

Girls Group Ministry Guide

An Orthodox Christian guide to starting a fruitful ministry of mentoring young ladies in a local parish.



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Ministry Overview

Vision Statement

To mentor the girls of our parish through their transition into Christian adulthood within the Church.

We meet twice a month on a Sunday night in the home of one of the leaders. The timing will defer for each parish according to availability. A weekly meeting or twice a month meeting allows for rich mentoring to take place. We meet for an hour and a half which is a perfect amount of time for a small group of about 4-8 girls plus two leaders. The girls span from 7th grade to 12th grade.

Fruit of this Ministry

I will share the specific fruit observed by the group that began this ministry. Your ministry may look different given your context and your group, but similar fruit may be expected. The young ladies are coming to the leaders saying they implemented what they learned in Girls Group. They mentioned how they have healed friendships, worked through conflicts with their parents, got out of unhealthy dating relationships, set good boundaries, prayed more regularly, thought about the meaning of the Liturgy, and so much more. Thank God! The fruit is obvious! May it be blessed!

Structure of a Meeting

1. **Prayer.** We began singing a prayer which is usually the Trisagion. Sometimes we modify it to relate to the liturgical cycle we are in at that specific time.
2. **Share our “highs and lows” from the week.** Each person shares something positive about her week and something negative. This brings us closer together and helps us understand what their weekly struggles and blessings are. Also, they

really want to feel known and directed in navigating life's day-to-day rigor. This time allows for that kind of connection.

3. **We drink tea together.** This is served by one of the girls and they rotate each week who practices serving. We began with instructions on how tea is served and some of the norms that go along with hostessing. This becomes a habit within a few weeks.
4. **We contemplate on a quote from the Fathers and sit in silence praying the Jesus Prayer.** This lasts for about 3-5 minutes. The leader often needs to remind them of the value of this time and how to pray the Jesus Prayer before starting. Remind them what to do with those distracting thoughts.
5. **The leaders bring up the topic to be discussed** for the night and engage the girls in questions and feedback. It is not a lecture format. The leader simply shares a few points and then asks questions of them and how they can apply it to their lives or what else it makes them think about.
6. **Prayer.** We end our time with a hymn to the Theotokos. She truly is our guide into how beautiful being a young adult woman can be. May we emulate her by her holy prayers!

Leadership Guidelines

As a reference, I think it is helpful to read the history of this ministry when considering the leaders of this group which can be found in this document in the Table of Contents. There should be two female leaders that regularly and faithfully lead this ministry. One of them should be the leader proper. It seems fitting that the leaders have a desire and gifting in working with this age group. To encourage honest conversation, it is best that the leaders are not mothers of any of the girls in the group. This allows for other ladies in their lives to play a mentorship role that is distinct from their families of origin. Also, the leader needs to be easy to talk to and an excellent listener. They do not have to be theologically trained, but if they are it would be preferable. If they are not, they should be clear and self aware of when they need to consult the priest on issues of dogma, tradition, and doctrine. The leader ought to be humble and not leading for her own gain or to hear herself talk. And the leader ought to be in good standing with the priest and attending regular confession. She should embody a good deal of discretion. This feature will help her to know when to confront a girl in the group about something and when to give her space to figure it out on her own. There are times to intervene and communicate to the priest and parents over certain issues like self harm and other spiritual matters.

If a leader should need to leave or step down, please be sure to handle the transition smoothly and respectfully. Give the girls a few months notice so they know when to expect the change. Also, be sure to have a replacement approved and in mind as soon as possible. Have the replacement leader attend a few meetings overlapping the old leader so she can see how the group is run and begin to see how the ministry works. It is critical that the new leader is first approved by the priest and a blessing is received by the priest for that new leader to step into the ministry. Pray through this process that God would help bring the best replacement to the leadership team.

Tips for Discussion

This is the most critical part of the ministry because this is where true mentorship takes place. Be sure to pick topics that are appropriate and of interest to the group of girls being mentored. At least twice a year ask for their feedback about what other topics they would like to cover and seriously consider their suggestions.

Avoid lecturing to them because this is not intended to be a class, rather a mentoring relationship. Keep your answers brief and try to follow up your answers with another question to engage further discussion.

