

OBJECTIVE

To have each family member understand that Jesus Christ is the Alpha and Omega and must be the beginning and end of all we do in our lives.

PREPARATION

The committee leading this activity should review and use the *Preparing for the Family Night* checklist in *Appendix B* to plan for the event.

Session leaders should allocate sufficient time to prepare, familiarizing themselves not only with the session but also with each of the following Bible passages: Revelation 1:8, Job 11:7–9, Ecclesiastes 3:1–11, and 1 Corinthians 15:20–22. In addition, look over any prayers that will be used so that you are comfortable with them as well. If theological questions arise during preparation, the leader(s) should schedule a meeting with the parish priest so that the lesson is fully understood before the session.

On the day of the session, allow time to organize the materials.

MATERIALS NEEDEDFor the Whole Group

- Copies of prayers and/or prayer services (*for all participants*)
- Flip chart, masking tape, and markers
- Bags filled with the following items (*one per family*):
 - *Family time: Opening Activity* handout (*see p. 105*)
 - Large sheet of flip chart paper or butcher paper
 - Markers and glue stick
- *Family Time: Closing Activity* handout (*see p. 106*)
- Pens/pencils and paper
- *Family Night: Taking It Home* handouts (*see pp. 107–108*)
- 2 small paper icons of Christ and 1 larger paper icon of the Pantocrator (*each family*)

For Children's Break-out Session

- Icon of the Pantocrator
- Paper icons of the Pantocrator
- Circular paper plates, glue, and glitter
- Crayons/markers

For Teenagers' Break-out Session

- Small bucket, rocks (enough to fill the bucket), and sand
- Pens/pencils and paper

For Adults' Break-out Session

- *Personal Reflection* handout (*see p. 103*)
- *Small Group Discussion* handout (*see p. 104*)
- Pens/pencils and paper

OPENING AND CLOSING PRAYERS

We recommend that as a parish family you begin and end your evening with a worship service or prayer. We have included a Small Compline service in Appendix A to reproduce and distribute for all to participate. If you choose a different service, make every effort to have the text available for everyone. For alternative prayer time, teach the families this beautiful prayer from the Vespers service. It is important to take a few minutes as a group to review the meaning of this prayer so that all can be active participants when praying. Consult with your parish priest for guidance in this.

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Grant, Lord, to keep us this evening without sin. Blessed are You, Lord, God of our fathers, and praised and glorified is Your name forever. Amen. Lord, let Your mercy come upon us, for we have trusted in You. Blessed are You, Lord; teach me Your commandments. Blessed are You, Master; make me to understand Your commandments. Blessed are You, Holy One; enlighten me with Your commandments. Lord, Your love endures forever; do not turn away from the works of Your hands. To You belongs praise, song, and glory, to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen. —Prayer from Vespers

OPENING ACTIVITY: LIFE POINTS (15–20 minutes)

After the opening prayers, give each family a bag with materials and have them follow the instructions on the Family Time: Opening Activity handout. Begin the discussion when most of the families have completed the task.

DISCUSS (Look first to the children for answers and reflect back.)

- What were some of the important events in your lives?
- Were any of the events a new beginning in your life? (Allow participants to share examples.)
- Were any of the events an end to a chapter in your life? (Allow participants to share examples.)
- “I am the **Alpha and Omega**, the Beginning and the End,” says the Lord, “Who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Revelation 1:8). What do you think Christ means by this? (Allow several people to answer before beginning the opening remarks.)

OPENING REMARKS (Paraphrase in your own words.)

Very good answers! Before we move on, I want to make sure you remember what Jesus said. Let’s all read it together:

Write Revelation 1:8 on a flip chart or project on the wall for all to see. Have everyone recite the passage in unison. If you like, have a quick contest to see who can recite it the loudest—the adults or the children.

