

Activities for the Book of Acts

Three sets of activities based on the Book of Acts, created by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America

To the Teacher:

Here are sets of 3 activities for 3 age groups: Grades 4-6, 7-8 and 9-12. These are approximate age groupings, so feel free to use the activities as you deem appropriate for your particular group of students. The activities are intended as seasonal supplements to your regular church school curriculum, but it would be fine to use them at any time of year.

During the month of May the Church's daily readings include most of the Book of Acts, so the activities are partly based on that book. Students will also learn about Saint Pachomius of Egypt, whose feast day is May 15th, and older students will consider some of the wonderful stories of spiritual courage from the books about Father Arseny, the priest and prisoner who as a prisoner in Soviet work camps saved the lives and sanity of many fellow prisoners and others in the camps. The activities compare his experiences with those of the apostles in Acts.

Each session begins with an introductory page that will give you information needed to complete the activities, followed by pages for the students, which you can copy and distribute. As with previous materials produced by the Department of Christian Education, we have used the Revised Standard Version of the Bible for its relatively clear wording. Reference is also made to the Orthodox Study Bible, which uses the Septuagint version.

We haven't included prayers to begin and end sessions. If you are using these lessons as stand-alones rather than add-ons to your Sunday teaching, use whatever prayers you wish.

The first activity for each age group is the story of Saint Pachomius, written simply for younger students and with a little more detail for the older ones, and followed by age-appropriate questions or reflections.

We hope you and your students will enjoy and benefit from using these activities as supplements to your church school sessions in the days of spring or any time you choose.

The activities for the 3 grade level groupings are on the following pages:

Grades 4-6 pages 1 to 10

Grades 7-8 pages 11-19

Grades 9-12 pages 20-29

Department of Christian Education, Orthodox Church in America

Grades 4-6: Activity #1

(Please be sure to read *To the Teacher*, general introduction on page 1)

Saint Pachomius: Introduction for the Teacher

The story of this Egyptian saint, who lived in the early 4th century, can be attractive to children because they sometimes disagree with siblings and friends, as Pachomius' brother John disagreed with him about building his first monastery. It also shows what one person can do.

Be sure students understand that a **monk** is a person who lives a life of prayer, fasting and service away from the busy life of society.

Materials needed: Copies of the story (on the following page) for each student, Bibles for each student or to share.

Procedure: Give students copies of the story. Read it together, and then ask these review questions:

1. Saint Pachomius' name in the Coptic language is Pachom. What does it mean? (*Eagle*)
2. How did Pachomius first meet Christians? (*As a member of the Roman Army, when Christians visited and ministered to soldiers*)
3. What did Pachomius do when his time as a soldier was finished? (*He was baptized, because he wanted to be a Christian like the kind people he had met while a soldier*)
4. What did an angel tell Pachomius to do? (*Build a monastery*)
5. Why did Pachomius' brother disagree with his plan to build a monastery? (*His brother John thought that men would not come into the desert to live as monks*)

Next, have students open their Bibles to **Acts 27**. Before reading from the Bible together, tell students: *"In Acts 27 Saint Paul was on a ship sailing to Rome. The ship had stopped at a harbor called Fair Havens. Paul urged the captain to wait a while before starting back on the sea voyage. An angel had told Paul a big storm was brewing at sea. But the captain wouldn't listen, and they started out on the voyage. Sure enough, a bad storm hit the ship. The crew threw all the food and cargo into the sea to keep the ship from sinking."*

Read together 27: 21-26. Ask students: *"What experience did Saint Paul and Saint Pachomius both have?"* (They were told to do something important by an angel of the Lord, but other people didn't want them to do what the angel had said they should. Ask, *"Do people ever disagree with us when we try to do what God wants us to do?"* Ask for examples. Things like not taking part when someone is being made fun of; not sneaking around with friends to do something everyone's parents have put off-limits; going to church instead of going on a fun outing with friends, might be examples. (end)

Grades 4-6

Saint Pachomius of Egypt (pronounced Pa—ko—mee-us)

When Saint Pachomius was a young boy growing up in Egypt, he didn't know anything about God. He had never heard of Jesus Christ. His family and all the people they knew worshipped many gods—but not the one true God. His name in the Coptic language of his native country means “eagle.”

Pachomius and many of his friends were ordered to join the Roman Army. As soldiers they were crowded together in a cold, bare building. Their food was cheap and not very tasty or filling. Each day was full of hard work that wore them out by evening. They missed their homes.

But this hard life was made easier by a group of visitors who came often. They brought good food and things to drink. They gave each soldier kind smiles and hopeful words.

“Who are these people?” Pachomius wondered. When he learned that they were Christians, he decided he would become a Christian after he got out of the army. He was sure that the God who taught people to care so much for strangers must be the only real God.

When his army service ended, Pachomius was baptized. He went to the desert and spent years with a monk there, learning to pray and to serve God. Then he became a monk. His brother John joined him in the desert.

One day an angel appeared to Pachomius, telling him to build a monastery. His brother saw no reason to do it. He said, “We are out in the desert. Who is going to come here and live in this big place you want to build? Don't do something so foolish!”

But Pachomius did as the angel had told him, and soon men began coming to join the monastery. They wanted to learn from this monk who was well-known as a true Christian. As the years went on, Pachomius started nine monasteries. He taught the monks to pray and to live together in peace. He made sure they memorized the Bible.

He was never too proud to do humble tasks like weeding and watering the vegetable garden, serving the table at meals, or answering the door when someone knocked. He would sit up all night to care for a monk who was ill.

Thousands of monks lived in the monasteries started by Saint Pachomius. He showed them the same love and kindness he had received as a young soldier. He taught them to worship the true God, who loves us all.