Try to encourage question asking. This is a small way that we invite them into thinking more like adults and less like kids. If they ask, “What should I say to this bully at school who really gets under my skin?” I would turn the question on the group and discuss it together. You could cover what shouldn’t be said, what could be said, and then what would be best to say. Perhaps even suggest a few options for them to consider. This method of communication lends itself to a mentorship relationship and not just another adult telling them what to do with their lives. The goal is to empower them with choices that are life-giving and within the bounds of the Holy Orthodox faith.

Ask genuine questions. Don’t ask questions that are dumbed down or that seem to have an obvious answer. For example, don’t ask, “Should we hit our sister after she ruins your favorite journal?” These kinds of questions belittle them as young ladies who are aspiring to become mature Christian women. Instead, ask **your** genuine questions. For example, “How do you stay focused in Liturgy? What works and what doesn’t work?” Let the discussion go where it may. That may mean you don’t get to all your questions. Sometimes there are pressing issues in the girls’ lives that require discussing, take the time to do that and let the curriculum be flexible with the needs of the group.

Let the young ladies talk. Give a chance for the girls to answer each other and not just look to the leaders for all the answers. This allows for them to consider what they have done in the past that has helped them to grow or improve. They are inspired and encouraged. And you would be surprised the wisdom that comes forth from their mouths!

Suggested Topics

- The Maxims by Fr. Thomas Hopko
- Skimming The *Boundaries* book by Cloud and Townsend
- Discussing how to resolve conflicts
- Discussing anger and how to deal with it
- Discussing loss and how to mourn
- Discussing life skills like organization, time management, and goal setting
- Dating and boys in general
- True Beauty and beauty as it has been wrecked by our culture
- Body image and living a healthy life
- Conflicts with parents. What to do when seeing their flaws and it hurts them as children
- Sin and repentance
- Confession how to overcome hurdles to get to confession
- Sexual boundaries, dating and anything about finding a spouse
- Christian adulthood
- Friendship
- Briefly talking about budgeting, how to think about money

Keep in mind, all of these topics are discussed within the tradition of the Holy Orthodox Church. If there are questions about the Church's teachings on any of these topics or other topics, then consult your priest for advice and guidance about how to talk about these topics. The following texts may prove helpful.

Possible Books for Reference

- *Who is God? Who Am I? Who Are You?* - Dee Pennock
- *Parenting towards the Kingdom* - Philip Mamalakis
- *Hear Me: A prayer book for Orthodox young adults* - Annalisa Boyd
- *Beginning to Pray* - Anthony Bloom
- *Come, let us worship: A Practical Guide to the Divine Liturgy for Orthodox Laity* - Fr. Patrick O'Grady
- *The Scent of Holiness* - Constanstina Palmer

Sample Curriculum for One Year

This sample is based on a bimonthly meeting following the school calendar and Liturgical cycle. Consider gifting the girls with a thin journal that they can write in while at Girls Group. This allows for a record to be kept of the ideas discussed as well as an opportunity for them to write down their personal reflections. Sit in a circle in a family room or study and be sure to stand for prayer and have an icon present to pray in front of.

Topics for the Year

Friendship, Beauty, Anger, Prayer

September meeting 1 - Introductions and Tea

- Welcome and briefly explain the sequence of events so they know what to expect. Then transition into introducing the Jesus Prayer.
 - “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”
 - This prayer is short and powerful and can be said at all occasions quietly in your heart. This is the prayer that brings the faithful into ceaseless prayer like it says in 1 Thessalonians. Let us practice this prayer so we can clear our minds of distracting thoughts and open ourselves up to God. Now I will read a quote and then we will turn to praying this prayer in our hearts. When you have distracting thoughts, don’t judge them or dwell on them. Just take a breath and begin with the prayer again. Let’s close our eyes and sit with good posture - attentively- as we begin to pray. If you have a prayer rope, now would be a good time to use it. Let us begin.
 - Quote to Reflect on in silent prayer - *“We have one sword, the prayer of Jesus. It is said, ‘strike the unseen enemies with this sword, for there is no more powerful weapon either in heaven or on earth.’”* - St. Barsanuphius of Optima

- Sit quietly for about 3 mins. Then, say aloud the Jesus Prayer one more time at the end and open your eyes together. You may take a moment to ask them about

their experience. If this is a new practice, it may help for them to hear just how distracted most of us are doing this kind of prayer.