Alpha and Omega are letters in the Greek alphabet—specifically, the first and last letters. In this statement, Christ is showing His eternalness—everything begins and ends with God. By nature, we have always sought to answer such questions as “Why are things so?” or “How did this come about?” We constantly search for the answer to our existence. To answer these fundamental questions, Jesus teaches that our life has a purpose and not just an existence. Christ tells us He is God, the Creator of all, the One that has been and always will be. He gives guidance and purpose to our lives. Christ is the beginning and end, the One that is infinite and uncontainable. He never abandons His children, but rather desires us to be with Him for eternity. This is what we will be exploring today: beginning and ending all aspects of our lives in Christ. Before we move on, let’s see who remembers what Jesus said. (Say the following and allow participants to fill in the blanks.)

“I am the _____ and _____ the _____ and the _____,” says the Lord, “who is and who _____ and who is to come, the _____.”

BREAK-OUT SESSIONS (45–60 minutes)

Three age-appropriate break-out sessions are offered on the following pages. These may or may not work for your parish, depending on the number of families that participate. If you are not able to break into three groups, keep participants together and adapt one of the sessions to best meet your needs.

- Children’s Break-out Session—The Almighty (pp. 97–98)
- Teenagers’ Break-out Session—Time for Everything (pp. 99–100)
- Adults’ Break-out Session—The End (pp. 101–104)

Transitioning smoothly from one activity to the next is critical when leading a session, especially for young children. For this reason, make sure to know exactly where each group is going for the break-out sessions and who is leading them. Give clear instructions and proper support so the lessons can begin promptly.

Please note that the children’s and teenagers’ groups will vary greatly in age, as well as in developmental and spiritual levels. If there are many children, it would be best to split the preschoolers through 2nd graders into one group and the 3rd through 6th graders into another. Likewise with the teenagers, split the junior high and high school students into two groups when appropriate. However the groups are arranged, make sure that all the young people are fully engaged in the lesson. For more specific information about the developmental needs of children and teenagers, see the *Guidelines* published by the Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (www.youth.goarch.org). Above all, always be certain there is enough adult supervision to ensure that the young people will be safe and supported in their learning.

CLOSING ACTIVITY (15–20 minutes)

Reassemble the participants back together as families. Give each family group a Family Time: Closing Activity handout. Have them follow the instructions on the handout and when most families are done (they can continue at home if necessary), begin the wrap-up discussion.

DISCUSS (Look first to the children for answers and reflect back.)

- What did you learn today?
- What are you going to do as a family when you get home?
- Does anyone remember the passage about Jesus we learned earlier? (repeat as a group)

WRAP-UP (Paraphrase in your own words.)

Our life is full of different chapters with beginnings and endings that help us develop as individuals and as families. If we include Jesus Christ in our lives—day-to-day, month-to-month, year-to-year—we may hope, through His grace, to be counted among the just when we are at the Final Judgment. When the pressures and cares of the world absorb us, it is difficult to keep Jesus Christ in the midst of our thoughts, words, and actions. We were joined to Christ at baptism, and it should be our life’s work to make the journey as

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dutiful servants of the Lord until our days on earth come to an end. As we leave here tonight, let us remember the words of Jesus, “*I am the **Alpha and Omega**, the Beginning and the End... who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty*” (Revelation 1:8).

AS FAMILIES PREPARE TO LEAVE

- Remember to close with a short worship service or closing prayer.
- Don't forget to give families the *Family Night: Taking It Home* handout.
- Let them know when the next Family Night is scheduled.
- Enlist families to help you clean up (*rotate monthly*).
- Thank them sincerely for their attendance and participation.

THE ALMIGHTY

CHILDREN'S BREAK-OUT SESSION

OPENING ACTIVITY: THE ALMIGHTY

What is the passage we learned in our opening session?

Allow children a moment to respond then proceed by reading the following passage once again:

"I am the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

—Revelation 1:8

The word "almighty" ends the verse. It is a word that we hear often when referring to God. Can anyone tell me what it means? *Allow children to share answers then proceed with the following:*

Almighty means that there is nothing greater, stronger, or more powerful than our God. Let's think about it another way. We are going to make a list of some of the mightiest people we know—they can be real or make-believe. *Have children list people and tell you why they are mighty. Write the names as the children share them for all to see. Once you are done state the following in your own words:*

All these people—some real, some make-believe—with all their powers cannot compare to God, who is more powerful than all of them put together. God is so mighty that it can be too much for us to imagine or understand. But even though He is Almighty, He is still our Heavenly Father who loves us very much.