Grades 4-6: Activity #2

A Grown Man Grows: Introduction for the Teacher

The skit on the next page shows Saint Peter, the Apostle, courageously proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Acts 3. After students have done the skit, they will make the contrast between Peter as he is then and Peter as he was earlier, when he didn't even have the courage to say he knew Christ. They will reflect on some of the things that help faith grow.

Then they will reflect on their own experience of faith.

Materials needed: Copies of the skit and the *Growing with God* sheet for students, Bibles, pens/pencils. If you wish, have a simple prop to represent the "Beautiful Gate."

Procedure: Have the class (or volunteers from the class) do the skit. Afterwards say, "*The next day, some of the Jewish leaders asked Peter in whose name he had healed the beggar who could not walk. Peter answered without any fear that he had done it in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.*"

Then read together Luke 22: 54-62. Ask, "*How did Peter grow from this time to the time we played in the skit?*" (Guide students to see that Peter's courage to declare himself a follower of Jesus Christ had grown greatly. Add the idea that as his courage grew, he grew into a better person.)

Follow with another question: "*What do you think helped Peter to grow?*" (Four important factors were: (a) seeing the truth of the Resurrection, (b) the willingness of Jesus Christ to forgive his betrayal, (c) the coming of the promised Holy Spirit, (d) his dedication to prayer and worship, as seen in his going to the Temple to pray at the beginning of the skit. You may wish to look together at John 21: 15-17 to read about Christ forgiving of Peter and giving him the ministry to "feed my sheep." You might also look at John 14:26 to read about Christ's promise of the Holy Spirit.)

Have students do the exercise *Growing with God* (2nd page following this one.) Talk together about their answers. They may wish to discuss the execution of the Coptic Christians, and some may wish to share some or all of what they wrote as a statement of their faith. You may also want to contribute to the discussion. (end)

A Grown Man Grows

Characters: Narrator, Peter, John, Beggar, 1st Bystander, 2nd Bystander

(Beggar is sitting on the floor. As Narrator speaks, Peter and John are walking toward the Beautiful Gate of the Temple.)

Narrator: One day the apostles Peter and John were on their way to the Temple to worship. It was three o'clock in the afternoon, the hour of prayer. A man who had been unable to walk since birth used to be carried each day to the "Beautiful Gate" of the Temple to beg.

Beggar: Wait, gentlemen! I beg you, give me some money. I am poor and I cannot walk or work for pay. *(Peter and John look at the beggar with loving concern.)*

Peter: Look at us! *(The beggar looks at them with his hand out, expecting money.)*

Peter: I have no silver or gold, but what I have, I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk! *(Peter and John raise the beggar to his feet.)*

Beggar: I can walk! Praise God! Look—I can walk or dance or do anything! Thanks to the Lord! *(He hugs both Peter and John. Then he walks around and does a few dance steps, and remains standing and smiling near Peter and John.)*

1st Bystander: Look what's happened! That beggar who always sat by the gate is walking!

2nd Bystander: How did it happen? Is it a miracle?

1st Bystander: Peter and John, over there, had something to do with it. But how could they have done it? *(They look at Peter and John.)*

Peter: Men of Israel, why do you stare at us as if we made this man walk by our own power or godliness? The God of our fathers sent His Son Jesus Christ. Though you killed Him, God raised Him from the dead. We are witnesses to that. *(John nods.)* By faith in the name of Jesus Christ this man was made strong and healthy. Now is the time for you to repent of your sin. Jesus Christ has come for you and all of us. He fulfills the promise made to your forefather Abraham long ago.

Narrator: Some of the Jewish leaders did not want John and Peter to go on preaching about Jesus Christ. The two men were put in prison overnight. But many who heard their message that day became believers. The number was about 5000.

Growing With God

We have seen how Peter's courage grew. After denying that he even knew Jesus, he grew into a person who proclaimed the Gospel openly. He became a leader of the Church, and finally gave his life as a martyr for the Christian faith.

When people were amazed at Peter's ability to heal the sick, he told them that he did so through faith in the name of Jesus Christ. He was not the healer; Jesus Christ was. But Peter believed that if we have faith in Jesus Christ (which is what faith "in His name" means) we can do great things for other people. We can find the courage to tell other people about Him.

To have faith means to trust that something is completely true and reliable. What are some things you have faith in? Put a check mark next to each one in this list:

I have faith that:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> the sun will rise tomorrow morning | <input type="checkbox"/> my family loves me |
| <input type="checkbox"/> God never gives up on me | <input type="checkbox"/> I can learn |
| <input type="checkbox"/> my best friend can keep a promise | <input type="checkbox"/> the Olympics will be shown on TV |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jesus Christ is the divine Son of God | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am a valuable person even if some classmates don't like me | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> God wants us to care for people and the earth we all live on | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jesus Christ became Man to save every human being | |

Recently, on a beach in Libya, 21 Coptic Orthodox Christians were beheaded by Islamic extremists. They might have been able to save their own lives if they had agreed to become Muslims. Instead, as they were being killed, they called out the name of Jesus Christ. That's an example of the courage that faith can give us.

In the space below, write a statement about your faith. If you wish, include a description of a time when your faith gave you courage. Use more paper if you need it.

Grades 4-6: Activity # 3

The Family of God: Introduction for the Teacher

This session looks at the experience of the Apostle Peter in Acts 10: 9-16. He has a vision of all kinds of food, including some thought unclean by the Jews, being lowered from heaven. He is told to eat, and he answers that he has never touched anything unclean. A voice from heaven answers, "What God has cleansed you must not call unclean."

Later Peter comes to understand that the lesson applies to the Gentiles, those who do not follow the Old Testament Law. God has blessed them to be baptized as Christians, equally with those of Jewish background, even though they do not know the Jewish law. Peter says, "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him" (Acts 10: 34-5).

