St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival 2013

TOPICS, TIPS, AND RESOURCES

GREEK ORTHODOX
ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA

Department of Religious Education
(800) 566-1088 | religioused@goarch.org

St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival 2013
Topics, Tips, and Resources

Elementary Division (Grades 4–6)

The purpose of the Elementary Oratorical program is to offer children the opportunity to express their feelings about their Faith and Church, as well as to gain confidence and self-esteem. In addition, it provides an incentive to children for later participation in the Junior and Senior Divisions.

Basic differences between the elementary and the teenage divisions:

1. The elementary division is strictly a local program.
2. There is no judging.
3. The topics are modest but invite creativity: Jesus, prayer, icons, etc.
4. It is designed to fit easily into the Church school program, with flexible topics that coincide with the curriculum.
5. To make it even more interesting, consider having some classes sign a song or re-enact a parable or a Bible story. Be creative!

What are the rules?

- Encourage all children to participate. Teachers and parents should assist the children in choosing a topic. Invite the children to present their talks at a community gathering, perhaps after the Divine Liturgy, as part of a parish event, during a special Oratorical program, or as part of the Junior and Senior Oratorical Festival.
- Each talk should last 30–90 seconds. However, no "strict timing" should be observed. For instance, one child may offer only two or three sentences, and another may offer considerably more. Also, if a child feels more comfortable in using an icon, picture, or poster as part of the talk, this is permissible.

Suggested topics:

Jesus Christ	Helping Others	A Smile	The Bible
Love	The Cross	My Church	My Family
Being Kind	Prayer	Church School	My Favorite Icon
Lighting a Candle			

St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival 2013
Topics, Tips, and Resources

Junior Division (Grades 7–9)

1. Considering the Lord's words to His disciples, "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all" (Mark 9:35), discuss the relationship between service and leadership.

A. Read the Church's teachings:

Matthew 18:1–4; Matthew 20:20–28; Mark 9:33–37; Mark 10:35–45; Luke 9:46–48

B. Consider the direction your speech might take. Here are some examples:

- Read about Christ in the New Testament and discuss how Christ's model of servant leadership can be used in today's world.
- Christ was speaking to His Apostles, who were sent forth and founded churches in all nations. Discuss the example of an apostle or saint who led through service.
- Who in your life is an example of Christian leadership?
- Compare and contrast worldly leadership with heavenly leadership.

C. Once you have chosen a direction, learn more about the topic. Here are some recommended resources and readings:

- Ann Bezzerides, ed., *Christ at Work* (Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2006). (DRE item #YM800)
- Michael H. Missios, "Servant Leadership in Greek Orthodox Parishes," PRAXIS 10, no. 3 (Spring 2011), www.goarch.org/archdiocese/departments/religioused/praxis_spring_2011
- Kent M. Keith, "The Characteristics of Servant-Leaders," www.greenleaf.org/whatissl/TheCharacteristicsOfServant-Leaders.pdf
- Kent M. Keith, "The Key Practices of Servant-Leaders," www.greenleaf.org/whatissl/TheKeyPracticesOfServant-Leaders.pdf

Junior Division (Grades 7–9)

2. Discuss the importance of participating in the life of the Church in light of Jesus's teaching in John 15:5: "I am the vine, you are the branches."

A. Read the Church's teachings:

- John 15:1–8

B. Consider the direction your speech might take. Here are some examples:

- Discuss how the Orthodox Faith and Way of Life have been passed from generation to generation through Apostolic succession. How has this shaped our Church community into what it is today?
- How do the Church and our Church family keep us connected and rooted?
- Discuss how we as the branches can use outreach to bear fruit in the life of the Church.

C. Once you have chosen a direction, learn more about the topic. Here are some recommended resources and readings:

- Bishop Gerasimos Papadopoulos, *The Gospel of St. John* (Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010).
- Fr. Michael Courey, *Walk in the Light* (Genesis World Press, 2008). (DRE item #YM700)

Junior Division (Grades 7–9)

3. In the Resurrection Service, the priest proclaims, "Come receive the light." Discuss the place of light in the Orthodox Tradition.

A. Read the Church's teachings:

Scripture: Matthew 17:2; Acts 9:3; 2 Corinthians 4:6

Hymns: "Come receive the Light," "O gladsome light" (*Phos ilaron*)

Prayer: "Shine in our hearts, Loving Master…"

B. Consider the direction your speech might take. Here are some examples:

- Look at how and when light, especially candlelight, is used in many different Church services and sacraments.
- Christ says that He is the light of the world (John 8:12). How is this shown in the Church?
- In the Presanctified Liturgy, we hear "The light of Christ illumines all." What does this mean to you?
- What is the relationship between light and darkness?