BIBLE PASSAGE: JOB 11:7–9

Let's see what the Bible says. We are going to read from the book of Job. Does anyone know if that is in the Old or New Testament? *(Allow children to answer, then proceed.)* It is from the Old Testament. Here is what it says:

Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than heaven—what can you do? Deeper than Sheol—what can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea.

STATE *(Paraphrase in your own words.)*

Let's take a closer look at this passage. Immediately, we are challenged by two questions:

Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty?

Well, can we? It is hard, but we can try. Our whole life should be spent trying to learn about God—but remember, God is so mighty we can never fully understand everything about Him. Next, the passage describes the "deep things" of God and the never-ending limits of the Almighty:

They are higher than the heavens—what can you do?

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We can't see higher than the heavens with our human eyes. That is very high, but that is how mighty God is!

They are deeper than Sheol—what can you know?

Sheol refers to the dwelling of the dead before Christ's Resurrection. According to Old Testament belief (Job and Ecclesiastes), it was the place where both the righteous and unrighteous went when they died. God's mightiness is deeper than we can imagine.

Notice the two questions this passage presents: "What can you do?" and "What can you know?" They illustrate the limits of our ability to understand. God is all-seeing, all-knowing, all-powerful, and rules everything we can see and even what's invisible. Finally, the passage says:

Their measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea.

God's mightiness is so great it is hard for us to understand. What does this mean to us? (*Let the children answer in their own words.*)

STATE (*Paraphrase in your own words.*)

This passage means that God is so great, strong, and powerful that He can do anything. He can do so many things that we can't even begin to know all of them. As His children, we need to place our lives in His hands and trust that He will take care of us each and every day.

Please adapt the following to your own church building if there is an icon of the Pantocrator on the dome. If you have one—and it is possible—take the children to see it.

On the ceiling in many Orthodox churches is an icon of Christ called the "Pantocrator" which means the Almighty. This icon represents how Christ watches over all of us. In His left hand, He holds the Bible—His Word, which tells us how to live. With His right hand, He blesses us. Christ is watching over us each and every day. Today we are going to make Pantocrator icons to take home.

ART PROJECT

Have the children begin by putting their names on the back of the paper plate and write "God is mightier than _____ (let them fill in the blank)" on the front (make sure to leave room for the icon in the center). Have them glue the icon of the Pantocrator on the front and decorate the edges.

WRAP-UP (*Paraphrase in your own words.*)

Begin by having some of the children share what they learned, then summarize with the following:

Today we have learned that God is greater, stronger, and more powerful than anything we know. He loves us completely as our Heavenly Father. We should trust in Him for all things in our lives.

Close with the following prayer:

Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God, the Almighty, forever and ever. Amen.

TIME FOR EVERYTHING

TEENAGERS' BREAK-OUT SESSION

OPENING ACTIVITY: TIME

Have the young people gather around the bucket. Distribute the rocks among them and state the following in your own words:

This bucket represents a typical day, and each of these rocks represents something we do during our day. Think of a task you might do on any given day. State what it is, and put a rock that represents it into the bucket. *Allow each person to place one rock in the bucket until the bucket is full. Then state the following in your own words:*

Can we fit any more rocks in the bucket? *(Allow young people a chance to answer before proceeding.)*

No, we can't fit any more rocks in the bucket. But, I forgot. We were supposed to put this sand in the bucket, too. Can we fit the sand in the bucket? Why or why not? *(Allow young people a chance to answer before proceeding.)*

The sand will fit if we pour it in slowly so it can fill the cracks between the rocks. *Slowly pour the sand into the bucket, shaking slightly to distribute throughout the bucket.*

In this activity, we know the bucket represents a typical day and the rocks represent tasks that fill our day. Can anyone guess what the sand represents? *(Allow young people a chance to answer before proceeding.)*

The sand represents God. Can anyone tell me how many grains of sand there are? *(Allow young people a chance to answer before proceeding.)*

We cannot tell how many grains of sand there are, just as we can not measure the ever-present power of God in our lives. The sand surrounds the rocks in such a way that we cannot divide the individual grains of sand. We need to pour God into our lives just as we poured the sand into the bucket. We can not compartmentalize Him into one day (Sunday) or one specific time of our day (praying before an exam). He is too great for that. He is our ever present, ever-loving, and eternal God—our beginning and end.