Materials Needed: Copies of the sheet **The Family of God** for each student, Bibles for each student or to share, copies of a Divine Liturgy book for each student or to share, paper and pens/pencils.

Procedure: Tell the class, *"We're going to talk about the way the Church grew and gathered more members as Peter and the other apostles went out to teach. The apostles had to learn as they went along, as we will see."* Divide the class into pairs, and give each student a copy of the sheet **The Family of God**. Have the pairs work together to complete the exercise entitled *The Long Recess*. When they finish, let volunteer pairs act out the solution they came up with. Let the pairs who don't volunteer to act out their solutions read them to the others.

Next, say: *"Peter the Apostle had to learn that nobody was to be left out of the family of the Church. He was from a Jewish background, and the Jewish Law taught that some foods were unclean and should not be eaten. Let's see what Peter learned about that."* Read Acts 10: 9-16 together. Note that God says nothing He created is by itself unclean.

Continue, *"Peter soon is instructed by God to visit a man named Cornelius. He is a Gentile, which means a person who is not of Jewish background and does not follow the Jewish Law. But Cornelius and many other Gentiles are on the way to becoming Christians. So Peter goes with some other men to see Cornelius. Let's see what happens when they get there."* Read together Acts 10: 25-48.

Ask students to define, or define for them if necessary, the word “partiality” in verse 34 as meaning special favor given to one group over another. Also explain to students that “the circumcised” in verse 45 are the Christians of Jewish background. They had thought that only by following the Jewish Law could one become a true Christian.

As a way of making sure students understand this important passage, have them do the fill-in exercise *The Church Family Grows*.

The words in the correct order are:

- 3) worshipped 6) common 2) right 7) healing 1) witness 5) forgiveness 8) believers
4) baptized

Go over the answers together.

Next, ask students to open their Bibles to Acts 2: 43-47. This describes the life of the first Christians. Ask them to find a word which appears 4 times in these verses. If they can't find it, tell them that it is **ALL**. Ask, “*What does this word tell us about the way they lived?*” (It tells us that nobody was left out. Everyone was cared for, everyone shared. We want that to be the model for our life in the Church today.)

Finally, give students copies of the Divine Liturgy books. Look together at the part of the First Prayer of Intercession in which the priest says, “Among the first...” and prays for bishops. Note with students what the choir sings: “And all mankind.” So in the Liturgy, too, all of humanity is remembered. Nobody is left out. Ask students, when they attend Liturgy, to listen for the word “all” and to remember that we pray for everyone in the world. (end)

The Family of God

The Long Recess (Read the story and complete the exercise with your partner)

Everybody likes to go outside for recess. But today it's raining hard, so recess is inside. Annie and Melanie go to the closet and bring out the big box of games. Karen and Tony grab their favorite game and invite two other kids to play with them. Other groups start getting together to play their favorites.

Kim has only been part of the class for two weeks. Her family moved here from another town. Now she pulls the Scrabble board out of the box and asks, "Anybody want to play Scrabble?" Her classmates don't seem to hear her. Kim puts the game back in the box, sits down at her desk and takes out drawing paper and markers. She glances up at the clock, thinking that this is going to feel like one long recess.

After you read the story, work as partners to create a new ending for it, showing a way you might make the situation better. Write your ending on another sheet of paper.

The Church Family Grows (based on Acts 10: 23b-48)

Fill in the blank spaces of the story about Peter visiting Cornelius with the correct word from the list that follows. The words are spelled backwards, and they are not in the right order.

Cornelius knew about Peter's miracles and healings. When Peter entered his house, Cornelius _____ him.

As a Jew, Peter was not supposed to associate with Gentiles, who did not follow the Jewish Law. But God had shown Peter that he must not call anyone _____ or unclean.

Peter told the group in Cornelius' house that God accepts anyone who fears Him and does what

is _____.

Peter told how Jesus Christ went about doing good and _____ all who were oppressed by the devil.

Peter said that the prophets bear _____ that everyone who believes in Jesus Christ receives _____ of sins through His name.

As Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who were listening to him. The _____ from among the circumcised (those of Jewish background) were amazed. They saw that the Holy Spirit had been poured onto Gentiles as well as Jews.

Peter commanded the Gentiles to be _____ in the name of Jesus Christ.

WORD LIST:

- | | |
|--------------|----------------|
| 1) ssentiw | 5) ssenevigrof |
| 2) thgir | 6) nommoc |
| 3) depihsrow | 7) gnlaeh |
| 4) dezitpab | 8) sreveileb |

Grades 7-8: Activity #1

(Please be sure to read *To the Teacher*, a general introduction on page 1)

Saint Pachomius: Introduction for the Teacher

This story of a revered fourth-century Egyptian saint is a good one for 7th-8th graders. Pachomius established nine monasteries—quite an accomplishment. He shows how much one determined person can do for God.

Students at this age are finding their way through the competing demands of getting along with peers and accountability to parents and family. Saint Pachomius had to do God's will against his brother's objections, and deal with the various personalities of the monks in his monasteries. In fact he's known as the father of cenobitic, or communal, monasticism. Saint Anthony the Great is the father of eremitic monasticism—men living alone as hermits.

Materials Needed: Copies of the life of Saint Pachomius (on the following pages) for each student; Bibles for each student or for students to share.

Procedure: Give students copies of the life of Saint Pachomius to read, and complete the Bible exercise. Then go over these review questions together:

1. How did Saint Pachomius first encounter Christians? What impressed him about them? *(He met them when they cared for him and other soldiers. He was impressed by their concern for people in difficult circumstances, as soldiers always were.)*
2. What did Pachomius do soon after finishing his military service? *(He was baptized.)*
3. Why did Pachomius' brother John disapprove of his plan to build a monastery? *(He didn't think men would come far into the desert to join a monastery.)*
4. How did Pachomius influence his sister Maria? *(He convinced her to start a monastery for women.)*
5. Pachomius never sought any high positions in the Church. Why was this? *(He felt that seeking a higher rank could easily lead to a desire for power.)*

Pachomius and Timothy are similar in that they benefited from the teachings of an older person, and "passed on" what they were given by sharing it with others.

