

A House of Prayer for All Nations

Level: 4th to 8th Grade

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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Assemble students at their desks and begin the lesson with a prayer, and consider using the prayer provided. Read the Bible verse to the students. To encourage a deeper understanding of the verse, ask students to repeat the verse with you a second time or, if able, ask a student to read the verse.

Ask the students "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 Batukhan as a class, and then consider the discussion/activity questions that follow the story, potential responses are below:

Activity #1: Meet Batukhan

Exercise: Read the story of Batukhan to your class. Have them answer the review questions.

Story: Sain Baina Uu! That means "hello" in Mongolian, my new friends! My name is Batukhan and I am a 14 year old boy growing up in the rural grasslands near Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, and am thinking about becoming an Orthodox Christian! I live on the complete other side of the Earth with my father, mother, sister Odval (who is 11), as well as our herds of sheep, cows, and horses. The land on which we live and herd is about 8 miles outside of Ulaan Bataar, the capital city of Mongolia.

I bet that our house is a little bit different from your house. My house is called a ger. It is round, and is made of sheets of felt, wood poles, leather strapping, and is surrounded by the land on which we herd our animals. Sometimes when we have periods of no rain or when our herds run out of grass to eat, we need to move because we need to find new places for our animals to graze. This is no problem for us because our house can be easily taken down and built again on another piece of land. Families, like mine, that move around a lot because of weather and land conditions are called nomadic, and this is how the majority of people that are not in the city live.

I am very lucky because since we only live 8 miles outside of the city, my sister and I are able to attend school. My uncle, as well as my cousin Chuluun, have a small truck and they pick my sister and I up for school each day. Whenever we are not at school, we are working with our mother and father to take care of our animals. These animals provide everything we need for food - mostly meat and milk products.

When we have free-time, our favorite things to do are either ride our horses, shoot archery, or wrestle. Wrestling is the largest, and most popular, sport in Mongolia!

Because we live far in the country, there are no hotels out here. But that is not a problem

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because offering hospitality, or opening your home to strangers, is a very important part of our culture. Very often strangers who are coming and going to the city will stop by as it is getting dark and ask if they can stay with us for the night. Father and mother always offer our home as well as a very good meal to these guests.

We had a very interesting guest a few months ago. His name was Naran and he was 45 years old. He was on his way back to the city after seeing some of his family in the grasslands. While we were talking that night he shared that he was a Christian and worshipped at Holy Trinity Orthodox Church in the city. My family is Buddhist, and I had never heard of Christianity before. I had noticed the large, beautiful church building he described because it is not far from my school, but I had never known what went on inside that building. He talked to my family about Jesus Christ, and stated that Jesus was the Son of God and that because of Jesus, we are able to have a personal relationship with God. I had never heard anything like this before as a Buddhist.

Naran invited my family to visit his church, Holy Trinity, the next time that we were in the city. One day after school, Odval, Chuluun, and I stopped by the church and found all kinds of activities going on. They had sports and arts classes! While there, we met Fr. Alexy, the priest, who showed us around the church, including many painted pictures that he called icons. Through these icons, we were able to learn all about the life of Jesus as well as other people, who Fr. Alexy called saints, who have continued Jesus's work on Earth for over 2000 years now! I learned so much about Jesus and Christianity on that day after spending just a little bit of time with Fr. Alexy and touring the church!

We shared this experience with our mother and father, but they were nervous because they were not familiar with Christianity and did not know Fr. Alexy. A few days later Chuluun and I returned to the church and picked up some information, in Mongolian, about Jesus and took them home to read to mother and father. Within a few weeks, whenever we did not have important work to help with at the house, Odval and I would visit the church. While I am enjoying learning more about Jesus as well as learning more about other sports, like hockey, Odval enjoys painting and ceramic classes that are at the church community center.

While I was playing on the sport court one day, I made some new friends who said that they were members of the Church. They were students at my school too! I did not even know that there were Christians at my school. They were excited to share with me that they were having a full week of Bible studies and activities during the next week because a group of people, or missionaries, were coming from the United States to teach and share with them. I hope that my father and mother will consider coming with me next week.

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Discussion:

1. Sketch a picture of what you think Batukhan's home and land look like, draw what you think might be around it based on the story he shared. Compare this to the photograph that your teacher will pass around.

Allow the students 3-4 minutes to draw their picture, and then distribute copies of the two ger (home) photographs to the students. One photo is the outside of the ger and the second is a photo of the inside.

2. List, and then share, the different ways that Batukhan learned about Jesus and Orthodox Christianity.

There are many possible answers to this question. Batukhan learned about Jesus Christ and the Church through:

- a) visit by Naran, the stranger, to the family ger;*
- b) visit to the Church after school and meeting Fr. Alexy, which included a tour and a lesson on icons;*
- c) reading the Church materials in Mongolian to his parents;*
- d) making friends who were members of the Church playing sports and participating in the activities; and*
- e) going to the Bible studies offered by the visiting missionaries from the United States.*

3. List, and then share at least 2 different ways that you can share your faith with your friends at school.

There will be many and various answers to this question. Some possible answers might be:

- a) Inviting a friend to church and/or church youth activities;*
- b) Talk to their friends about their church, and telling them about icons, the Theotokos, and why they love coming to Church;*
- c) "Loving their neighbor" by being a good listener, not gossiping, and helping their friends when they are upset or in need.*

4. 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 Batukhan and his family.

Distribute the coin boxes to the students. Let them know that when they offer money and gifts to mission work through the coin boxes, they are joining the missionaries who are assisting Fr. Alexy to bring the Gospel to other children all over the world, like Batukhan. Also, let them know that when they get a few years older, that they will have the opportunity to travel and share their faith as a missionary too!

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Known as a ger, many Mongolians live in this traditional home, made of sheets of felt, wood poles and leather strapping. A ger can be taken down and moved when the family moves their herds to different grazing areas.



The ger consists of one large room with a stove in the middle. Gers are well adapted to the nomadic life of rural Mongolians.