STATE *(Paraphrase in your own words.)*

It can be hard to wrap our minds around the eternalness of God. In our lives, we like absolute truths and scientific facts that we can contain in a nice little box labeled "Things I Know." But how can we contain the Almighty? We can never know everything about Him. That doesn't mean we should give up our quest to know Him and grow in Him. It just means that as we learn we must accept that certain aspects of God will remain a mystery. In the church, a sacrament is also referred to as a mystery. It is a mystery to us how the elements of bread and wine become the actual Body and Blood of Christ. It is a mystery how two people are joined becoming one in the sacrament of marriage. In both of these mysteries of the church, the sacrament does not necessarily have to be fully understood as much as it is to be experienced and accepted in faithful commitment. If we are faithful and accept that our capacity to understand God's ways is limited, He will reveal more to us in due time as He sees fit.

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BIBLE READING: ECCLESIASTES 3:1–11

To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven: A time to be born, And a time to die; A time to plant, And a time to pluck what is planted; A time to kill, And a time to heal; A time to break down, And a time to build up; A time to weep, And a time to laugh; A time to mourn, And a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, And a time to gather stones; A time to embrace, And a time to refrain from embracing; A time to gain, And a time to lose; A time to keep, And a time to throw away; A time to tear, And a time to sew; A time to keep silence, And a time to speak; A time to love, And a time to hate; A time of war, And a time of peace. What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

DISCUSS (*Allow all to share and reflect back.*)

- What is this passage saying?
- What is meant by “He has made everything beautiful in its time”?
- What does this mean to our lives?

STATE (*Paraphrase in your own words.*)

We live in a society that wants everything ASAP! But as Christians we need to be patient and faithful to accept that we don’t need all things immediately and where we are—at this very moment in our lives—has significance. We need to pray for God to give us patience and to help us understand His purpose for our life. By doing this, we turn our lives over to Him and accept His will—remembering that He is our beginning and end (and hopefully everything in between!)

SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY: A TIME TO

Break the young people into small groups of 4–5. Ask them to write the following across the top of their paper: “To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven.” Ask them to mimic the style in the Ecclesiastes passage and write their own modern-day passages (i.e. a time to study, a time to play Nintendo). Once they create this, they can discuss what they can do to be patient, putting their lives in God’s hands so that everything begins and ends with Him. When everyone is done, have them share their passages.

WRAP-UP (*Paraphrase in you own words.*)

There is a time for all things in life. We must turn our lives over to Christ and trust in His strength to guide us and show us what we need at the proper times. But in order for us to see what He is revealing to us, we must look toward Him and listen to and obey His commandments. (*Bring out the bucket for all to see as a visual aide.*) Look at your days and ask yourself, Am I pouring Christ into all aspects of my life? Are there activities that I need to spend less time with so I can make more time for Christ? If we continually work to make Christ a bigger part of our lives, He will reveal more and more of His wondrous mysteries—grain by grain.

Close by having all recite the Lord’s Prayer with reverent attention.

THE END

ADULTS' BREAK-OUT SESSION

OPENING ACTIVITY: TOWARD ETERNITY

Allow everyone five minutes to reflect on the personal reflection handout (see p. 103). When everyone seems done, have them share some of their thoughts on the poem. Because this session will be focusing on death, it is best to have someone lead the session who can deal sensitively with the topic especially if someone has recently lost a loved one.

