

Family Life

Begin with **discussion starter**: Each of us is a member of a family. Each family has a story: who are the different people in your family? Where does your family live now and/or where did your family live before—maybe many years ago.

Today we are each going to tell something about our families. Together, we are also going to start a book—A book about our own families and our Church Family. Today, we will make the pages that tell about the children in our class and in your families.

- **Family Stories: Primary / Middlers, Juniors / Teens / Young Adults / Adults & Seniors**

Levels: Most levels from Primary and above. See [Journaling](#) and [Think & Write Prompts](#)

Teachers Note: This activity requires that students will be able to read and print (or write). You may also want to have a few helpers in class for the younger students. The project can be started in class and finished at home with parental help.

This is an activity that can be worked on over several class periods as a Journaling project.

Materials Needed:

1. Pencils or pens, erasers, (can add colored pencils or markers for illustrating)
2. Inexpensive paper for drafts of stories, or story outlines to fill in.
3. Journaling books or inexpensive lined notebooks for their final copies. (optional)
4. **Older Students:** Sewn-in notebooks, one per student; pencils, pens, markers

Primary Outline 1: **My Story** (Click on title for 3 printable pages, 8 ½ x 11 paper)

1. Worksheet Outlines for students (younger grade levels). Click on title to print one or more copies (2 pages each set). If you have a large class you may prefer to photocopy additional sets needed, plus a few extra. Distribute to class and discuss what they are to write about in each section. Give them time to suggest a few ideas from their own experience. Each week they may add to their story, or use the stories to initiate discussion on related themes. The stories may be put into personal scrapbooks or writing books for students to keep (and to display at the end of the study unit).

Middlers, Juniors Outline 2: **I Am A CHRISTian!** (Click on title for 2 printable pages, 8 ½ x 11 paper)

Teachers Note: This activity may be used in conjunction with a study of the Sacraments, in particular, Baptism, Chrismation, Confession and Communion. Students can interview relatives and gather stories about their baptism and their participation in Church Life, keep a journal, add photos, etc. for a book entitled "My Life in the Church" or "I Am an Orthodox Christian!" A good resource for teachers and parents is [Our Life in the Church](#), published by the Orthodox Christian Education Commission (OCEC).

- **Family Memories Album—"Remember When..."**

Level 1-6—Collect favorite family photos that tell a story about something family members like to remember: vacation trips, visits to grandma's house, cousins, etc., special events, funny things that happened. Put into a large scrapbook with the stories written up or by family members. You can also record on audio tapes, or video tape events or photos of events (add short captions next to photos to identify event or persons. You can also draw your own pictures of what your family looks like, or what each member looks like when you think about them.

Level 3—Make a "**Roots**" **Ancestor Map**. Get a very large map of the world and mount it on the wall (preferably on corkboard or homosote). Students will do **interviews** and **research** in their families to see where their grandparents, great-grandparents, or great-great grandparents came from. From the town where their family lives now, stretch colored strings to their ancestral homelands. Some students will have more strings going abroad, while others may stretch only to other places in North America. (Students who are not able to obtain their family history may wish to interview other older

parishioners who do not have children, or whose children and grandchildren are not in your parish or living nearby.) Try to have as many parishioners (and their ancestors) as possible represented on the map.

- **Oral History**

See: [Oral History for Parish Use](#), [Interview Techniques](#), [Journaling](#), ["Think and Write" Prompts](#)

"How to Conduct..."

Oral History for Parish Use

by Eleana Silk

Introduction

We learn the facts about any historical time by study and research. But we can never know everything about the time; we were not there. The written history of mankind is filled with documents -- books, letters, diaries, legal papers, church documents, business papers, census records. But these documents do not record the everyday activities of people -- what did they eat, what stories did they tell, what tools did they use, what songs did they sing? History is interesting when it focuses on human beings. The gathering of conversations, songs, legends, speeches and interviews is the purpose of oral history. A tape recorder, an interviewer, an interviewee and a topic of conversation provide the setting for oral history.