- Girls' Group introduction- this group is a special gathering where the leaders are here as mentors to you all in hopes to best support you as you grow into young ladies. We care about you deeply and desire to be available to you. We live in a world so in conflict with the Church's teachings about what brings true life and true peace and true happiness. May this group be a refuge for you.
 - I want you to be assured that what is spoken about here in confidence is not shared outside the group. We want to ensure that we can trust each other and this group with feelings and ideas close to our hearts. Can we all commit to keeping the things that happen at Girls Group at Girls Group? Of course, you can share with your parents what topics we discuss here, but let's not share what other girls in the group say in confidence.
 - We just sat quietly and prayed the Jesus Prayer together. How unlike the world is that? We are constantly busy and distracted and screens seem to be ever around and in front of us. May this time be a break from the phones and a return to connecting to our hearts and to God.

- Discussion - this group will include a lot of discussion. This is not a time for the leaders to lecture at you. We want to hear from you. That said, let's make sure we do not interrupt each other when we are speaking and to listen attentively. Being quiet while another is sharing not only a practice in self control but it is a way we show love and respect to the one speaking. Also, let us be careful to discuss things that are honoring of others and not full of gossip. The Holy Scriptures speak of how powerful the tongue is for good and for ill so let us be sure to use our tongue for good. Let us move forward with our topic for the night with these guidelines in mind.

- Introduce "highs and lows"- this is where each person shares a positive thing from her week or month and a negative. Sometimes girls don't want to share so they don't have to. Sometime girls have two highs or no lows - all of this is permissible. Have the leaders go first to model. Be sure to keep them brief though the first few meetings it is appropriate for them to be a bit longer so we can get to know each other. Be sure that no one interrupts each other during this time. They may need to be reminded to not interrupt.

- Topic: Tea

We will be serving tea tonight and a leader will first model how we serve the tea. What do you know about tea? Do you like it? What have you tried? What don't you like?

- Have a leader serve tea. Offer two kinds if possible. And for this first night, it would be delightful to include scones.
 - Explain what tea is and how many women's monasteries offer tea to all their guests and often in china cups. Explain what steeping is and how long to do it for. Offer sugar or honey and cream if it is not a fasting day. Ask them what they think of the tea and what they taste. Compare how the two teas taste.
 - Nice quote about tea - *"Tea time is a chance to slow down, pull back and appreciate our surroundings"* Letitia Baldrige
 - Be sure to distribute journals and have them write their names inside them. Keep them at the home of the hostess. Close in prayer and dismiss or have small talk.
 - Finish with them writing some reflections down in their journals and praying together.

September meeting 2 - Introducing Friendship

- Prayer
- Share highs and lows
- Serve tea
- Open with greetings and prayer then distribute the journals.
- Quote to reflect on in silent prayer -
 - *"A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."* Proverbs 18:24
- Questions to Discuss (pick a few if time is limited) Sometimes during brainstorming like this, a whiteboard is a helpful tool to write down their answers.
 - What makes a good friend?
 - What do you look for in a friendship?
 - How would you like to improve as a friend?
 - What habits are unhelpful in a friendship that you have?
 - How do we listen well in friendship?
 - Finish with them writing some reflections down in their journals and praying together.

October meeting 1 - on Friendship

- Prayer
- Share highs and lows
- Serve tea
- Quote to reflect on and the Jesus Prayer -
 - *“The practice of the Jesus Prayer is simple. Stand before the Lord with the attention in the heart, and call to Him: ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me!’ The essential part of this is not in the words, but in faith, contrition, and self-surrender to the Lord. With these feelings one can stand before the Lord even without any words, and it will still be prayer.”* - Bishop Kallistos Ware
- Friendship- Aristotle explains three kinds of friendship that I think are helpful for us to reflect on. Here is a brief summary of what Aristotle said in *Nicomachean Ethics*:
 - There are three kinds of friendship. The first is friendship based on utility, where both people derive some benefit from each other. The second is friendship based on pleasure, where both people are drawn to the other’s wit, good looks, or other pleasant qualities. The third is friendship based on goodness, where both people admire the other’s goodness and help one another strive for goodness. The first two kinds of friendship are only accidental, because in these cases friends are motivated by their own utility and pleasure, not by anything essential to the nature of the friend. Both of these kinds of friendship are short-lived because one’s needs and pleasures are apt to change over time. Goodness is an enduring quality, so friendships based on goodness tend to be long lasting. This friendship encompasses the other two, as good friends are useful to one another and please one another. Such friendship is rare and takes time to develop, but it is the best.
- Let’s reflect on these three kinds of friendship. (encourage them to use their journals)
 - Who can summarize what the first kind of friendship is?
 - Who can summarize the second kind?
 - Who can summarize the third?
 - Do they overlap? If so, how?
 - Think back to your childhood. Can you think of a friendship that was a lot like this first kind of friend or the second kind?