Next, have students stand. Say, "*Think of a word that describes Saint Pachomius, and raise your hand when you have one. I'll write the first three I see on the board.*" Put the words on the board. Indicate three areas of the room, one for each word. Ask students to go to the area with the word they feel best describes the saint. Discuss their choices. (end)

Grades 7-8 Activity #1

Saint Pachomius of Egypt (pronounced Pa—ko—mee—us)

Saint Pachomius lived in the third century, in Upper Egypt. His family gave him a good education, but they were pagans. He never heard of Jesus Christ as he was growing up. He knew nothing about the true God. But he was a good student, and liked to learn. His name in the native Egyptian Coptic language means “eagle” and like an eagle he was alert to the things and people around him.

Like all young men, Pachomius was conscripted into the Roman Army. The soldiers were housed in a prison—cold, comfortless and crowded. Their food was cheap and not very tasty. But this hard life was made easier by a group of visitors who came often, bringing better food and things to drink. They gave each soldier kind smiles and hopeful words.

“Who are these good-hearted people?” Pachomius wondered. He soon found out that they were Christians. “If their God teaches them to treat even strangers this way, then their God is the true God for sure,” he decided. He wanted to join them.

When his army service ended, Pachomius was baptized. He went to the desert and spent years with a wise and experienced monk there, learning to pray and to serve God. Then he too became a monk. His brother John joined him in the desert.

One day an angel appeared to Pachomius, telling him to build a monastery. His brother saw no reason to do it. He said, “We are out in the desert. Who is going to come here and live in this big place you want to build? Don’t do something so foolish!”

But Pachomius did as the angel had told him, and soon men began coming to join the monastery. They wanted to learn from this monk who was becoming well-known as a true Christian. As the years went on, Pachomius started nine monasteries. He taught the monks to pray and to live together in peace. He made sure they memorized the Bible.

Even as the leader of large groups of men, he was never too proud to do humble tasks like weeding and watering the vegetable garden, serving the table at meals, or answering the door when someone knocked. He would sit up all night to care for a monk who was ill. Anyone who was sick was automatically released from the strict rule of fasting until he recovered.

Once a young boy was visiting the monastery and saw Pachomius weaving a basket. The boy said, “Oh, father, I can show you a better method of weaving.” Rather than be annoyed that a child wanted to correct him, Pachomius said, “Yes, teach me the style of weaving you know,” and went on to use it. The example of humility was important to him. He never wanted high positions in the Church, because having high positions could lead to the desire for power.

Pachomius wasn't only concerned that men should have the chance to become monastics. He convinced his sister to live a life of prayer alone in a hut. Before long other women gathered there with her. Pachomius provided a rule by which they could live as nuns as their numbers grew.

By the time he died in the year 346, Pachomius had guided thousands of men and women in the monasteries he founded. He showed them the same love and kindness he had received as a young soldier. He taught them to worship the true God, who loves us all. (end)

When you finish the story, read II Timothy 1: 1-7. Here Saint Paul is telling Timothy to remember the example of people he was with while he was young. In the last paragraph of our story about Saint Pachomius, what is similar?

Write in the box about a good example you have received from someone. Choose an example that you believe will be important as you grow to be an adult:

Grades 7-8: Activity #2

God is Always With Us: Introduction for the Teacher

This activity focuses on two experiences of Saint Paul and Saint Peter, relating them to similar experiences of two modern Christians. From these comparisons of experiences in Bible times with modern experiences, we hope students will see that God continues to work in our lives, down the centuries and millennia to our own day.

The miracles we read about in the Bible are not just things that happened “back then” in the pages of a holy book. Rather they are signs of God’s active love for His people—from Saint Paul right down to us and all the people we know. He continues to show us that love, and those miracles, to bring us closer to Him.

Materials Needed: Copies of the activity page entitled *God is Always With Us* for each student, Bibles for each student or to share, writing paper and pens/pencils.

Procedure: Give each student a copy of *God is Always With Us*. Let them complete the questions, orally, written, or some of each—as you choose. Students should be able to come up their own answers to the questions. (Like Father Daniel, Saint Paul had a life-changing vision of Christ. Like Father Arseny, Saint Peter was delivered from a deadly situation by angels or messengers of God.)

For the question asking how Father Arseny changed, students may feel that he didn’t change. Yet he had come through a terrible experience and had seen the power of prayer. It might be hard to define the change, but surviving the ordeal surely deepened his certainty that he could rely on God. Discuss the final question: Do students agree that God is always with us?

Look together at Isaiah 53: 7-12. Help students understand that this is just one of many Old Testament passages that prepared people to recognize Jesus Christ as the Savior. It was written long before He was born on earth, but it told what He would be like, and what He would do, when He came many years later. Say, *“Today we read about miracles with Saint Peter and Saint Paul. We compared them to similar experiences of Christians in our time. We also saw in the writing of Isaiah that long before Jesus came, God was preparing the world for His coming. So we know that God keeps working in our lives, from Old Testament times right down to today. Let’s try to be ready for whatever God calls us to do.”* (end)

Grades 7-8: Activity #2

God is Always With Us

The Book of Acts is filled with the adventures of Saint Paul and Saint Peter as they traveled from place to place, telling people the Good News of the Resurrection and new life. Sometimes the two apostles were joyfully received. Other times they were threatened, beaten, imprisoned and severely mistreated. No matter what happened, they never gave up. They would preach the Gospel in spite of any hardship.

