

2025 ACYOA Lenten Retreat Guidebook

Made in His Image



DIOCESE OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH (EASTERN)
Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries

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February 3, 2025

Dear Pastors, Parish Council Chairs, Youth Advisors, and ACYOA Seniors Chairs,

The Diocese of the Armenian Church (Eastern) is pleased to offer this ACYOA Retreat Guidebook prepared by the Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries and ACYOA Central Council. The ACYOA Central Council will be offering three regional day-long retreats for ACYOA Seniors ages 18-30. We welcome you to plan and execute your own retreats using this guidebook for the youth and youth adults of your parish community. When possible, try to collaborate with nearby parishes.

In this guidebook, we have provided the nuts-to-bolts instructions for planning and running a retreat to equip you with the resources needed to hold a retreat for your ACYOA Juniors and/or Seniors. You will find three sample schedules, a registration form, a sample Code of Conduct, detailed lesson plans for icebreakers, an opening activity, engaging group discussions, and a Scripture study. We hope this will assist you in the execution of a retreat that can be organized and led by your parish leadership. *Please keep in mind that this guidebook contains the raw materials of each presentation; clergymen and facilitators should feel free to add their own personality and modify the sessions to meet the specific needs of their audiences!*

As a way of helping our local communities and encouraging our ACYOA youth and young adults to participate in an aspect of service this Lenten season, we suggest adding a service project to your retreat, such as a sock or hat drive, canned food drive, or making and donating sandwiches to a local shelter.

We will be available throughout the planning stages of your retreats if you have any questions or need additional guidance. We hope that the contents of this guidebook lead you to fruitful discussions, fun fellowship, and a deepened strength within your ACYOA.

We look forward to hearing all about your ACYOA Lenten Retreats!

In Christ,

Jennifer Morris, jenniferm@armeniandiocese.org

Alisha Panthier and Sarah Tavitian, ACYOA Central Council, acyoacc@gmail.com

(INSERT PARISH OR REGION NAME) **ACYOA LENTEN RETREAT**

SATURDAY, *(INSERT MONTH, DAY, YEAR)*

10:00 - 10:20 AM	Registration and Welcome
10:20 - 10:45 AM	Diocesan Camp Morning Service
10:45 - 11:15 AM	Session 1: Ice Breakers
11:15 AM - 12:15 PM	Session 2: Bible Study
12:15 - 1:15 PM	Lunch & Group Photo
1:15 - 2:15 PM	Session 3: Collage
2:15 - 3:15 PM	Session 4: Discussion
3:15 - 3:45 PM	Rest Hour Service and Personal Reflection
3:45 - 4:00 PM	Survey, Clean Up, & Depart

(INSERT PARISH OR REGION NAME) **ACYOA LENTEN RETREAT**

DAY 1 - FRIDAY, (INSERT MONTH, DAY, YEAR)

5:00 - 5:30 PM	Registration and Welcome
5:30 - 6:15 PM	Session 1: Introduction and Icebreakers
6:00 - 6:45 PM	Rest hour Service
6:45 - 7:45 PM	Dinner
7:45 - 8:00 PM	Group Photo
8:00 - 10:30 PM	Movie/Board Games/Snack Time
10:30 - 11:00 PM	Prepare For Bed
11:00 PM	Lights Out

DAY 2 - SATURDAY, (INSERT MONTH, DAY, YEAR)

8:00 - 8:30 AM	Wake Up
8:30 - 9:00 AM	Breakfast
9:00 - 9:15 AM	Diocesan Camp Morning Service
9:15 - 10:15 AM	Session 2: Bible Study
10:15 - 11:15 AM	Session 3: Collage
11:15 - 11:30 AM	Break
11:30 - 12:30 PM	Session 4: Discussion
12:30 - 1:30 PM	Lunch
1:30 - 2:00 PM	Pack Up, Clean Up & Depart

(INSERT PARISH OR REGION NAME) **ACYOA LENTEN RETREAT***

**if following this schedule, be sure to remind participants to bring a church-appropriate change of clothes for Sunday Badarak*

DAY 1 - SATURDAY, (INSERT MONTH, DAY, YEAR)