STATE (*Paraphrase in your own words.*)

There are two things that everyone in the world has in common: we are all born and we all die. Death—even though we all will experience it—is something we generally don't like talking about. As we learned, Christ is the beginning—the beginning of the world, the universe, and our lives. Christ is also the end—the end of the world, the universe, and our lives. If we live as Christ would have us, His judgment at our death will be merciful and lead us to live eternally with Him in Paradise—a place that has no endings. Remember, Christ conquered death for us so that we can live eternally with Him.

BIBLE PASSAGE: 1 CORINTHIANS 15:20–22

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

DISCUSS (*Allow all to share and reflect back.*)

- What is this passage telling us?
- How are we “made alive” in Christ?
- What does this mean to our lives?

STATE (*Paraphrase in your own words.*)

Death was brought about by man through sin. Christ conquered death by dying for our sins. On Mt. Athos, there is a saying: “You must die before you die so that you don't die when you die.” In other words, we must die to our sins before our physical death, so that we will live eternally with Christ in Paradise.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Break adults into groups of 4–5 and give them the Small Group Discussion handout. Give them 10–15 minutes for discussion and proceed with the following discussion:

DISCUSS (*Allow all to share and reflect back.*)

- What were some of the passages that struck you and why?
- What themes ran through these prayers?
- Did any questions come up that you did not have answers to? (*If you are prepared to address the questions and answering them won't run the session over, do so at this time. If you cannot answer them at this time, make arrangements to assist the participants in finding answers.*)

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- These prayers will be chanted someday at our funerals. What lessons do they offer that can direct us to be “citizens of Paradise”?

WRAP-UP (*Paraphrase in your own words.*)

Lying down in bed to sleep at night is a gesture that can be invested with spiritual meaning to help us practice the presence of God. It can remind us of our own death since sleep is a “little death.” Monks of old used to prepare their own coffins which they kept in their cells. Periodically they would sleep in them to remind themselves of their mortality. The experience provided them with a very healthy perspective toward life. When I lie down to sleep, I meditate for a moment on my own death as I pray the prayer of Jesus on the cross just before His death, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” The physical act of lying down to sleep can become a prayerful reminder of and preparation for death.

Orthodox Christians have a decided advantage in this regard. We are constantly reminded of death in our worship as we pray: “For a Christian ending to our lives, painless, blameless, peaceful, and for a good account of ourselves before the awesome judgment seat of Christ.” We should keep this recollection ever before us.

—Taken from Daily Vitamins for Spiritual Growth Vol. 2 by Anthony Coniaris

Take the next five minutes to silently reflect on our lesson today.

After five minutes have passed, close with the following prayer:

Remember, Lord, our fathers and brethren who have fallen asleep in hope of the Resurrection to eternal life and all those who ended this life in piety and faith. Pardon their every transgression, committed voluntarily or involuntarily, in word, or deed, or thought. Place them in a place of light, a place of refreshment, a place of peace from which every ailment, sorrow, and lamentation are banished and from which the light of your countenance shines and gladdens all your saints from all ages. Bestow on them and on us your kingdom. Grant to them the participation of your ineffable and everlasting blessings and the enjoyment of your endless and blissful life. For you are the life, the Resurrection, and the peace of your departed servants, Christ our God, and to you we give glory, together with you all holy good, and life-giving Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

—Prayer for the Departed

PERSONAL REFLECTION
TOWARD ETERNITY

You cherish your temporary life, although you will inevitably leave it, yet you do everything so as not to be deprived of it. How incomparably more must you safeguard your eternal life and make every effort so as not to be deprived of it, for all things temporal are nothing as compared to the eternal. Seek, then, eternal life as your sole true good, and with every effort flee everything that closes the door to it. God Who loves man wishes you to be saved. The let that be your desire too, and without fail you shall be saved. Desire it and seek it as a hungry man seeks food and a thirsty man seeks water, and you shall receive what you desire.

Do not imitate those Christians who desire and seek to become rich, to pass their time in honor, and to be glorified in this world. They have forgotten that Christ, the Son of God, died and suffered for them, and that by His Suffering and death He has opened the door to eternal life and has called them to it. It is evident that they only desire and seek what they see, but they do not desire and seek what they do not see.