C. Once you have chosen a direction, learn more about the topic. Here are some recommended resources and readings:

- Eikona, "Come Receive the Light" audio recording, http://lent.goarch.org/media/audio.asp
- Theodore Stylianopoulos, *A Year of the Lord*, Vol. 4, Chapter 1. (DRE item #FL614)
- Anthony M. Coniaris, "The Resurrection Service in the Orthodox Church" pamphlet. (DRE item #P28)

Junior Division (Grades 7–9)

4. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22–23). Discuss how we can, by the help of the Holy Spirit, produce the above fruit in our lives.

A. Read the Church's teachings:

John 14:26; Galatians 5:22–23

B. Consider the direction your speech might take. Here are some examples:

- Look at the life of your patron saint or the saint of your church as an example of how to live a life filled with the fruit of the Spirit.
- Tell a story from your own life about how these characters helped you.
- Discuss how the fruit of the Spirit can help us live a more peaceful life.

C. Once you have chosen a direction, learn more about the topic. Here are some recommended resources and readings:

- Orthodox Church in America, Feasts & Saints, www.oca.org/fs
- George Poulos, *Orthodox Saints*, Vols. 1–4 (Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2005). (DRE item #FL325–328)

Junior Division (Grades 7–9)

5. In Psalm 103/104, God's care for the natural world is praised. Select elements from the psalm and discuss how they may help us "grow" in our Faith.

A. Read the Church's teachings:

Psalm 103/104

B. Consider the direction your speech might take. Here are some examples:

- Discuss what you learned in your own life from caring for living things, plants or animals.
- How has your spiritual life been affected by something from the natural world?
- Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has been called the "Green Patriarch." What are his teachings about the environment? How is his message important for the Church?

C. Once you have chosen a direction, learn more about the topic. Here are some recommended resources and readings:

- The Service of Sunday Vespers (Holy Cross Orthodox Press), http://goarch.org/en/chapel/liturgical_texts/vespers.asp#psalm103
- Frederick W. Kruger, *Greening the Orthodox Parish* (CreateSpace, 2012).
- Becket Films, "The Green Patriarch" DVD. (DRE item #FL083)

St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival 2013
Topics, Tips, and Resources

Senior Division (Grades 10–12)

1. The Prophet Micah says, "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8). Discuss how this passage has inspired many Christians to acts of service.

A. Read the Church's teachings:

Micah 6:8

B. Consider the direction your speech might take. Here are some examples:

- Service is not just serving in the mission field in a foreign country. You can also serve in your own city, town, or parish. Discuss different ways that this can be achieved.
- Compare and contrast secular service projects with philanthropy.
- In what ways does service involve self-sacrifice? How far might you go to put the needs of "the other" before your own?

C. Once you have chosen a direction, learn more about the topic. Here are some recommended resources and readings:

- Youth Equipped to Serve (YES), http://yesnorthamerica.org
- Jenny Friedman and Jolene Roehlkepartain, *Doing Good Together* (Free Spirit Publishing, 2012). (DRE item #CR313, $14.95)

Senior Division (Grades 10–12)

2. In 313 AD, St. Constantine the Great proclaimed the Edict of Milan, which allowed Christians to practice their faith freely. What did religious freedom mean then, and what does it mean for people of faith today in countries where violent religious persecution occurs?

A. Read the Church's teachings:

Read the Edict of Milan (available at www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/edict-milan.asp).

Learn about the life of St. Constantine and the Roman Empire at the time.

B. Consider the direction your speech might take. Here are some examples:

- Why was the Edict of Milan so important for the Christian Church? What values did it promote in the Roman Empire at that time? How is our age similar or different?
- Consider countries in which people of different religions have learned to live together peacefully. What can we learn from them?
- How could the values of the Edict of Milan be applied in places where people of different religions, usually small communities, feel threatened or are actively persecuted?

C. Once you have chosen a direction, learn more about the topic. Here are some recommended resources and readings:

- "60 Minutes: The Patriarch" DVD (2009). (DRE item #FL086)
- Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, "Statement on Religious Tolerance and Violence," www.patriarchate.org/documents/statement-on-religious-tolerance-and-violence
- Archbishop Demetrios of America, *Ways of the Lord* (Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, 2010).
- Maria C. Khoury, *Witness in the Holy Land* (CDK Publications, 2003).