2:00 - 2:30 PM	Registration and Welcome
2:30 - 3:15 PM	Session 1: Introduction and Icebreakers
3:45 - 4:15 PM	Session 2: Bible Study
4:15 - 5:00 PM	Break
5:00 - 6:00 PM	Session 3: Collage
6:00 - 7:00 PM	Dinner and Group Photo
7:00 - 8:00 PM	Session 4: Discussion
8:00 - 8:30 PM	Rest Hour Service
8:30 - 10:30 PM	Movie/Board Games/Snack Time
10:30 PM - 11:00 PM	Prepare For Bed
11:00 PM	Lights Out

DAY 2 - SUNDAY, (INSERT MONTH, DAY, YEAR)

8:00 - 8:30 AM	Wake Up
8:30 - 9:00 AM	Clean Up and Prepare for <i>Badarak</i>
9:00 - 12:00 PM <i>(depending on when Badarak is in your parish)</i>	Morning Service and <i>Badarak</i>
12:00 - 1:30 PM <i>(depending on when Badarak ends)</i>	Attend Fellowship/Coffee Hour
1:30 - 2:00 PM	Pack Up, Clean Up & Depart

*****Suggested list of movies to compliment the theme of “Made in His Image”:***

Hunchback of Notre Dame (1996)
Soul Surfer (2011)
Wonder (2017)
Blue Miracle (2021)
Wicked (2024)
The Chosen Series

(INSERT PARISH OR REGION NAME) **ACYOA Lenten Retreat**
(INSERT MONTH, DAY, YEAR)

Sample Registration Form*

(Please modify questions and fields based on the age group of participants)

Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____ **Age:** _____

Sex: Male Female

Parish: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City: _____ **State:** _____ **Zip Code:** _____

Home Phone: _____

Participant Cell Phone: _____

Participant Email: _____

PRIMARY PARENT/GUARDIAN	SECONDARY PARENT/GUARDIAN
Name:	Name:
Cell Number:	Cell Number:
Email:	Email:

_____ Yes, my *Code of Conduct* has been read and signed by me (and a parent, if applicable).

**Please note: If you'd like to go completely digital with your retreat, you may create an online registration form using [Google Form](#). Participants can submit their registration using the registration link you send them.*

(INSERT PARISH OR REGION NAME) **ACYOA Lenten Retreat**
(INSERT MONTH, DAY, YEAR)

CODE OF CONDUCT

1. As members of the ACYOA, we are part of a Christian youth organization and expect Christian standards of behavior at all times. Therefore, all participants and chaperones shall be treated with respect and dignity at all times.
2. We are a community – we all need to clean up after ourselves, share the facilities, and treat the facilities with respect. The destruction, misuse, or abuse of property will not be tolerated. Those found responsible for such behavior will be held financially liable.
3. Be on time and follow the schedule! You are expected to participate in all activities.
4. Participate in discussions, share your ideas, and remember to listen to others. Everyone deserves a chance to speak, and everyone deserves to be heard.
5. Proper dress and language are expected at all times. Participants will not use foul or abusive language, including words of a sexually explicit or violent nature.
6. No weapons of any kind, firecrackers, or inappropriate audio/video recordings are permitted.
7. Participants will not partake in any form of drugs and/or alcohol while participating in the retreat. This includes but is not limited to: alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, illegal drugs, cigarettes, e-cigarettes, cigars, snuff, chewing tobacco, vaporizers, hookahs, etc. (and their accompanying paraphernalia).

Any serious violation of these rules by participants will be evaluated on an individual basis and dealt with quickly and firmly and may result in expulsion from the retreat. Parents and pastors will be contacted after the retreat to discuss any inappropriate behavior.

**I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE CODE OF CONDUCT,
AND AGREE TO ABIDE BY THE ABOVE INFORMATION.**

Participant Name PRINT: _____

Participant SIGNATURE: _____ **Date:** _____

Parent/Guardian SIGNATURE: _____ **Date:** _____

SESSION 1: Introductions and Icebreakers

Time: 30-45 minutes, depending on the retreat schedule

A NOTE TO FACILITATORS: Be sure during the icebreakers that everyone has a chance to speak and introduce themselves with their name, age, etc. Select one or more of the icebreakers below, based on your registration numbers and time available.

