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## Creative Ideas for Teaching Teens in the Sunday School Setting

Presenter's Objectives:

1. List at least ten guidelines for effective teen classes.
2. Show and tell about budget-friendly tools and resources
3. Describe methods that allow students to apply Orthodox principles and teachings to their lives.
4. Provide at least six take-home lessons, ready to use in your parish.
5. Describe at least five ways to get your parish "invested" in teens.

### **GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE TEEN CLASSES**

Understand the basics of adolescent growth and development

Challenging, confusing and exciting time

Physical changes: hormones, changing bodies

Mental changes: idealistic and critical, many doubts and questions

Social changes: peer pressure, intense/volatile friendships, romance/can be sexually active

Awareness of what can influence a teen's faith

Peer pressure: friends attending Big Box churches

TV, music, movies

Schools: propagate what is "politically correct" and "everyone has a right to...."

Parents: frightened, over-react, must be consistent and set examples

Other adults: **THIS IS WHERE THE CHURCH CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!**

Recreation: sports teams, social groups, school activities

Church: Teens can lose interest if nobody reaches out, parents don't attend

Set classroom ground rules that promote learning and trust

No one has to talk.

We respect what each other has to say.

Humor is always welcome.

What goes on in the classroom stays in the classroom.

A "problem" that needs group help always trumps the lesson.

Teach the lessons/communicate using multiple methods

Handouts, workshops, role-playing, short lecture, posters,

Multi-media, music, crafts, flipcharts, etc.

Consider utilizing a team approach-more than one adult leader

Don't underestimate what children learn during the Divine Liturgy

Be prepared ahead of time!

Students are sophisticated learners and can tell if you aren't prepared.

Be respectful of their time and stay within time-allotted for class.

Walk the talk

Teachers must be active in church life: feast days, projects, be visible

Be aware that the conventional definition of families has changed!

Divorced parents, widowed parents, surrogates, orphans, immigrants, adoptees

Don't underestimate the positive effect that older students have on younger students.

Remind yourself that we have no idea what goes on at home.

Don't PREACH and be sparing with your..."Back when I was a kid we....."

Remember, social issues present in the community are present in your church community.

Be prepared and informed.

ASK the students what they might like to learn about and explain your expectations.

Never give homework.

Lessons should stand-alone each week as many times students don't come consistently.

Remember that many teens don't drive and must rely on parents to bring them.

There should be a clearly-defined TAKE HOME message

Lessons should be relevant to their lives.

*People learn when they perceive a need to know.*

## **SHOW AND TELL: BUDGET-FRIENDLY TOOLS**

Quiet space with chairs

Clipboards and pens from office supply

Newsprint and masking tape

White boards and easels with chalk boards

IKEA, Target, Office supply stores

Markers

Signs on paint sticks

Large, bright post-its

PowerPoint presentations; useful only for the instructor

Beware of putting distance between you and your students.

Handouts

Be frugal and have only one...many times they never make it out of the classroom.

Food

If students haven't eaten breakfast, allow time for them to eat.

Consider sharing responsibilities to bring a treat

Movies, board games, DVDs, props

## **Lesson Ideas, Teaching Methods that Promote Application of Orthodoxy to Daily Life**

Ice Breakers, fun openers and getting started

Begin with a prayer: there are many written for students

Copies can be laminated for posting in locker, inserted into student daytimers

Fun openers

[www.adulted.about.com](http://www.adulted.about.com)

[www.Bingocardcreator.com](http://www.Bingocardcreator.com)

[www.ptint-bingo.com](http://www.ptint-bingo.com)

Develop a funny message for them utilizing current teen lingo:

*Yo-hey! We got something bad going on here. We've left our cribs, got our peeps together and we're gonna get some shizzle. Don't be zipped or keep it on the down-lo...boost my ideas, not my bling. I'm stoked, aint gonna diss anybody—I like this vibe...wanna seem some happy grill! Boo-yah!*

[www.thesource4ym.com/teenlingo/](http://www.thesource4ym.com/teenlingo/)

Provides an extensive slang dictionary

Be VERY CAREFUL as there are explicit sexual and racist components here.

High School Talk Sheets by David Lynn

[www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com)

Topics taken from Proverbs, Psalms and New Testament themes, there are hundreds of relevant contemporary topics. Each lesson includes a student handout and leader guide.

Adapt these to fit into the church calendar, themes of Lenten Sundays, in response to current events or to prompt discussions. Each lesson includes passages from the Bible for student reference.

Hot Seat Sundays

*Tell me a fact and I'll learn. Tell me a truth and I'll believe. But tell me a story and it will live in my heart forever.*

Provide an opportunity for the people in your parish to tell their story. Invite them to your classroom: provide a special chair, give them a list of questions to answer (students prepare ahead of time)...including, how they came to Orthodoxy. Also an opportunity to talk about careers, how being Orthodox impacts their careers, daily life.

WWOCD? (What would an Orthodox Christian do?)

*The truth of the matter is that you KNOW the right thing to do The hardest part is doing it.*  
It helps to prepare ahead of time for those moments when your faith is challenged. Role-playing and problem-solving with others experiencing the same issues can prepare teens with what to say, what to do and how best to handle difficult situations.

