - Historically, one of the pillars of Orthodox Missions has included building Churches that offer a physical witness of the presence of God. In a recent presentation His Beatitude Anastasios, Archbishop of Tirana, Durrës and All Albania to the General Synod of the Church of England 8th June 2011, shares in his address 'Sharing Good News and Building the Church Today' some personal reflections. "It was July 1991 when I arrived for the first time in Albania. Together with a small group of old men, we made our way from the airport to the ruined Cathedral of Tirana. In order to express the most essential message of my mission, I asked each one of those present to take a candle, and inquired how to say the greeting 'Christ is Risen' in Albanian. I lit the candle exclaiming 'Kristi Njalle', that is Christ is Risen! One after the other, the candles of the few believers were lit, and they answered 'Vertete Njalle', Truly He is Risen! And their eyes were full of tears and light. People began to come together and hear the Gospel message and liturgies most of which took place in the open air under trees or in the ruins of old churches. ... There followed the creation of a seminary to provide basic theological education for future Albanian clergy. ... A fundamental element in Christian missionary work throughout the centuries has been the construction of places of worship so that hymns and thanksgiving can be raised to God in the ages of ages."

Mongolia shares her story - The Holy Trinity Orthodox parish in Ulaanbaatar is the only Orthodox Church in the country. It was founded in 1998 by Russians living in Mongolia. The first priest was appointed by the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church and the focus was primarily on the Russian community in Mongolia. Since that time, Fr. Alexy Trubach has begun to focus increasingly on bringing non-Christians to the faith.

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The Church in Mongolia has translated the liturgy, prayer books and Orthodox newspapers into Mongolian; catechism classes have been conducted; about 40 Mongolians have been baptized; and two students have been sent to an Orthodox seminary in Moscow. The Church building was completed and consecrated in 2009. The church compound includes the church, a parish building, a power station, a sport court and a small park. The parish has a Children's Center, mostly for Mongolian children with painting, ceramic, Russian language, boxing and ice hockey being offered. Throughout the school year, about 150 children participate in these programs at varying degrees.

Fr. Alexy has a vision that the Orthodox Church will be seen as the true faith for all nationalities living in Mongolia. He continues to teach the Orthodox Faith and hopes to begin offering English language courses on the Bible. The goal is to ordain indigenous clergy and establish parishes outside of Ulaanbaatar.

A Church that has an open and welcoming atmosphere for visitors does not happen by accident. As we see in the story of Cholon, it is not just the role of the clergy or adults to invite others to their Church. All members can participate. By understanding at an early age that Orthodoxy is a faith for all people and that our Churches are a place of worship for all people, we are preparing ourselves and our parishes to be welcoming and inviting places for people intent on worshiping Christ and a place of learning for those who are beginning on this pilgrimage. At a very simple stage, young children are able to actively participate in this.

Christ wants us - children and adults - to transform the world around us. By emphasizing that our parish is a place for prayer for all nations and understanding that our parish and each of us are directly connected to the world-wide Orthodox Church, we can begin to prepare ourselves for the change that is necessary for us to be that place where we and others can pray.

Pray:

Dear Lord Jesus
 We pray for all people from all nations around the world
 that they may know that your house is a place for them to learn about Your love.

Help me to be a good example of your love to others
 that I may be bold to welcome new believers into your house
 and that people will know that I am a Christian by my life.

Verse:

"...My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations" Isaiah 56:7

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Begin the lesson with a prayer, and consider using the prayer provided. Read the Bible verse to the group. To encourage a deeper understanding of the verse, ask the group to repeat the verse with you a second time or, if able, ask a member of the group to read the verse.

Ask the group "Whose house is the verse speaking about?" and/or "What does all nations mean?"

"How can our Church be a house of prayer for all nations?"

Read the story about Bataar, and then consider the discussion/activity questions that follow the story, potential responses are below:

Activity #1: On the Way Home from Nadaam

Exercise: Read the story of Bataar to the group. Have a discussion with group using the included questions.

Story: Bataar woke with a start. It was July 11th and he could already hear the clamor and feel the excitement. Today was the first day of the annual Naadam Festival - a three day sporting event featuring Mongolia's finest horseback riders, archers and wrestlers.

Bataar was only a boy, but living in the Mongolian capital city of Ulaanbaatar meant that every year he and his father could go and watch the games at the National Sports Stadium across town. Bataar's favorite event was Mongolian wrestling.

Sometimes a thousand men would grapple with one another until just one man was left standing. This champion received the title of "Lion of Nation". Last year's champion, Dariin, was Bataar's favorite. Bataar and his father watched with great excitement as Dariin defeated opponent after opponent. For Bataar, the highlight of the Naadam festival was to see Dariin claim victory once again and receive the title "Giant of Nation" (a special title only bestowed upon repeat champions).

On the walk home Bataar's father ran into a friend. It was a familiar part of town, but while Bataar's father talked, Bataar began to look more closely at the buildings that surrounded him. Bataar's attention was drawn to one building in particular. He'd asked about it before and his father explained that it was an Orthodox Christian Church. They never went in. Bataar and his family were, after all, Buddhists.

Next to the church, on the same grounds, was another building. The sounds coming from the building were very similar to those he heard at the wrestling matches he loved to watch. With curiosity peaked, Bataar went in to get a closer look. As he peered inside, he could see a fully equipped gymnasium with a large mat at its center. There, on the mat,

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Bataar saw people of all ages (even some as young as he) grappling with one another similarly to the way they did at the Naadam Festival. He was amazed and immediately wanted to give it a try.

Bataar talked about what he saw with his father the rest of the way home. Bataar's father finally agreed to take his son to learn more about what he witnessed at the gymnasium that day. When they returned they learned that Bataar had witnessed one of the Aikido classes that were offered to the community through the Orthodox Church. Bataar's father talked with a priest and with the Aikido instructor. He found them both to be respectable and learned men.

Bataar and his father began taking Aikido lessons at the church. Over time they would spend more time talking with the priest, who often joined them for Aikido lessons. It was through these conversations that Bataar and his father first came to know Jesus Christ.

Over time, Bataar became very good at Aikido, but was even more excited when after going through catechism with the priest he and his family were received into the Orthodox Church through Holy Baptism.

Bataar's journey is just one example of how the Orthodox Church can celebrate the vibrant cultures of countries like Mongolia while at the same time welcoming them into the Body of Christ.

Discussion:

1. In the story Bataar was introduced to the Church through an activity from his own culture that he enjoyed. What activities or outreach could our church do in the United States to welcome more people?
2. What could our churches in North America do to support the ministries of the Church in Mongolia?
3. Many of the people in Mongolia are Buddhist. Do you think we should share our faith with the people of Mongolia? If so, what challenges and opportunities do you perceive exist in sharing the Faith with people of a different culture?

Activity #2: Coin Boxes

Exercise:

Take home the coin boxes and save money between now and Pascha that will go to help send more people to Mongolia to share our faith with people like Bataar and his family.