(continued)

Senior Division (Grades 10–12)

- U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, Annual Report 2012, pages 6–12, www.uscirf.gov/images/Annual%20Report%20of%20USCIRF%202012(2).pdf
- Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, "Rising Tide of Restrictions on Religion," September 20, 2012, www.pewforum.org/Government/Rising-Tide-of-Restrictions-on-Religion-findings.aspx
- Luke Veronis, *Missionaries, Monks and Martyrs* (Light and Life Publishing, 1994).

Senior Division (Grades 10–12)

3. Discuss the Lenten Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian in light of today's culture.

A. Read the Prayer of St. Ephraim:

Lord and Master of my life, cast away from me the spirit of laziness, idle curiosity, love of power and vain talk.

But grant me, Your servant, the spirit of moderation, humility, patience and love.

Yes, Lord and King, grant me to see my own faults and not to judge my brothers and sisters.

For You are blessed forever. Amen.

B. Consider the direction your speech might take. Here are some examples:

- Books like *Achieve Anything in Just One Year*, *Reinventing Yourself*, and *100 Ways to Motivate Yourself* are bestsellers. How should Orthodox Christians approach the idea of self-improvement? Compare and contrast the Prayer of St. Ephraim with the culture of self-help and self-improvement.
- This prayer dates from the fourth or fifth century. Are all of the vices and virtues it discusses just as relevant today? Would you revise the prayer in any way?
- The Prayer of St. Ephraim is one of repentance, the spirit of Great Lent. Does our culture promote repentance?

C. Once you have chosen a direction, learn more about the topic. Here are some recommended resources and readings:

- The Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian, www.goarch.org/resources/prayers/saint_ephrem
- Alexander Schmemann, "The Lenten Prayer of St. Ephrem the Syrian," www.sv-luka.org/misionar/lentenpr_n2.htm
- "St. Ephraim the Syrian," www.goarch.org/chapel/saints_view?contentid=406
- "St. Moses the Ethiopian," www.ewtn.com/saintsholy/saints/M/stmosestheblack.asp

Senior Division (Grades 10–12)

4. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Social media is constantly present in our lives, making it easy for us to share bits and pieces of our lives with many people. How do you "let your light so shine" by using the widely available contemporary social and other media?

A. Read the Church's teachings:

Matthew 5:13–16; John 15:8; 1 Peter 2:12

B. Consider the direction your speech might take. Here are some examples:

- St. Paul says that, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). Discuss how by understanding this we are able to let our light shine because Christ is shining out of us.
- Christ says that we are both "the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13) and "the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). How and why should we be both in our "digital lives"?
- For most Facebook profiles, people are only showing a portion of their life that they want people to see. Why might this be? How can you shine the light of Christ through this?

C. Once you have chosen a direction, learn more about the topic. Here are some recommended resources and readings:

- St. Gregory Palamas, "Homily on the Transfiguration," http://oca.org/fs/sermons/sermon-on-the-transfiguration
- "Pop Culture," PRAXIS 10, no. 3 (Spring 2011), www.goarch.org/archdiocese/departments/religioused/praxis_spring_2011

Senior Division (Grades 10–12)

5. "Your hands have made me and fashioned me; Give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments" (Psalm 118/119, verse 73). Discuss how this passage can guide us in a time when we constantly seek to alter the way we look, act, and live.

A. Read Psalm 118/119.

B. Consider the direction your speech might take. Here are some examples:

- TV is flooded with many makeover shows, and "beauty" is often defined by those who are famous and popular. Discuss how the Church sees perfection in a person.
- Do reality TV shows affect how we act and live? Discuss how we as Christians can combat these influences so that we can focus on God intended us to be.
- Body image and being comfortable with oneself is a big issue in middle and high school. Discuss how this passage can help you in times like these.
- This psalm forms the core of the Orthodox Christian funeral service; discuss how we can learn about our lives through the psalm and the service.

C. Once you have chosen a direction, learn more about the topic. Here are some recommended resources and readings:

- Regina Franklin, *Who Calls me Beautiful? Finding Our True Image in the Mirror of God* (Discovery House Publishers, 2004).
- Deborah Newman, "Comfortable in Your Own Skin: Making Peace with Your Body Image" (Focus on the Family, 2007).
- Orthodox Christian Teen Survival Guide, "Body Image" pamphlet, www.goarch.org/archdiocese/departments/youth/youthworkers/survivalguide
- Dee Pennock, *Who Is God? Who Am I? Who Are You?* (DRE item #1011)
- Orthodox Christian funeral service (Holy Cross Orthodox Press), www.goarch.org/chapel/liturgical_texts/funeral2