- Now, do you have any friends in the third category? How are they like the third kind of friend?
- Finish with them writing some reflections down in their journals and praying together.

October Meeting 2 - On Friendship - Concluding Thoughts

- Prayer
- Share highs and lows
- Serve tea
- Quote to reflect on and the Jesus Prayer-
 - *“In friendship...we think we have chosen our peers. In reality a few years' difference in the dates of our births, a few more miles between certain houses, the choice of one university instead of another...the accident of a topic being raised or not raised at a first meeting--any of these chances might have kept us apart. But, for a Christian, there are, strictly speaking no chances. A secret master of ceremonies has been at work. Christ, who said to the disciples, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you," can truly say to every group of Christian friends, "Ye have not chosen one another but I have chosen you for one another." The friendship is not a reward for our discriminating and good taste in finding one another out. It is the instrument by which God reveals to each of us the beauties of others.”*
 - C.S. Lewis, The Four Loves
- Topic to Discuss: Examples of saints who can teach us about true friendship.
 - Let us reflect on saints who modeled true friendship like Barbara was to St. Elizabeth the New Martyr
 - What other saints can you think of?
 - Then have the “Anonymous Teapot” questions
 - Distribute small pieces of paper and pencils and have them write a question down on it, fold it up and place it in the teapot.
 - This is where the girls write questions down related to the topic (or not) and the leaders get to read them. It is ok for the leaders to place questions in there as well. Place them in an empty teapot. Try to do one round of questions that are related to the topic of friendship if possible. Then open it up to questions about anything. You will be delighted to get to know what and how the girls think through this!

- Finish with them writing some reflections down in their journals and praying together.

November Meeting 1: Introduce the topic of Beauty

- Prayer
- Share “highs and lows”
- Serve tea
- Quote to reflect on and the Jesus Prayer

“...One must clean the royal house from every impurity and adorn it with every beauty, then the king may enter into it. In a similar way one must first cleanse the earth of the heart and uproot the weeds of sin and the passionate deeds and soften it with sorrows and the narrow way of life, sow in it the seed of virtue, water it with lamentation and tears, and only then does the fruit of dispassion and eternal life grow. For the Holy Spirit does not dwell in a man until he has been cleansed from passions of the soul and body.”

 - St. Paisius Velichkovsky, “Field Flowers”
- Topic to Discuss: Beauty. What do you think of when you hear this word? Have them write down a few things and share a few. This is a good chance to use a whiteboard.
 - Do you think Beauty is important to the Church? If so, how? Give examples.
 - Based on your answers, what do you think beauty is?
 - Do you think beauty is in the eye of the beholder? Or is it objective?
 - Let’s consider that Beauty is objective. We have been taught it is subjective by the world’s standards and beauty is in the “eye of the beholder”. Have you heard that phrase before?
 - But that is not true and that is not how the Church has understood beauty through time. Beauty is objective and we can all think of examples to prove it. Think of something beautiful... truly breathtaking that moves you. Have them share. Perhaps it is a sunset or a mountain top view, or a rose, or a song, or a painting or a play. Now think of something ugly... maggots crawling on a dead rat for example... Perhaps a song that is played by a 2 year old on the piano that has not been taught how to play yet. We have a repulsion to the rat and we have a pull towards the rose. We plug our ears if we hear a 2 year old pound on the keys but we stand quietly if we walk by a live performer playing music. These are examples of objective beauty. Certainly there are areas or things that are harder to define. For example, what about a particular song or a particular painting. But to be clear there

are things that are objectively beautiful and objectively ugly even if we can't define some of them well in the moment. There are some people who are more gifted or sensitive to knowing the beautiful than others. Some artists are every sensitive to beauty. Just like I know some people that are more sensitive to being good or truthful. If you know the story of George Washington's cherry tree, you'll know he was an honest man from a very young age. So what if beauty is objective? What does it matter? It matters because it is a way to get to know God and God gifted us with the ability to be drawn to the beautiful in order to shape us to be more like Him. Just like a friend with a beautiful soul draws you closer to God, beauty itself can draw us closer to God.