Peter and Paul received angelic messages of reassurance. They had life-changing encounters with Jesus Christ. They had visions telling them about important things they must do. What is amazing about these events is that similar things have happened to people who are alive now, or who lived recently. God didn't stop coming into human life in the time of Peter and Paul. Let's look at some examples:

- a) **Daniel Byantoro** was a devout Indonesian Muslim. He knew the Qur'an well, and enjoyed debates with Christians, which he usually won. One day as he was reading the Qur'an, he had a vision of Jesus Christ. It was wonderful but also frightening. It made him want to study and pray even more closely. As he did so, he became convinced that Christianity is true. God shows Himself to us through His Word—Jesus Christ.

Daniel began attending a Protestant church, the one to which his former schoolteacher belonged. He was happy doing missionary work and teaching with other members of the church. But he found that he missed certain things he had known in Muslim worship, such as fasting and a regular pattern of prayers. He began to look around for what he felt was the true Church. He thought that it would be a Church that had begun in the Eastern part of the world, just as Islam had done.

He found his way to the Orthodox Church, and became the first Orthodox convert in Indonesia. Later he was ordained to the priesthood. He established Orthodoxy for the first time in Indonesia, his beloved country of birth.

In the years since then, he has been forced to move from his home several times for his own safety. Though his life has been threatened more than once for being a Christian, he continues to spread the Orthodox faith.

Read Acts 9: 1-9. Then answer the following questions:

- What is similar/different in the experiences of Father Daniel/Saint Paul?
- What did Fr. Daniel do after his experience? What did Saint Paul do after his?

b) Alexei was a young man who was incarcerated in a Soviet prison camp in the 1960's. He had only vaguely heard about God from his grandmother, but wasn't interested in the Church or anything religious. Another prisoner was Father Arseny, a priest whose holiness and miracles saved many in the camp. Father Arseny had saved Alexei from being beaten to death by another prisoner. Now he and Father Arseny were being punished for "fighting." They were locked in a shack made of sheet metal, in which the temperature stayed a minus 30 degrees. They had to stay there for two days, after which they would surely be dead.

When the guards closed the door, Father Arseny immediately began praying. Alexei was numb with cold, and thought the priest was crazy. But suddenly, with Father Arseny's voice the only sound, everything changed. The numbing cold, the fear, the darkness disappeared. There was light and warmth, and Alexei saw two brilliant figures standing by the priest. For a moment he thought he was delirious and close to death. But he began slowly following the words of Father Arseny's prayer. This was no delirium, he realized—nothing had ever felt more real.

Alexei slept, and Father Arseny went on praying. Many hours later, when the shouting guards came knocking, all the light and warmth disappeared, and the two prisoners once again stood in a freezing shack. To the astonished guards who expected to see two frozen corpses, Father Arseny merely said, "We are alive."

Alexei's whole life changed. He was transformed as a person, just as the freezing shack had been transformed into a warm place, full of prayer and light. (Adapted from *The Mountain of Silence*, Kyriacos C. Markides, Doubleday, 2002)

Read Acts 12: 1-11. Then answer these questions:

- What is similar/different in the experience of Saint Peter/Alexei?
- How was Alexei changed? How was Father Arseny changed?

Do you agree that "God is Always With Us" as the title of this activity says? (end)

Grades 7-8: Activity #3

Good Things Can Happen When We Listen to God: Introduction for the Teacher

This activity is a reflection on three events in Acts. In these events, three people-- Ananias, Paul and Apollos—did as God asked them to do, even though they may not have fully understood His reasons for asking. In listening to God and doing what He asked, they found good things they didn't expect.

The activity sheet, entitled *Good Things Can Happen When We Listen to God*, begins with 2 brief descriptions of experiences students themselves might have. Then students will reflect on the passages from Acts. The sheet contains the 3 passages, with reflection questions for each. Suggested answers to the questions are given for you, the teacher, on this sheet. But students will probably be able to come up with good answers on their own, so accept any reasonable answers from them before you suggest answers.

Materials Needed: Bibles for each student or for students to share; copy of the activity sheet ***Good Things Can Happen When We Listen to God***; paper and pens/pencils.

Procedure: Have students read *Something Unexpected* on the activity sheet. Let any volunteers tell about experiences they have had of doing something that has a good, but unexpected, result.

Next, read the passages in Acts and let them offer answers to the questions for each passage either orally or in writing. Discuss their answers.

Finally, let students list ways we can be ready to hear and listen to what God is asking us to do, and discuss their answers. (End)

Suggested answers for the Activity Sheet questions:

For the stories about Holly and David:

Holly helps her Mom when she doesn't really want to, but unexpectedly makes a friend.

David gives up a Saturday morning to do hot, tiring work. He gets an unexpected treat for lunch, and the added benefit of learning his grandmother's recipe for that treat.

For Acts 9: 11-22:

1. Ananias knows that Paul has been persecuting Christians.
2. Ananias says the Lord has sent him to Paul so that Paul can regain his sight. Paul is to be a "chosen instrument" of God, to make God's name known.
3. Paul becomes a powerful preacher, "proving that Jesus was the Christ."

For Acts 16: 9-15:

1. Saint Paul concludes that God is calling him to preach the Gospel in Macedonia.
2. Lydia comes to hear him preach.
3. Lydia and her family are baptized, and then she offers her home as a meeting place and resting place for Saint Paul and other Christians. (See 16: 40).

For Acts 18: 24-28:

1. Most students will probably say that Apollos is a educated person, and an enthusiastic, accomplished speaker.
2. They want to teach him about Jesus Christ as Savior. Right now, he only knows the baptism of John the Baptist.
3. He becomes an even better speaker, with a deeper knowledge of the Scriptures showing that Jesus was the Christ, or Messiah.