THE NAME GAME: Have everyone stand or sit in a circle. Ask for a volunteer to start. The first person will say their name and a describing word or hobby that starts with the same letter (e.g., “My name is Maria and I like Movies” or “I am Julie and I am Jolly”). The next person has to repeat what the first person said and add their own. This game continues around the circle until it returns to the first person. Add a twist by asking each person to make up a silly movement when they say their name, like spin in a circle, clap their hands, jazz hands, etc. Challenge participants by going around the circle a second time and having everyone say each person’s name and adjective with movement as a group. It’s a great way to learn names and find common interests.

UNSCRAMBLE ME: Split participants into groups of 3-6 participants. Participants will work together to unscramble “church” words on a handout (the facilitator will need to create a handout and make copies). Pass out the handout and pencil for each team, making sure they leave it face down until you yell out, “go!” The first team to unscramble all ten words yells out “Unscramble Me.” Possible words: Saints, Breath of God, Badarak, Made In His Image, Khachkar, Reflection, Secular, Nature, ACYOA Retreat, and Armenian Church.

BALLOON TAG: The facilitator will need balloons, scissors, and string for each person. Tie strings to balloons and then tie one balloon to each person’s ankle. It is every man/woman for him/herself in this one! The object of the game is to pop everyone else’s balloons while making sure that yours does not get popped. Once your balloon is popped, you are out of the game.

APPLES AND ONIONS (or ROSES AND THORNS): Ask each of the participants to share their name and their apple (sweet and good) and onion (worst or yucky) of this past week. This activity allows everyone to speak and for the participants to get to know each other better while getting the pulse of the group on what is going well on campus and what needs improvement.

LIFE BOXES: Pass out a blank sheet of white paper and fold it in half and then in half again. Unfold it all, and you will have four boxes. Have markers or crayons available, and instruct people to write the following headings in the four boxes: Childhood, Teen Years, Present Day, and Future. In each of the boxes, they are to draw a simple picture that represents an event or action that was extremely important to them during that particular time of their life. Once they have completed their boxes, have people go around the room, introduce themselves with their names and ages, and then share their drawings in each box and explain how each life event has helped to shape them into the person they are today.

SESSION 2: Bible Study: Made in His Image

Time: Approximately one hour.

Supplies: Each participant will need a pen and a handout with the questions below. Ensure that you have AV available and the proper cords to connect.

Icebreaker: This light-hearted question helps participants ease into the session, while subtly introducing the theme of creation and identity. Ask participants, "If you could be any creation of God (animal, plant, star, etc.), what would you be and why?" Give time for each person to share what they selected and why. (5 mins)

Show: Share this opening video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X2yUftbD2-E> to set the tone of the day and help give participants a better understanding of what it means to be Made in His Image. (4 Min)

Tell: Provide a brief context as an introduction to Genesis: "Genesis is the first book of the Bible, and its name means 'beginning.' It tells us about God as the Creator and the special relationship He established with humanity. In these verses, we learn about what it means to be made in God's image—a concept central to understanding our purpose and identity." (1 min)

Read and Do: Ask participants to underline keywords or phrases that stand out to them when reading the passage below. Invite volunteers to share what they underlined and why. (10 minutes)

Genesis 1:26-27

“26 Then God said, “Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over the cattle and over all the wild animals of the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”27 So God created humans in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

Discuss: (40 minutes)

1. What does it mean to you that you are "made in the image of God"? [Genesis 1:26-27]
2. When do you sometimes struggle and/or forget that you are made in the image of God?
3. Does being made in God's image impact your relationship with Him? If so, how?
4. How does knowing that you are made in God's image affect your daily interactions with others?
5. What aspects of God's nature are reflected in us, since we are made in His image?
6. Reread Genesis 1:26-27 and also read Genesis 2:15, “The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” How might these two passages influence us

to have a greater sense of responsibility to care for God's creations (environment, self, others, etc), including ourselves?

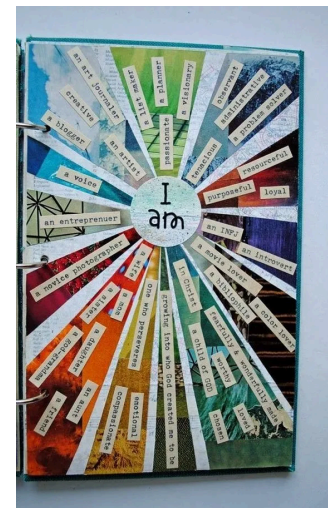
Closing Remarks: As we continue the day, take time to acknowledge and notice how your fellow participants are Made in His Image, and if possible share your observations.