- Discuss their questions and comments and write down their thoughts to discuss the following time.
- Finish with them writing some reflections down in their journals and praying together.

November Meeting 2: On Beauty

- Prayer
- Share "highs and lows"
- Serve tea
- Quote to reflect on and the Jesus Prayer
 - "Beauty will save the world"
- Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel *The Idiot*
 - Discussion Topic: on Beauty continued
 - Last meeting we discussed why beauty is objective. And oftentimes judging whether something is beautiful is not easy to do though we could think of a few examples of things that were objectively beautiful and objectively ugly which did prove that it could be done. We discussed how some people are more gifted or sensitive to beauty than others and those people are truly the ones we can learn from if this is not a strength of ours in this modern era. We have some artists today making beautiful things, but some are doing ugly things like the crucifix in a jar of urine by Andres Serrano. Try to find people that are better at finding beauty than you are. Learn from them. And try to bring more beautiful things into your world. Listen to a song you know is beautiful and you can listen to the music you like too. But add to what you are consuming MORE beauty. See how God works through beauty to heal us. So, let us transition to looking at beauty on a more personal level.

- We are all made in the image and likeness of God. So are we beautiful? Are we beautiful even if we don't think we are? Even if we don't feel we are? This is important to discuss because things that are objective are true even if we don't feel like they are or even if we don't believe they are. Yes, you are all beautiful objectively. God loves your nose, your legs, your arms, your teeth, your ears, your hair, your hands, your heart, your mind, your creativity. He created you. And if you remember from the account in the book of Genesis, after he created man in his own image he said it was "very good". The world will tell you that only a certain nose shape or hair style or height is beautiful. Is the world right? No! The world is wrong. Let us keep our focus on God's True understanding of his creation - His creation is beautiful and you are a part of His creation and you are beautiful. Now, does that mean we are beautiful so we don't need to shower or brush our teeth anymore? Certainly not. We ought to be good stewards of what he has given us, but let us not fall into the sin of vanity and think that we have to look a certain way or change the way we are in order to be beautiful. We should take care of ourselves and respect our bodies and our souls.
- Now, let's return to any questions you have about this topic. Our world tells us such the opposite of this, so it is important for us to discuss. Open the floor for discussion for the rest of the night.
 - Question to start the discussion: How do we combat the world's comments about beauty?
- Finish with them writing some reflections down in their journals and praying together.

December Meeting 1: On Beauty

- Prayer
- Share "highs and lows"
- Serve tea
- Quote to reflect on and Jesus Prayer
 - *"It was when I was happiest that I longed most. The sweetest thing in all my life has been the longing to find the place where all the beauty came from."*
-- C.S. Lewis
- Read this article: <https://oca.org/reflections/fr.-lawrence-farley/what-is-beauty>
And discuss it. The beauty of the saints is something that is obvious because they have reached Theosis. Do you know what that means - what Theosis is? It is union with God and when a person reaches this state they are truly beautiful and it manifests in

miraculous ways. Who knows about the relics of a saint that have been preserved past the saints repose? Do you know about St. John Maximovitch of Shanghai and San Francisco? He is venerated today under glass and his body is not decaying. And he reposed over 50 years ago. That's a miracle! His soul is beautiful and so his body was in turn made beautiful and miraculous as well.

- The article about beauty seems to put into perspective the value that we have as a culture to “look beautiful” or “appear beautiful” but we don't have a high value of being truly beautiful. Botox is a way of defying the look of aging or defying decay, but the saints have a way of defying decay in a real sense... even after death.
- How do we keep a true understanding of beauty about our own bodies when the world around us is full of lies about beauty?
- Open it up for discussion about the article and other comments and questions they have.
- Finish with them writing some reflections down in their journals and praying together.