Some ways we can hear and listen to God:

- Reading the Bible in church and at home
- Prayer
- Noticing the people and events around us, so we can try to see how God is working through them (end)

Grades 7-8 Activity #3

Good Things Can Happen When We Listen to God

Something Unexpected

--Holly goes to the grocery store with her mother, though she doesn't really want to, All the way there she thinks about better ways she could be spending her time. When they finish shopping and are waiting in the checkout line, Holly starts talking to a girl in line behind them. That day is the beginning of a great friendship.

--David spends a hot Saturday morning working hard to clean up his grandmother's yard. At lunchtime, expecting to eat the sandwich he's brought, David is surprised when she calls him into the house and serves him a delicious shrimp salad. She tells him, "Your mother told me that you really like shrimp. So if you like, I'll teach you how to make this. It's my special recipe and it was your grandfather's favorite. Since he died I haven't made it, but I enjoyed doing it for you this morning."

David answers, "I'd love to learn to make it, Gram," and takes another big bite.

Three Events in the Book of Acts

--Read **Acts 9: 11-22**. Talk about, or write about, answers to these questions:

1. Why is Ananias hesitant about approaching Paul?
2. What does Ananias say the Lord Jesus has sent him to do?
3. What good result comes from Ananias' actions?

--Read **Acts 16: 9-15**. Talk about, or write about, answers to these questions:

1. What conclusion does Saint Paul come to when he receives the vision telling him to go to Macedonia?
2. How does Saint Paul meet Lydia?
3. What good result comes from their meeting?

--Read **Acts 18: 24-28**. Talk about, or write about, answers to these questions:

1. What is the first impression you get of Apollos?
2. What do Aquila and Priscilla want to do for him?
3. What good result comes from their teaching of Apollos?

Grades 9-12: Activity #1

(Please be sure to read *To the Teacher*, a general introduction on page 1)

Saint Pachomius: Introduction for the teacher

This story of a beloved and revered fourth-century Egyptian saint gives students in 9th to 12th grade some good things to think about. First, Pachomius was a truly accomplished person, establishing nine monasteries. But he also cared that women as well as men should be able to take part in the life of monasticism that he loved, and he was a humble servant of others even when in charge of literally thousands of people. In addition, he was not deterred by the objections of his brother to building a desert monastery, sure that it was God's will for him to do so. The activity that follows the story about Saint Pachomius gives students a chance to rank three things he did, choosing one as the most important.

Materials Needed:

- Copies for each student of the story of Saint Pachomius (on following pages)
- Bibles for each student or to share
- Markers
- Large sheets of plain paper (one for each group of 3-4 students)
- Tape that won't harm walls, to put sheets up on walls
- Scratch paper and pencils

Procedure: Divide students into groups of 3 or 4 (or pairs if you have a small group.) Give each student a copy of the Saint Pachomius pages. Have them read the story together, and do the ranking exercise that follows it.

For the ranking exercise, give each group scratch paper and pencils, plus a large sheet of plain paper and tape. They can work together to decide the order of importance of 3 things Saint Pachomius did (or add other things they consider important) and rank them. Have them put their ranking on the large sheet of paper, using markers so everyone can read it. They can attach their sheets to the wall.

Discuss the groups' reasons for ranking things as they did. Finally, look together at II Timothy 1:5 and ask students, "*What is similar in this verse and in the experience of St. Pachomius?*" (Paul is noting that Timothy learned how to be a Christian from other Christians--his mother and grandmother. Similarly, Saint Pachomius learned to be a Christian from others—the people who came and ministered to him and his fellow soldiers.) (end)

Grades 9-12: Activity #1

Saint Pachomius of Egypt (pronounced Pa-ko-mee-us)

Saint Pachomius lived in the third century, in Upper Egypt. His family gave him a good education, but because they were pagans he never heard of Jesus Christ as he was growing up. He knew nothing about the true God. But he was a good student, and liked to learn. His name in the native Egyptian Coptic language means “eagle” and like an eagle he was alert to the things and people around him.

Like all young men, Pachomius was conscripted into the Roman Army. The soldiers were housed in a prison—cold, comfortless and crowded. Their food was cheap and not very tasty. But this hard life was made easier by a group of visitors who came often, bringing better food and things to drink. They gave each soldier kind smiles and hopeful words.

“Who are these good-hearted people?” Pachomius wondered. He soon found out that they were Christians. “If their God teaches them to treat even strangers this way, then their God is the true God for sure,” he decided. He wanted to join them.

When his army service ended, Pachomius was baptized. He went to the desert and spent years with a wise and experienced monk there, learning to pray and to serve God. Then he too became a monk. His brother John joined him in the desert.

One day an angel appeared to Pachomius, telling him to build a monastery. His brother saw no reason to do it. He said, “We are out in the desert. Who is going to come into this wilderness to live in this big place you want to build? Don’t do something so ridiculous!”

But Pachomius did as the angel had told him, and soon men began coming to join the monastery. They wanted to learn from this monk who was becoming well-known as a true Christian. As the years went on, Pachomius started nine monasteries. He taught the monks to pray and to live together in peace. He made sure they memorized the Bible.

Even as the leader of large groups of men, he was never too proud to do humble tasks like weeding and watering the vegetable garden, serving the table at meals, or answering the door when someone knocked. He would sit up all night to care for a monk who was ill. Anyone who was sick was automatically released from the strict rule of fasting until he recovered.

Once a young boy was visiting the monastery and saw Pachomius weaving a basket. The boy said, “Oh, father, I can show you a better method of weaving.” Rather than be annoyed that a child wanted to correct him, Pachomius said, “Yes, teach me the style of weaving you know,” and went on to use it. The example of humility was important to him. He never wanted high

positions in the Church, because he worried that having high positions could lead to the desire for power.