Session 3: Collage: A Reflection of Me

Time: Approximately one hour.

Supplies: Lots of magazines (one per participant to rotate and share), white cardstock per person (can vary in size from 8 ½ x 11 to 18” x 20”), scissors, glue sticks, inspirational word stickers, etc.

Instructions: Take five minutes to explain the activity and pass out supplies. Ask participants to spend the next 40 minutes creating a collage of how they visualize themselves and what they believe they reflect to the outside world or want to reflect on the outside. Below are a few examples.



Reflection: During the remaining 15 minutes allow participants to share their collages. Ask them how their collage represents that they are Made in His Image. “If you didn’t have time to complete this activity then please feel free to continue this activity at home. Remember all of our reflections are Made in His Image.”

Optional: Secure a Polaroid camera and film to take a picture of each participant to put in the center of their collage or request that each participant bring a photo of themselves.

Session 4: Small Group Discussion: Living In His Image

Time: Approximately one hour.

Whole Group Opening Prompts (5 minutes)

Welcome participants warmly and set the tone: "Today's session is about the challenges we face when navigating the expectations of the world around us while remaining true to the teachings of our faith. This is a space for honest reflection, personal sharing, and learning from one another."

Ask participants to quietly reflect on these questions as you read them aloud:

- Have you ever felt conflicted when the teachings of the Church didn't seem to align with your personal beliefs or experiences?
- Have you ever struggled to stand up for your faith as an Armenian Christian in daily life?
- How do you feel when you're in environments where your values aren't welcomed or respected?
- Have you ever faced an internal battle between staying true to yourself and going along with the crowd?

Encourage participants to sit silently for a minute to internalize these thoughts before moving forward.

Visual Reflection and Questions: God Help The Outcasts (10 minutes)

Play the video clip of the song "[God Help The Outcasts](#)" from The Hunchback of Notre Dame.

Post-Video Reflection Questions:

- What stood out to you in this song?
- Who did you relate to more—Esmeralda, who courageously speaks her heart, or the Hunchback, who quietly observes? Why?
- How does this song connect with the idea of faith in a secular world?

Allow brief sharing from a few participants to set the stage for deeper discussions.

Small Group Discussions (40 minutes)

Break into small groups of 4-6 people with a facilitator, or remain as one group if numbers are small.

Personal Reflection (Silent Moment - 2 minutes):

Invite everyone to sit silently for two minutes and think: "Have I ever experienced a time when the teachings of the Church didn't align with my personal beliefs or when I struggled to live out my faith in the world?"

Then, begin the small group discussion:

1. **Faith & Personal Beliefs:**
 - Have you ever faced a time when the teachings of the Church and your personal beliefs felt misaligned?
 - If you're comfortable, would you like to share your experience?
2. **Connection to the Church:**
 - What aspects of the Armenian Church's teachings, traditions, or community do you find most meaningful?
 - Even when facing doubts or struggles, what keeps you connected to your faith community?
3. **Challenges in Secular Environments:**
 - How do you feel when your values are not welcomed or respected in certain environments (school, work, social circles)?
 - Have you ever felt pressured to "blend in" instead of standing firm in your faith? How did you handle it?
4. **The Masks We Wear:**
 - Do you ever feel like you wear different "masks" depending on where you are (e.g., at school, with friends, at church)?
 - Why do you think we wear these masks? How does this affect our sense of identity and faith?
 - Can you think of a time when you were able to remove one of these masks and be fully yourself? What was that experience like?
5. **Courage to Witness:**
 - Have you ever had the opportunity to stand up for your beliefs as an Armenian Christian?
 - What gave you the courage (or what held you back) in those moments?

Closing Group Reflections (10 minutes)

Gather everyone back together for final reflections.

- Based on today's discussion, what have you learned about navigating the tension between faith and the secular world?
- What helps you stay grounded in your faith when facing challenges?
- Who or what can you turn to when your faith feels shaken?

Grounding in the Armenian Orthodox Perspective:

"In the Armenian Orthodox Church, we believe that our identity is first and foremost rooted in being created in the image and likeness of God. This means that our worth doesn't come from the world's approval but from God's love. When we feel torn between faith and the pressures around us, the Church offers us timeless guidance."