From Journey to Heaven by St. Tikhon of Zadonsk (page 164) Published by Holy Trinity Monastery; Jordanville, NY and used with permission.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

First, silently and thoughtfully read over the following prayers from the Funeral Service of the Orthodox Church. Underline any passages that strike you.

As a group, discuss the passages that you underlined and what you found most intriguing about them. If questions arise, be sure to make note of them to seek out answers later.

As a group, discuss the themes that run through these prayers.

As these prayers will be chanted at our funerals, what lessons do they give that can direct us to be “citizens of Paradise”?

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Blessed are You, O Lord; teach me Your statutes.

The choir of the saints has found the Fountain of Life and the Door of Paradise. May I also find the way through repentance: I am the sheep that was lost; call me up to You, O Savior, and save me.

Blessed are You, O Lord; teach me Your statutes.

You Who of old fashioned me out of nothingness, and with Your Image divine honored me, but because of transgression of Your commandments returned me again to the earth where I was taken; lead me back to be refashioned into that ancient beauty of Your Likeness.

Blessed are You, O Lord; teach me Your statutes.

I am the image of Your unutterable glory, though I bear the scars of my stumblings. Have compassion on me, the work of Your hands, O Sovereign Lord, and cleanse me through Your loving-kindness; and bestow on me the homeland of my heart's desire by making me a citizen of Paradise.

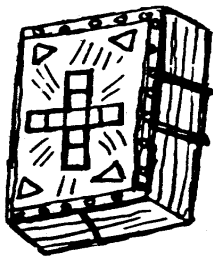
—Excerpt from the Eulogetaria for the Dead

FAMILY NIGHT: TAKING IT HOME

“I am the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End,” says the Lord, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” —Revelation 1:8

PRAY TOGETHER

Grant, Lord, to keep us this evening without sin. Blessed are You, Lord, God of our fathers, and praised and glorified is Your name forever. Amen. Lord, let Your mercy come upon us, for we have trusted in You. Blessed are You, Lord; teach me Your commandments. Blessed are You, Master; make me to understand Your commandments. Blessed are You, Holy One; enlighten me with Your commandments. Lord, Your love endures forever; do not turn away from the works of Your hands. To You belongs praise, song, and glory, to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.
—Prayer from Vespers



MORE ON THE BEGINNING

In the beginning ...	Genesis 1:1
In the beginning was the Word ...	John 1:1
... who is the beginning ...	Colossians 1:18

WAYS TO SHARE GREAT LENT AND PASCHA WITH YOUR CHILD

BY ANN MARIE GIDUS-MERCERA

GO TO CHURCH!

Whenever a service is scheduled, plan to attend. Services like The Canon of St. Andrew of Crete may be physically tiring with the many prostrations, but don't think your child can't be a part of them. In my own parish, which is filled with pre-schoolers, the children do a great job of making prostrations right along with the adults. Many of the children will join in as "Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me" is sung. This experience is good for our children! If they see their parents attending services, they get the message that attending Church is important. If we bring our children to Church with us (both young and old), they get the message that their presence in Church is important. The Canon of St. Andrew of Crete is especially good for teaching our children that we worship with our entire bodies.

EXPLAIN THE SERVICE

Notice that the word "family" is used in the first sentence. Now is a good time to stress that the entire family should be attending services. My husband can't make it home from work in time for all of us to get to services to-

gether, but he always meets us at Church. This tells our children that Church is important enough for Daddy to meet us there. As children get older, homework and after-school activities may tempt them (and us!) to skip Church services. Don't let it! First of all, if we give in, then what we're really telling them is that worldly affairs are more important than spiritual affairs. By allowing our children to miss Church, we make it extremely easy for them to fall away as teenagers or young adults.

Last of all, if we allow our older children to miss Church, we are telling our younger children that Church is not important when they get to be big sister or big brother's age. Enforcing Church attendance by the entire family is no easy task. In fact, enforcing it may be one of the hardest jobs you encounter. Sticking to your rule will be even tougher. It's a choice we must make as Orthodox parents. Maybe, it makes our task easier if we ask ourselves, "What would God want us to do?" The answer is obvious.

