

“The Spirit of Peace”

Level: 4th – 8th Grade

Themes: “Acquire the spirit of peace, and a thousand souls around you shall be saved.”
– St. Seraphim of Sarov

“Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”
– James 3:18

Objectives:

- **Introduce** the idea to “acquire the spirit of peace, and a thousand souls around you shall be saved”
- **Establish** a connection between the “spirit of peace” and the ability to share Christ with those who do not know Him and to pique interest in those who do not know Him.
- **Understand** that when we have a spirit of peace, that helps to show others about the peacefulness and love that Christ is in us. It helps make others want to know more about us and our beliefs.
- **Challenge** students to realize that it is part of our faith to share Christ with others.
- **Identify** the ways that Orthodox Missionaries (such as Christina Semon) have a spirit of peace that assists them in their mission to spread the love of God.
- **Act** by collecting funds throughout Lent with the Mission Coin Boxes to support the work of the Mission Center so that many more are empowered to use their spirit of peace to bring others to the faith.

Note to teacher:

As Orthodox Christians, we are each called to participate in Christ’s Great Commission to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). We do this by sharing Christ’s peace, and His love, which those people Christ brings into our lives. We each begin our journey in Christ by first opening our heart, accepting Christ into our lives, and allowing His peace fill our hearts and mind so that we can begin to hear Christ’s will for us. As we grow closer to Jesus Christ, our behavior and our attitude will begin to take on very peaceful characteristics. In this peaceful place, we become vessels for Christ’s will in our lives. As we meet people, Christ’s influence becomes obvious in the manner in which we react to others and to situations. With Christ as our guiding light, we will be able to find peace within even the most stressful situations and in our interactions with cruel people.

With the acceptance of peace of Christ in our heart, our choices may not be the same as others. However, this is what we are called to do and through our peace in Christ others will be introduced to His love and salvation, and lives will be transformed! The sharing of Christ’s peace and message with those around us, and throughout the world, is missions!

The Church offers numerous tools to support us in our journey toward acquiring the peace of Christ, including the Eucharist, prayer, and fasting. Each of these Holy activities gives us the opportunity to pause, refocus on Christ, and recommit our heart to listen to His will. In turn, our peace is renewed.

Christina Semon is an OCMC Missionary serving the Orthodox Church in Moldova. Completing her fourth year of missionary service, Christina is a beautiful example of an Orthodox Christian who, despite temptations and much “noise” around her, chose to dedicate her life to Christ and His will. Today, she works with youth she is serving near Chrisinau, Moldova, encouraging them to acquire the peace of Christ in their lives.

Pray:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God

We pray for all people from all nations around the world

That they may come to know the peace that is only offered through a life lived with You.

Help me to open my own heart to your peace, and that I would be a good example of your love to others.

That I may be bold to welcome new believers into your Church

And that people will know that I am a Christian by my peace and my life.

Lesson:

Assemble the students at their desks and begin the lesson with a prayer, and consider using the prayer provided. Read the Bible verse, as well as the quote from St. Seraphim of Sarov. To encourage a deeper understanding of the verse and quote, ask the students to repeat the verse with you a second time, or ask a student to read the verse and quote.

Activity 1: Who is a “peaceful” person? (Directions)

Have each student take the activity sheet and write a short paragraph about someone in their life that they think is a peaceful person. Have the students describe the attributes of that person that they feel make them “peaceful.”

While the students are writing their paragraph, the teacher should begin to create a distraction by singing, tapping on the table with pens/pencils making music, dancing around the room, tapping them on the shoulder, and overall attempting to distract the students from their writing. After this goes on for 2-3 minutes, allow the students to focus on their writing but take note how they reacted to the distraction.

Once the students complete their writing, ask them to share for a moment how they felt about the teacher's distractions. How did the distraction make them feel? Was it difficult for the students to remain peaceful amidst the distraction?

Share with the students that it is similar distractions that often keep us from being still, listening to God through our prayer, and serving Him in our daily lives. The writing activity is a metaphor for a life lived in Christ and the teacher's distraction is a metaphor for all of the things in the world that keep us from focusing on God's will. How difficult was it for the students to remain peaceful while being distracted?

Ask 1-2 students to read aloud their paragraph describing a peaceful person that they know. Reflect with the class what can be learned from the examples of these peaceful people. What would draw you toward these people to be their friend? In conclusion reflect if each member of the class has similar attractive, peaceful attributes that would be attractive to others.

After 5-6 minutes of discussion, move on to Activity #2.

Activity 2: Meet Christina Semon, Missionary to Moldova (Directions)

Read the story of OCMC Missionary Christina Semon as a class, and then consider the discussion/activity questions that follow the story on the student activity sheet.