The New Teen Choices Game: a board game which provides students with real-life scenarios and provides opportunities to problem-solve and apply Christian principles. This can be purchased at: [www.Christianbook.com](http://www.Christianbook.com)

Provide a box in the classroom where students can anonymously write problems/challenging situations that the group can discuss. (Teacher can “plant” some situations and ask clergy to do the same.)

Free For All Sundays

*This is the day which the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

In an attempt to encourage socialization between students, plan something fun: go out for coffee at a local coffee shop, go for a walk together, attend the parish coffee hour with an agenda to meet and greet somebody new, host a coffee hour, go out for breakfast, record a CD of a Sunday service to give to a house-bound parishioner...the sky is the limit.

What-Do-You-Believe Sunday

*We understand ourselves better when we understand others.*

Examine the major components of various religions. Ask students which Christian denominations they wish to know more about, include other world religions, sects, etc. Make a chart of what makes us Orthodox: the origin of the faith, the Creed, The Divine Liturgy, sacraments, apostolic succession, tradition and scriptures, icons and saints and requirements to be a member, etc. Teacher/student volunteers research other faiths, looking for similarities and differences when compared to the components of the True Faith.

Useful references:

Handbook of Denominations in the United States Frank S.Mead and Samuel S Hill

Abingdon Press 11th edition available at libraries and Amazon.com

So What's the Difference? Fritz Ridenour Regal Publishing

All age groups Sunday school Assemblies and Nativity Pageants

Birthday Party on Pentecost

Read the story and provide a birthday cake, noisemakers,  
Students can make greeting cards

Is it the BIG PARTY (secular holiday celebrations) or is it THE BIRTH OF CHRIST?

Bring examples of Christmas cards, decorations, wrapping paper, media ads, etc....ask students to discriminate between those that are nativity-based or just the big party. Review the Christmas story using collections of Nativity Sets...(kids love to bring in their own) teach the troparion and practice the greetings of the Nativity. Christ is born! Glorify Him! Decorate Christmas cookies (big party shapes or birth of Christ shapes?)

### Graffiti Wall

Cover a large wall with butcher paper and allow the students to decorate it using themes from Bible stories, crosses, religious symbols, words using letters similar to those done when illuminating manuscripts...all ages love to do this.

### The Twelve Groceries of Christmas

Using the melody from The Twelve Days of Christmas, have the students rewrite the song, describing groceries they are donating to the church food pantry. Get the audience involved with singing as each student comes forward with a grocery bag of items. *“Five cans of beans! Four boxes of pasta, three packs of diapers, two jugs of juice and a case of paper towels. On the sixth day of Christmas, to the food pantry I bring.....”*

### A different “look” for the Nativity Pageant

Take a closer look at the traditional icon of the Nativity and recreate the different levels of the cliffs, using ladders and stools and a drop cloth. Perch students at different heights surrounding Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

## **Effective Ways to Integrate Teens in Your Parish Life**

It is the responsibility of the entire congregation to make teens feel welcome. Ask yourself these questions: Do parish council members know the teens/college kids by name? Can clergy call teens and college students by name, do they know where they go to college, high school, what are their interests, hobbies, etc. Do teens know the seniors? Do teens/college students stay for coffee hour? Do what it takes to make them feel welcome!

All-student Assemblies promote friendships across age levels.

Participation during the Divine Liturgy promotes “ownership” in worship: altar servers, handmaidens, greeters, processions, collections, reading at the tomb during Holy Week, etc.

Clergy can host a “reunion” of grown altar servers...get the college students home during the holiday season to help in the altar. Introduce them, welcome them home, and explain where they go to school and what they are studying. This gives everyone knowledge to use in conversations.

Shout-outs! During announcements, clergy can lead or encourage parents to share information about reasons to celebrate in the lives of our children: awards, making teams, and choirs, special events.

Parish bulletin boards: post clippings, photos, letters, etc. about student activities.

Graduation recognition: Introduce each graduate to parish, where they are headed...(kids can make contacts with people who know people in other parishes!)

E-mails: Clergy can target students with e-mail messages....alerting them to a feast day during the week, parish news, etc. Students away from home LOVE hearing about home.

Prayer List: Encourage students to submit names or consider a prayer list available on-line for student access.

Parish Directory: As students graduate from high school, include them as a separate entry on the parish directory...they have become a member apart from their parents.

Teen events: Sleepovers, basketball teams, fund-raising events, outings with seniors (intergenerational events have been wildly successful.) cooking events to learn how to make a specific ethnic treat, outings to a city, movie nights at parish homes....just a few ideas.

Mailings: YES..snail mail! Students love to get something personal in the mail. Send a bulletin to a student who has been absent or a copy of the handout with a personal note. Of course, e-mail...IF students want to share their e-mail addresses.

Other wonderful references that have a place on the desk of anyone teaching Orthodox kids:

The Orthodox Study Bible

Thomas Nelson publisher

The Living God Volumes 1, 2

A Catechism

SVS Press

The Incarnate God Volumes 1,2

The feasts of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary

SVS Press

Introducing the Orthodox Church

80 Talks for Orthodox Young People

Making God Real in the Orthodox Home

Anthony M. Coniaris

[www.librarything.com](http://www.librarything.com)

The Orthodox Faith- 4 volumes: doctrine, worship, bible and church history, spirituality

Father Thomas Hopko

Amazon.com

The Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Benedicta Ward

Amazon.com

For more information or sample lessons, contact Alexa at alexgeeza@aol.com