When we study history we are trying to imagine ourselves in times past. What was it like to be on the Mayflower? What was it like to be in the church of Hagia Sofia in Constantinople in the 9th century? What was it like in the time of Christ? We can't talk to people who lived during these times, but we can talk to our parents, grandparents and our great-grandparents. The people we meet everyday are not likely to have written an article for a magazine or paper, let alone a book. In the early part of the 20th century people still kept diaries and wrote letters, but now in this age of technology we no longer take the time to keep track of our daily activities. Letters are written on computers and purged when the disk gets too full. Few people save letters they receive. Our written historical record is now almost totally dependent on what the historians say and what our libraries save. Oral history can play a major role in recording the history that we no longer write down.

Parish usage

How can oral history benefit the Orthodox Church parish? You may be celebrating your 10th, 50th or any other anniversary in the near future. A perfect project for this anniversary would be to record the story of how the parish began. What was life like, church services, music, the priests, the good times and what bad? Although oral history interviews can be done by anyone, this is a very good teaching method for the parish teens. Teens like to do things and oral history can give them the opportunity to find out about the Orthodox Church in a unique way. We now regularly speak of the "generation gap" and teens interviewing grandparents and other elders of the church gives two generations an opportunity to become friends. When we understand the history of the times before ours, we become more tolerant of other ways of doing things and differences in people.

General Oral History Methods

Find another person, a cassette tape player and just "talk." One of the most important elements in doing an oral history is to have fun doing it. But in order to have a good oral history tape you must prepare, just as you would to write something. You must have a working tape player, select a topic, choose people to interview, have a question outline, do the interview, and save the cassette tape (and a tape transcription if possible) in a place where other people can use it for research. The following information will help you to organize oral history projects.

Choosing the Interviewee

You must choose a person you want to interview, keeping in mind you also must be interested in the topic that will be discussed. Choosing a topic is very important so that the interview has a direction and does not wander indiscriminately. It is also good to progress in a chronological order or a historical order in discussing the topic. When first beginning to do oral histories, choose someone who

is a good speaker and is comfortable with the interview format. Some people who are not comfortable with the interview situation will answer questions with one sentence or one word and you must continuously draw them out by saying "Can you elaborate on that? Do you have further opinions?" This is very difficult when you are just learning interviewing techniques. Choosing a person who speaks well will help you to gain confidence in your interviewing techniques. It is a two-way conversation and you must be able to formulate intelligent questions. The questions are very important.

Interview Techniques

One of the most difficult challenges to oral history is to constantly pay attention to the person in front of you. You may be distracted by all kinds of noise, people talking in the background, dogs barking, clocks chiming. You have to be really disciplined to always have that next question ready. You must make sure you ask the questions clearly and concisely so the person knows what you are talking about. When you first start interviewing, an hour tape will seem like an eternity. It is also more difficult to concentrate as the interview progresses and your mind wanders. Make notes to yourself -- topics to return to again and future questions to ask.

Try not to have long discussions with the person you are interviewing. You are interested in the views or stories of the interviewees -- let them talk! You have to remember who is doing the interviewing. If they have questions, stop the tape or volunteer to answer them at the end of the interview. There are times when you need to interrupt the person if they have strayed too far from the topic of discussion. Refrain from putting in too many comments of your own, but there are times when this may be necessary to clarify a point they are making or give them a word if they are floundering and searching for the right word. Caution is needed at all times because you can disturb the train of thought of the interviewee. Also be careful not to offend the interviewee with questions that are presumptuous or that would indicate they are "wrong" or would place anyone on the defensive. Oral history should not be some kind of test or exam for the interviewee. You are usually limited by an hour interview and must lead the comments back to the topic when necessary. Leading phrases such as "Getting back to," or "Going on to" are necessary to keep the interview moving. An hour interview is very tiring for both people and an interview should not last much longer. Further interviews can be set up for a later time.

There is a tension between the interviewer and the interviewee that must be maintained for a good interview. You, the interviewer, need not agree with everything that is said, but you do need to ask challenging questions. You want to get the historical facts down on tape, but you also want to ask the how and why questions. This is often difficult, as a logical question for you will seem crazy or silly to the person who has lived through the experiences. The interviewee may need time to think about your question, as he never thought about his experiences from that point of view before. The first question often sets the tone of the interview. Choose it carefully. People are most comfortable talking about themselves and their own experiences, so ask them personal questions. You should think about the questions you want to ask before you do the interview, but don't write them down in great detail. You must be flexible enough in the interview to change direction if the interviewee has a particularly interesting story. End the interview with a "catch all" question which allows the interviewee to add anything not yet covered.