Pachomius wasn't only concerned that men should have the chance to become monastics. He convinced his sister to live a life of prayer alone in a hut. As he was sure would happen, other women gathered there with her. Pachomius provided a rule by which they could live as women monastics, also called nuns. Their numbers continued to grow.

By the time he died in the year 346, Pachomius had guided thousands of men and women in the monasteries he founded. He showed them the same kindness and love he had received as a young soldier. He taught them to worship the true God, who loves us all.

A Ranking Exercise

With your group, consider the following three things that Saint Pachomius did. Decide together which is the most important, and rank them in order with the most important as #1. If there are other things he did that feel are equally or more important, feel free to add them to your ranking.

- His effort to “pay it forward” by treating others with the kindness and love he had received from Christians as a young soldier
- His desire that both women and men should have the opportunity to live as monastics
- His humble service to those he governed in the monasteries he founded

Grades 9-12: Activity #2

God is Always With Us: Introduction for the Teacher

This activity focuses on two experiences of Saint Paul and Saint Peter, relating them to similar experiences of two modern Christians. From these comparisons of experiences in Bible times with modern experiences, we hope students will see that God continues to work in our lives, down the centuries and millennia to our own day.

The miracles we read about in the Bible are not just things that happened “back then” in the pages of a holy book. Rather they are signs of God’s active love for His people—from saints like Paul and Peter right down to us and all the people we know. He continues to show us that love, and those miracles, to bring us closer to Him.

Materials Needed: Copies of the page entitled *God is Always With Us* for each student, Bibles for each student or to share, writing paper and pens/pencils.

Procedure: Give each student a copy of *God is Always With Us*. Let them complete the questions, orally, written, or some of each—as you choose. Students should be able to come up their own answers to the questions. (Like Father Daniel, Saint Paul had a life-changing vision of Christ. Like the man saved by Father Arseny, Saint Peter was delivered from a deadly situation by God’s mysterious intervention. Though in Peter’s case we are told it was an angel, the way Father Arseny stopped the abuse was also God’s doing, though we can never know just how it happened.)

Though the Father Arseny story doesn’t tell us how the young man changed, we can assume that what happened to him made him think about the mercy of God, revealed through the love and courage of the priest who was his fellow prisoner.

For the question of how Father Arseny changed, students may feel that he didn’t change. Yet he had witnessed something terrible and had seen the power of prayer to stop it. The change might be hard to define, but being able to save the young man surely deepened his certainty that he could rely on God.

Some students may wonder why one prisoner watching the event saw what Father Arseny had done, and the other did not. In the verses from Acts about Peter, it seems that the guards didn’t hear or see Peter escaping his chains or walking past them out of the jail. Peter himself thought it was a vision. Very often God can work in ways we don’t see or

understand, but we can still know that He is working. Perhaps one prisoner was more ready to sense God's hand at work than the other one was.

Discuss the final question on the sheet: Do students agree that God is always with us?

Look together at **Isaiah 53: 7-12**. Help students understand that this is just one of many Old Testament passages that prepared people to recognize Jesus Christ as the Savior. It was written long before He was born on earth, but it told what He would be like, and what He would do, when He came many years later. Say, *"Today we read about miracles with Saint Peter and Saint Paul. We compared them to similar experiences of Christians in our time. We also saw in the writing of Isaiah that long before Jesus came, God was preparing the world for His coming. So we know that God keeps working in our lives, from Old Testament times right down to today. Let's try to be ready for whatever God calls us to do."*

To consider a few ways we can try to be ready for what God calls us to do, look together at these Psalm verses:

- --O Lord, who shall sojourn in Your tent? Who shall dwell on Your holy hill?
The one who walks blamelessly and does what is right (Psalm 15: 1-2)
- --I keep the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved (Psalm 16: 8)
- --It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to Thy name, O Most High; To declare Thy steadfast love in the morning, and Thy faithfulness by night (Psalm 92: 1-2)
- --Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits (Psalm 103: 2)
- --I was pushed hard, so that I was falling, but the Lord helped me; The Lord is my strength and my song; He has become my salvation (Psalm 118: 13-14)

Encourage students to choose one of these verses (or find one they like) that can become a reminder for them to stay close to God. Have them write it down to take with them, and encourage them to memorize it so they can always call it to mind. (end)

Grades 9-12: Activity #2

God is Always With Us

The Book of Acts is filled with the adventures of Saint Paul and Saint Peter as they traveled from place to place, telling people the Good News of the Resurrection and new life. Sometimes the two apostles were joyfully received. Other times they were threatened, beaten, imprisoned and severely mistreated. No matter what happened, they never gave up. They would preach the Gospel in spite of any hardship.

Peter and Paul received angelic messages of reassurance. They had life-changing encounters with Jesus Christ. They had visions telling them about important things they must do. What is amazing about these events is that similar things have happened to people who are alive now, or who lived recently. God didn't stop coming into human life in the time of Peter and Paul. Let's look at some examples:

- a) **Daniel Byantoro** was a devout Indonesian Muslim. He knew the Qur'an well, and enjoyed debates with Christians, which he usually won. One day as he was reading the Qur'an, he had a vision of Jesus Christ. It was wonderful but also frightening. It made him want to study and pray even more closely. As he did so, he became convinced that Christianity is true. God shows Himself to us through His Word—Jesus Christ.

Daniel began attending a Protestant church, the one to which his former schoolteacher belonged. He was happy doing missionary work and teaching with other members of the church. But he found that he missed certain things he had known in Muslim worship, such as fasting and a regular pattern of prayers. He began to look around for what he felt was the true Church. He thought that it would be a Church that had begun in the Eastern part of the world, just as Islam had done.

He found his way to the Orthodox Church, and became the first Orthodox convert in Indonesia. Later he was ordained to the priesthood. He established Orthodoxy for the first time in Indonesia, his beloved country of birth.