December Meeting 2: Conclusion on Beauty and Gift Exchange

- Prayer
- Share “highs and lows”
- Serve Tea (and possibly other treats)
- Quote to reflect on and Jesus Prayer
 - *“The Cause of all things, through the beauty, goodness and profusion of His intense love for everything, goes out of Himself in His providential care for the whole of creation.”*
-- St. Maximus the Confessor
 - Read this article on beauty to sum up the topic if you like or you can focus on the gift exchange and perhaps just send this article home with them.
 - <https://oca.org/reflections/fr.-john-breck/divine-beauty-1>
 - Also, if you have time, ending the night with the “Anonymous Teapot”. This way you can tell what questions still have yet to be answered and what the girls are thinking about the topic of Beauty just covered. Have them write a question down or a comment they want feedback on and put it in an empty teapot and have the leaders pull them out one at a time and answer them.
 - Finish with them writing some reflections down in their journals and praying together.

January Meeting 1: Introduce topic on Anger

- Prayer
- Share “highs and lows”
- Serve tea
- Quote to reflect on and Jesus Prayer
 - *“The first step toward freedom from anger is to keep the lips silent when the heart is stirred; the next, to keep thoughts silent when the soul is upset; the last, to be totally calm when unclean winds are blowing.”*
-- St. John Climacus
- Introduce Topic: Anger
 - Let’s discuss anger with an understanding of why God would give us this energy and ability in the first place and what anger’s role is in the perfected person (the saint). Anger is given by God for us to direct towards evil. Anger is there to awaken our hearts to reject evil and run away from it with great vigor. Sadly, anger is rarely used to defeat evil today because we are living in the world “east of Eden”. We are no longer in paradise so all the things God gifted us with have been bent and broken by the Fall. It is true that through the power of God and submission to Him, the saints can overcome the fall by the cross and anger can return to its original purpose. But for us today, anger is a real feeling and energy that causes a lot of damage and hurt in our lives and the lives around us.
 - How many of you have been angry and said something you regretted? How many of you have felt angry and later regretted reacting so strongly? I know I have too many times. We need tools to help us in the meantime while we work on ridding ourselves of the passions.
 - What are some ways we deal with anger that are not helpful?
 - What ways have we expressed anger that don’t seem fruitful?
 - Have you seen someone express anger in a way that you respected? If so, share.
 - How do you wish you dealt with your anger?
 - Take a minute to write down a few thoughts about anger based on what we discuss tonight. Next time, we will provide some tools for how to deal with anger. You won’t want to miss the next meeting.
 - Finish with them writing some reflections down in their journals and praying together.

January Meeting 2: On Anger

- Prayer
- Share “highs and lows”
- Serve tea
- Quote to reflect on and Jesus Prayer
 - *“As with the appearance of light, darkness retreats; so, at the fragrance of humility, all anger and bitterness vanishes.”*
-- St. John Climacus, The Ladder of Divine Ascent
- Last time, we discussed what the unfallen roll of anger is and how anger was intended to be used. We all shared how anger is a hard feeling to deal with and to have control over. We also discussed some ways that it seems obvious we don't want to continue to deal with anger in the future. This week, we have the joy of looking at ways we can redirect that anger and use some self control. Certainly, the goal should not be to stop with these tools that I will give. They are a stepping stone towards dealing with anger in a better way. Don't stop with these steps, but let them be a beginning step towards dealing with anger in a better way that causes less harm to others and to ourselves.
 - Tools for Anger
 - Instead of lashing out with our words or our fists at those around us when we feel uncontrollable anger, try taking a deep breath and counting to 10. Sometimes this can help us regain control of our passions and cool off.
 - Sometimes the anger is so big we feel we have to get it out of our body. If this is the case, get it out without hurting anyone. Don't hurt yourself. Don't hurt someone else. Don't hurt other living things (animals, plants, etc). Scream into a pillow, yell underwater, punch a pillow, or hit a couch. You will tucker out quickly and under the anger, you will often find a deeper emotion (often it is sadness) and this is a feeling you can sit with and try to understand more about yourself. Pray during and after your feelings of rage and/or sadness. Ask for God's help. He is with us even when we are feeling out of control. Getting the anger out when you DON'T have control of it can be helpful in avoiding hurting someone. I find this to be true especially when I want to say something hurtful, I need to hold my tongue and sometimes go for a jog. After I sweat a bit, I find that my mind is more clear and I have prayed about the issue I

was upset about and usually God has given me some insight into myself and my need to repent and grant others mercy.