Physical Preparations

You also have to be prepared physically with a tape recorder that is in good working order and that you can depend on. Use 60 minute cassettes; 90 and 120 minute cassette tapes are thinner, break more easily and the sound track can wear through the tape. Using an external microphone rather than the built in microphone will give a better sound recording. Have batteries that are good and an extension cord ready in case of emergencies when batteries are not functioning. As you are doing the interview, you must check your tape recorder periodically to make sure it is functioning properly. This is especially important as you begin the interview, for much can be lost if the recorder is not working. This must be done as inconspicuously as possible to keep the interviewee at ease. The ideal goal with an oral history interview is for both people to forget that the tape recorder is even there. Then the interview will progress smoothly and comfortably. When a problem develops with the recorder, it is very difficult to reconstruct what was lost.

It is also very important for you to make the proper adjustments in recording for the sound level to be correct. Remember to take into consideration the timber of the voice you are recording and make adjustments accordingly to produce a tape that is "listenable." If you have a pause button on your tape recorder, use it. Let the person you are interviewing know it is there and let him feel free to use it too. If time is needed to think, to formulate an answer or to ask you a question, the tape can be easily stopped. We want to have the best tape possible, but there is no need to be extremely professional. You should also watch the time. Note the time you started the interview and then be ready to turn the tape when thirty minutes has been reached. That time in between can sometimes be very critical if a person has a thought in mind that you don't want to lose. The goal is a good, understandable tape.

You must remember to put an introduction on the cassette tape containing the following information:

1. Name of person interviewed
2. Date of interview
3. Place of interview
4. Any other pertinent information

Then leave a blank space of 15-30 seconds on the cassette tape so that more information can be added later if necessary.

As you progress in doing interviews, confidence develops and you need to be careful that you do not become "sloppy" in your technique. You still need to prepare for each interview no matter how many interviews you have done on the same subject. You have to think about the questions you want to ask and think about what has happened in the preceding interviews so you can relate and ask certain questions that have come up in other interviews. Plan the times and places of the interviews ahead of time and make sure that the interviewee knows what you are doing. Be prompt. The interviewee may get very nervous if you are late. Your task is to try to make that person in front of you feel comfortable. He or she may never have been interviewed before or may never have had to talk on a tape player. Answer any questions ahead of time. If a person is very hesitant, give reference to someone you have interviewed already and the person who has been interviewed can help in reassurance.

Longer Projects

If your project is longer than one interview, keep a diary of field notes made during each interview. Use the diary to prepare questions for future interviews and to help collate your information for any written presentations you may wish to make. You may want to include men and women, young and old, clergy and laity. Determine ahead of time the scope of your project and the number of people you will interview. Oral history projects have a tendency to become very unmanageable, as there is always something more interesting that needs to be recorded. Once you have selected who you will interview, you must determine the order for the interviews. Some interviews are easy and you may want to do them first. Or you may want to build on your own information about the topic and save some important interviews until the end when you know more and can ask better questions. After doing several interviews, review the project. You may want to add or delete names to your list, or revise your questions.

Saving the Cassette Tapes

A library is the best place to deposit the cassette tapes. Your parish library is an appropriate place, but your oral history research needs to be more readily available to scholars. The St Vladimir's Seminary Library has an oral history collection of tapes. Please send copies of your oral history tapes along with any pertinent written information to the library: St Vladimir's Seminary Library, 575 Scarsdale Rd., Crestwood, NY, 10707. You can call the library for further information at 1-914-961-8313 or email to librarian@svots.edu. The library has a form that allows the library to let its patrons use the oral history tapes. The interviewer and interviewee need to sign the form. This form is very general and you can add limitations to it if the interviewee is hesitant about depositing the tape in the library. Phrases such as, "not to be used for (5, 10, 25) years" or "not to be used until my death" are appropriate. Again, contact the St Vladimir's Seminary Library if you have any questions or would like copies of the form.