PREPARE FOR LENT

The weeks prior to Lent help us take on the right frame of mind for entering

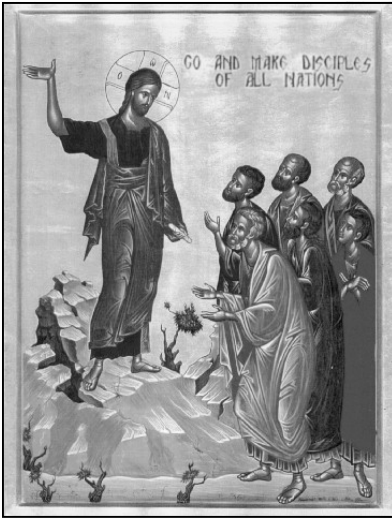
Lent. Let them do the same for your child. Read the stories and let your child color (or draw) the pictures prior to attending the Sunday services. You may want to read the story again on Saturday evening, or let your child take the color sheet to Church. A simple reminder Sunday morning concerning what the service and Gospel reading will contain can be enough. Pre-schoolers have the ability to remember even the briefest of comments (even when it's something we DON'T want them to remember!). Keep your explanation simple and BRIEF in order to hold his/her attention. Don't try to go into a long and drawn-out explanation or s/he will lose interest. If s/he has questions or comments, answer them briefly.

DON'T MOVE MOUNTAINS

It might be a quiet, even uneventful day. That's okay! Nothing magical needs to happen. We must only be ready to give our hearts to Christ, and we should gladly hand them over in an effort to be a good example to our children. This is our greatest task as Orthodox Christian parents.

—Taken from *Orthodox Family Life* www.theologic.com. Reprinted from *A Way of Life: Introducing Your Child to the Orthodox Faith, a Religious Education Pre-School Program for Parents* by Ann Marie Gidus-Mercera.

FAMILY ACTIVITY: OCMC COIN BOX



Forgiveness or Cheesefare Sunday has been designated by SCOBA as Missions Sunday to raise awareness and support of mission programs in the Orthodox Christian community. The Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC) is the official agency that coordinates missionary activity for the Orthodox Christian churches in America. During Lent, consider supporting missions by participating in OCMC's Coin Box Program. The Mission Center provides missions-related lesson plans with each request for coin boxes. Check with your parish's church school coordinator to see if coin boxes and lesson plans have been ordered. If not, you can order them directly from OCMC by calling 1-877-463-6784 or by e-mailing them at

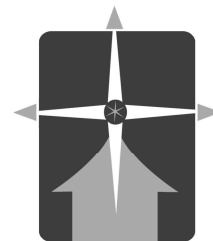
coinboxes@ocmc.org. Keep the box in a prominent place in your home (or even consider having one for each family member). Contribute to it daily with loose change and money you save by trying to live more simply during the Lenten period. To learn more about the Coin Box Program and OCMC, visit their Web site at www.ocmc.org.

FAMILY CHALLENGE

We have an exciting beginning before us—the beginning of Great Lent. Lent leads us to the Light of the Resurrection on Pascha. Let's make sure as a family we begin this preparatory period by making Christ the focus of our lives through fasting, almsgiving, and prayer. Take some time as a family to plan what you are going to do during this Lenten period so you can start with Christ and He can guide you the entire distance—beginning to end!

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- *Great Lent* by Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, published by St. Vladimir's Seminary Press (www.svspress.com).
- *My Lenten Journey: An Interactive Poster for Kids* Available from Light and Life Publishing (www.light-n-life.com).
- *Balancing Great Lent* by George M. Tsongranis published in the January 2007 issue of the Orthodox Observer (www.observer.goarch.org).



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CENTER FOR FAMILY CARE

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

79 Saint Basil Road • Garrison, New York 10524

familycare@goarch.org • www.family.goarch.org

Phone: 845-424-8175 • Fax: 845-424-4172