In discussing the reflection questions, the objective remains to **familiarize** the students with the tools and opportunities God provides within the Orthodox Church so that we may find peace in a chaotic world, inclusive of prayer, fasting, and the sacraments, including the Eucharist; to **recognize** the ways during our daily lives that living in peace impacts those around us, including our families, friends, and strangers; and to identify ways that we can offer the peace offered in the Orthodox Church to those around us through missions.

Activity 3: Assemble the OCMC Coin Boxes (Directions)

Discuss how these funds will be used to support the ministries of the Mission Center to spread Christ's love around the world. Send the boxes home with the students and ask them to fill them and return the boxes at a time you decide upon. Remind the class of their role in spreading Christ's love through having a spirit of peace within themselves.

Activity Sheet 1: Who is a “peaceful” person?

In the space provided below, write a short paragraph to describe someone in your life that you think of as a “peaceful” person. Then, think about the questions at the bottom of the page.

Questions:

1. What is it about this person that makes him/her peaceful?
2. Are these peaceful qualities ones that make you want to be their friend and get to know them better or ones that make you want to stay away from them?
3. What can you learn from this peaceful person?

Activity 2: Identifying Peacefulness

Read the following story from missionary Christina Semon and then answer and discuss the questions following the story.

My journey to becoming a long-term missionary began when I finished college. However, throughout my life God had planted seeds, as well as offered everything I would need, to make this decision.

I was baptized as an Orthodox Christian by my parents and they raised me up in Orthodox Church by participating in Sunday school, youth activities, and the Divine Liturgy every Sunday. Along with my church activities, I was involved with school and sports. After school, I immersed myself in softball and swimming practices. I enjoyed the excitement and atmosphere of the competitions. At the end of high school, I was recruited by the softball coaches at Binghamton University (in New York) to play Division I softball on scholarship. It was a dream come true! I always wanted to perform at the highest level of collegiate sports. With a big smile on my face I started out my college life. However, a storm of challenges began to appear in the distance.

I was an hour away from home, I was independent, and ready to start this new phase of my life on my own. My life was changed by the college scene. I was the only one in control of my life about what I wanted to do, but somehow I just did not feel like myself. Looking back, I realize now that I abused this freedom in the wrong way on many occasions. The peace and balance that I had growing up was gone. But God allowed this darkness because of my own free will but also showed me a way out of the darkness. God would open doors for me that would show me the way back to His peace and love.

The key door that God opened for me was an opportunity to spend part of my college study abroad in Russia. My heart knew that this was a special opportunity, so special that I chose to give up my sports scholarship in order to go! During my time in Russia, I enjoyed living in an Orthodox country and I found myself surrounded by saints' relics, icons, and church communities. This time allowed me to reflect on my life and all of those things that helped shape me growing up – being surrounded by the Church and all of my friends and family in the Body of Christ. The peace I found as a result of this experience made me much stronger as a Christian and encouraged me to seek out a life where I could serve and work for the Church.

I did not have all of the answers yet, so once I graduated from college, I had to do what each of us has to do – work. Unsure of what God had for me next I worked at Starbucks as well as in a factory. In the mean time, I couldn't ignore the call in my heart to serve the Church and to help people. In my free time, I searched for international volunteer opportunities because God had always put a love for travel and a curiosity for new cultures in my heart. I knew about the Peace Corp but I expanded my search and through God's help, He led me to the Orthodox Christian Mission Center.

I went to my spiritual father and shared with him what I thought God was speaking to my heart. Once I had his blessing I shared my calling with my parents. My mother was worried about me going so far away but my father encouraged me to do it because, at that moment, I did not have a lot of responsibilities at home that would keep me from going. I prayed that my parents would not worry too much, knowing that I was in God's hands. I am blessed to be here in Moldova now where I am able offer the joy of a life lived in Jesus Christ with young people who are just beginning to understand how

deep Christ's love really reaches. In addition to organizing youth gatherings at the local church, I have become involved in several outreach programs to help young people. Whether we are assisting young mothers to care for their babies or teaching teenage girls valuable skills like cooking and sewing, through these social ministries we first and foremost show them that Christ loves them and cares about them; the love that we show to them is an imitation of Christ's love. Glory to God for all things!

Questions:

1. Christina described that when she went to college, that she lost much of the peace and balance that she had while she was growing up because of the distractions there. What are the distractions in your life that keep you from being peaceful?
2. What activities does the Church offer to help us find peace by growing closer to Jesus Christ?
3. Christina is sharing Christ's peace and love with teenagers in Eastern Europe in the country of Moldova. What can you do today to share Christ's peace with your family as well as with your friends at school?

Activity 4: Assemble the OCMC Coin Boxes

When you share Christ's peace and love with those around you.....you are being a missionary!

Please take the OCMC Mission Coin Box home, share it with your family, and fill it with spare change and money during Lent. The money you offer will assist missionaries like Christina share Christ's Gospel overseas with many who have never heard the Gospel.