1. **When Struggling with Conflicting Beliefs:**
 - The Church teaches that **truth is not something we create for ourselves—it's revealed by God through Scripture, the teachings of Christ, and the life of the Church.**
 - If you're wrestling with a teaching, don't carry that burden alone. **Prayer, spiritual conversations with trusted clergy or mentors, and learning**

more about the faith can help bring clarity. Doubt isn't the opposite of faith—it can be the beginning of deeper understanding.

- **Truth is Revealed by God**

John 14:6: This verse emphasizes that truth is not subjective but is found in the person of Christ, who reveals God's will and purpose to us. **2 Timothy 3:16-17:** This highlights the role of Scripture in guiding us toward God's truth, even when we struggle with understanding or accepting certain teachings.

2. **When Facing Pressure to Conform:**

- As Orthodox Christians, we're called to be **in the world but not of the world** (John 17:14-16). This doesn't mean we reject society; rather, we live differently because our values come from Christ.
- The saints of our Church, like **St. Hripsime, St. Vartan, and countless others**, faced immense societal pressure, yet their courage came from knowing **who they were in Christ**.

3. **The Masks We Wear:**

- The temptation to wear "masks" comes from fear—fear of rejection, judgment, or standing out. But the Church reminds us that **authenticity is holiness**.
- **Confession, prayer, and the sacraments** are not just rituals—they are opportunities to remove those masks before God, to be known fully, and to be loved completely.
- **Authenticity and Being Known by God:** Psalm 139:1-3 Samuel 16:7. **The Struggle with Fear:** 2 Timothy 1:7.

4. **How to Strengthen Your Faith:**

- **Stay connected to the Church's life:** Regular prayer, participation in the Divine Liturgy, reading Scripture, and engaging with your church community.
- **Seek spiritual friendships:** Surround yourself with people who encourage your faith.
- **Turn to Christ:** Remember, **He faced rejection, misunderstanding, and loneliness**—He understands your struggles and walks with you through them.
- **Staying Connected to the Church's Life**
Acts 2:42 - This verse highlights the early Church's commitment to prayer, teaching, fellowship, and the sacraments, showing how essential these practices are for strengthening faith.
Hebrews 10:24-25 - This encourages regular participation in the life of the Church and the importance of communal worship and support.

Connecting Back to the Video:

"In 'God Help the Outcasts,' Esmeralda prays not for herself, but for those who feel unseen. Christ calls us to be that light—to see others, to love without conditions, and to remind people that they are made in God's image. When we live authentically in our faith, we naturally share Christ's light with the world."

Final Thought:

"Even though each of us is different, we are all made in His image. The world may change, but God's love for you doesn't. You don't have to earn it, prove it, or pretend to be someone else to receive it. The courage to be authentic, the strength to live out your faith, and the love to shine Christ's light—that's what we carry with us, always."

Optional Closing Prayer:

Conclude with a simple prayer asking for strength to live authentically, wisdom to navigate challenges, and love to reflect Christ's light in all environments.



**ACYOA Lenten Retreat
Bible Study: Made in His Image**

Genesis 1:26-27

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ACYOA Lenten Retreat

Small Group Discussion: Living in His Image

1. Faith & Personal Beliefs:

- Have you ever faced a time when the teachings of the Church and your personal beliefs felt misaligned?
- If you're comfortable, would you like to share your experience?

2. Connection to the Church:

- What aspects of the Armenian Church's teachings, traditions, or community do you find most meaningful?
- Even when facing doubts or struggles, what keeps you connected to your faith community?

3. Challenges in Secular Environments:

- How do you feel when your values are not welcomed or respected in certain environments (school, work, social circles)?
- Have you ever felt pressured to "blend in" instead of standing firm in your faith? How did you handle it?

4. The Masks We Wear:

- Do you ever feel like you wear different "masks" depending on where you are (e.g., at school, with friends, at church)?
- Why do you think we wear these masks? How does this affect our sense of identity and faith?
- Can you think of a time when you were able to remove one of these masks and be fully yourself? What was that experience like?

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ACYOA Lenten Retreat Grounding in the Armenian Orthodox Perspective

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