In the years since then, he has been forced to move from his home several times for his own safety. Though his life has been threatened more than once for being a Christian, he continues to spread the Orthodox faith.

Read Acts 9: 1-9. Then answer the following questions:

- What is similar/different in the experiences of Father Daniel/Saint Paul?

- What did Fr. Daniel do after his experience? What did Saint Paul do after his?

b) A young, slender man was working alongside Father Arseny. They were both prisoners in a harsh Siberian labor camp, and the work they were doing in the freezing cold was difficult and exhausting. Father Arseny, like many in the camp, had done nothing wrong except to refuse to give up his faith. The Communist government imprisoned and persecuted thousands of others like him. But he was a man of prayer, and even some hardened criminals in the camp were comforted by his calm, loving presence.

On this day the guard began mercilessly beating the young man next to Father Arseny for some reason. Then a supervisor kicked the young man with his heavy boots. The other prisoners were angry at such senseless brutality, but were afraid to confront the guards.

Suddenly Father Arseny stood still, made the sign of the cross and blessed the guard, and then said clearly, "In the name of the Lord I order you to stop! Stop this!" The guard calmly went back to counting prisoners, as he had been doing before the beating began. The young man unsteadily found his place in the line of workers.

Two prisoners nearby spoke about what had just happened. The first said, "Did you see what Father Arseny did when they were beating that young man?"

"Did what? He was standing as still as a statue," the second prisoner replied. (Adapted from *Father Arseny: Priest, Prisoner, Spiritual Father*, Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1999)

Read **Acts 12: 1-11**. Then consider these questions:

- What is similar/different in the experience of Saint Peter/the young man?
- How was the young man changed? How do you think the young man might have been changed?

Do you agree that "God is Always With Us" as the title of this activity states?

Grades 9-12: Activity #3

Stepping Out in Faith: Introduction for the Teacher

This activity centers on Acts 20: 17-37, in which Saint Paul shares with the believers from Ephesus his intention to travel to Jerusalem. For several months he has been carrying around gifts from the other churches intended for the mother church in Jerusalem. He wants to deliver the gifts by the Feast of Pentecost. So he has asked the elders of the Ephesian Church to come to him, so he can say goodbye to them.

Paul has no illusions about what the future may hold. He says that he is going to Jerusalem “not knowing what might befall me there.” He is not deterred by the fact that danger will likely come. He is willing to step out in faith, to trust in God no matter what.

This is the example we want to put before students, not so they will take dangerous risks, but so they will have the courage to stand as Orthodox Christians in any circumstances.

Materials Needed: Copies of the page entitled *Stepping Out in Faith* for each student, Bibles for each student or to share, writing paper and pens/pencils.

Procedure: Ask students what they think the phrase “step out in faith” means. They’ll probably understand that it means doing something that may entail some unfamiliarity, uncertainty or risk, while trusting that God will be with them in the endeavor.

Read Acts 20: 17-37 together. Have them answer the questions on their sheet. Then discuss their answers Here are some suggestions for discussion:

1. What risk is Paul taking in going to Jerusalem? (Verses 22-23.) *He risks the “imprisonment and afflictions” that the Holy Spirit has testified await him everywhere.*
2. Why doesn’t Paul just decide not to go to Jerusalem, and avoid the risk? (Verse 24.) *Paul says that the purpose of his life is to accomplish his course and ministry. Without this, his life is of no value to him. So he will go on accomplishing the ministry, no matter what danger that entails.*
3. What warning does Paul give to the people he is addressing? (Verses 29-31.) *He warns them that people with false teachings will come among them and try to draw them*

away from the true faith. He begs them never to abandon that faith, which he worked so hard to teach them.

4. *What are the people's feelings toward Saint Paul? (Verse 37-8). The people love him and are sorry that he will be leaving them. This is significant, because he has sometimes had to tell them hard truths. Paul has had to keep people on the "narrow path" of Christian behavior and sometimes criticize the way they were conducting their lives. From these verses we see that he was able to do this and still keep their affection and love, rather than stirring up resentment.*

Following these four questions on the students' page are a few reflections on and questions about "stepping out in faith" and taking some risks. Let students look over and make notes on these, and then talk about their answers as they wish to. (end)

Grades 9-12: Activity #3

Stepping Out in Faith

In one part of the Book of Acts, we read that Saint Paul has been carrying around gifts from the other churches intended for the mother church in Jerusalem. He wants to deliver the gifts by the Feast of Pentecost. So he has asked the elders of the Ephesian Church to come to him, so he can say goodbye to them. But Paul knows there is a risk involved in the journey he plans to make.

That's the "setting" of the verses you are going to read, **Acts 20: 17-36**. Read the verses, and come up with some answers to these questions, using the verses noted for each one:

1. What risk is Paul taking in going to Jerusalem? (Verses 22-23)
2. Why doesn't Paul just decide not to go to Jerusalem, and avoid the risk? (Verse 24)
3. What warning does Paul give to the people he is addressing? (Verse 31)
4. What are the people's feelings toward Saint Paul? (Verses 37-38)

Can you "step out in faith" and do things that might involve some risk? Yes—though it probably won't be the kind of risk that threatens your life. These risks may give you some moments of discomfort or difficulty, but they may also make your life more meaningful. They may bring you closer to God. For example:

It's a risk to "step out" and be nice to a kid at school who's ignored or made fun of by the others in your group.

It's a risk to "step out" and say no to friends who want you to "borrow" some of the beer in the cupboard that your Dad has told you to leave alone.

It's a risk to "step out" and declare yourself as an Orthodox Christian when you're with people who ridicule or say stupid things about the Christian faith.

What would you be risking in each of these situations? Would the risk be worth it? (end)