Oral History Theory and Problems

In oral history the interviewer and interviewee are creating history. The tape is a form of history that would not exist without these two people. We are creating a now about the then. We introduce new evidence to the story. Topics important to us today, such as the woman's view, become important for yesterday's times even if that topic was not important then. We are searching for new meanings and we create material. People like to be interviewed and the rapport between these two people is very important. The relationship is one of linguistics, psychology, and sociology. You as interviewers needs to be careful that the interviewee is not altering his material to fit what you want to hear. You are an alien to the relationship between the interviewee and his history. This tension is good. Resolve it and you are in trouble. If you challenge too much, the interviewee may stop in anger. If you don't challenge enough, the interview has little meaning beyond nostalgia. (If nostalgia is your goal, then it is acceptable.) Oral history produces a special document that uses the memory of what happened then to explain life since then until now.

Conclusion

There is a lot of history of the Orthodox Church in this country -- people, places, events -- that will never be recorded in writing. Few people take the time to write a book about events that have happened to them in the Church. This type of history is very important because it gives the color, the background, the understanding of what the Church was like through the eyes of its members. Nowadays we have videotape machines, so we can videotape liturgies for future generations of historians. It would have been very interesting to see a ninth century Byzantine Liturgy. Occasionally we have those insights into history, but they are few and far between. Oral histories help future generations to understand the events of our time through our eyes and memories.

Further Reading

- Ronald J. Grele, *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History* (Chicago, IL: Precedent Publishing, 1985)
- James Hoopes, *Oral History: An Introduction for Students* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979)
- T Stitton, *Oral History: A Guide for Teachers (and Others)* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1983)
- Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988)
- *Voices: A Guide to Oral History* (Province of British Columbia, Provincial Archives, 1984)

For Discussion

1. How did your parish begin? Are there any original members still in the parish? Who are they?
2. Make a list of the people in your parish, in your area who would be interesting to interview.
3. Think through who would make good interviewers. Would some of the teens or students in an older church school class be willing to become interviewers?
4. How could you make use of the oral history tapes once they are made?

[Eleana Silk](#) is Librarian and a member of the faculty of [St Vladimir's Seminary](#).
She is also a member of the OCA Department of History and Archives.

- **"Roots" Coffee Hour (Parish Event)**

Levels 1-6— (A good final event for the conclusion of the "I Am Orthodox" study unit. It can be planned by students 12 & up: *Note: contributions to the program can be made by children or adults at any level.*)

When all of your "ancestry projects" have been completed, plan a "Roots" Coffee Hour or similar special event. Invite all the members of the parish and their relatives and friends, as well as people who live in the neighborhood of the church. Display the projects in the largest room or conduct tours of classroom areas to view and explain what you discovered about your **church family**. Encourage people to dress in clothes their ancestors might have worn. Learn some songs or favorite games from different cultures, and bring foods representative of those cultures (don't forget to include the culture you live in today!)
(cf. *Resource Handbook* for more details.)

Materials Needed:

1. List of students' ancestral countries (some may have several countries)
2. Music from ancestral countries (tapes, CD's)
3. Stories from ancestral countries
4. Foods (with recipes), costumes, other items to put on display
5. Tape and/or CD player
6. Blank tapes
7. Any family history stories, anecdotes, etc.
8. Photos and materials for displays
9. Paper and pencils for notes
10. Recipe ingredients
11. Paper products for coffee hour or luncheon
12. Drinks and other implements needed
13. Tables and chairs in church hall for program, displays, eating, etc.
14. Folk costumes (optional)
15. Scrapbook and scrapbooking materials (optional)

Procedures:

1. Ask students to share with the class any family history stories or anecdotes. (See also: "My Story" and other projects done during the ***I Am Orthodox*** study unit that can be brought together for a "Roots" Coffee Hour or special parish event.
2. Have students interview or talk with fellow parishioners about their family histories.
Encourage students to speak especially to seniors, for they have much to share! Students should brainstorm and list key questions to be asked (see "My Story" activity). Add their names to the class family history map.
3. Record any stories or anecdotes they may have to add to those already collected.
4. Research recipes and have each student cook a dish (with parental help) for the coffee hour or a luncheon.

5. Have students choose music from tapes or CD's representative of various ancestral lands/cultures and make a single tape or CD to play during the luncheon.
6. Plan a special coffee hour or pot-luck luncheon, with music, displays of different heritages/countries represented in the parish, and storytelling. Wear costumes (optional), display a large map of the world that shows where the ancestors of parish members lived.
7. Display scrapbooks or make bulletin board displays or posters with pictures, letters, stories shared by students, their families and parishioners.