- Open it up for discussion. What tool could they implement? Do they have questions about implementing them?
- Finish with them writing some reflections down in their journals and praying together.

February Meeting 1: On Anger

- Prayer
- Share “highs and lows”
- Serve tea
- Quote to reflect on and Jesus Prayer
 - *“One must by every means strive to preserve peace of soul and not be disturbed by offenses from others; for this one must in every way strive to restrain anger and by means of attentiveness to keep the mind and heart from improper feelings. And therefore we must bear offenses from others with equanimity and accustom ourselves to such a disposition of spirit that these offenses seem to concern not us, but others. Such a practice can give quietness to the human heart and make it as dwelling for God Himself.”*
-- St. Seraphim of Sarov
- Discussion on Anger: Let’s reflect on some wise words by St. Mark the Ascetic. And then we can discuss them together.
by St. Mark the Ascetic
 - *Now let us say something about the senseless passion of anger, which ravages, confuses and darkens every soul and, when it is active, makes those in whom it is easily and quickly aroused behave like beasts. This passion is strengthened particularly by pride, and so long as it is so strengthened it cannot be destroyed. While the diabolical tree of bitterness, anger and wrath has its roots kept moist by the foul water of pride, it blossoms and thrives and produces quantities of rotten fruit. Thus the structure of evil in the soul is impossible to destroy so long as it is rooted firmly in pride.*
 - *Do you want this tree of disorder - I mean the passion of bitterness, anger and wrath - to dry up within you and become barren, so that with the axe of the Spirit it may be 'hewn down and cast into the fire' together with every other vice (Matt. 3 :10)? Do you want the destruction of this*

house of evil which the devil builds in your soul by continually using as stones various plausible or senseless pretexts, whether material or mental, and by constructing its foundations out of thoughts of pride? If this is what you really want, keep the humility of the Lord in your heart and never forget it.

- Why do you think humility combats anger?
- Is anger and wrath the same thing?
- How does anger relate to pride?
- Finish with them writing some reflections down in their journals and praying together.

February Meeting 2: Celebrating St. Valentine and Tea

(this meeting requires a little bit of prep. Encourage the girls to bring something baked or “tea appropriate” to eat for this meeting. And purchase blank cards with envelopes for each girl and leader.)

- Prayer
- Share “highs and lows”
- Wait to serve the tea and the food together (see below)
- Quote to reflect on and Jesus Prayer
 - *“Speak well of those who speak evil of you. Pay good for evil. Pray for those who cause you various offenses, wrongs, temptations, persecutions. Whatever you do, on no account condemn anyone; do not even try to judge whether a person is good or bad, but keep your eyes on that one evil person for whom you must give an account before God—yourself.”*
-- St. Ignatius Brianchaninov
- Discussion: Tonight we shall share some ways we appreciate each other while we enjoy a festive tea party together. Thank you everyone who brought treats to enjoy. May we express our gratitude and appreciation not just today but all the time!
 - Hand out a card to each of the girls and have them write their name inside of the card in pretty large print. Then, have them pass the card with their names on it to the left and everyone takes a moment to write down a word that describes that person, or something they appreciate about that lady, or a favorite memory they share. Do this until the cards are returned to their original owners and ask them to tuck them away in the envelop and to save them for later.
 - Pray and bless the food and tea before you and pass it around to the girls to share.

- Discuss what they like or don't like about this national holiday - Valentine's Day. Ask them if they know much about St. Valentine. Then read about St. Valentine.
 - <http://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2011/02/orthodox-saint-valentine.html>
 - Finish with them writing some reflections down in their journals and praying together.

March Meeting 1: Review Anger

- Prayer
- Share “highs and lows”
- Serve tea
- Quote to reflect on and Jesus Prayer
 - *“Prayer is the flower of gentleness and freedom from anger.”*
-- Evagrius the Solitary
 - Discussion - We will conclude our thoughts on anger tonight. We have discuss the ways anger was intended to be used towards the devil and towards evil. We discussed how we have habits with anger that are not edifying us. We looked at some possible ways to begin to deal with anger that does not lend itself to hurting others or ourselves. We have talked about holding our tongue to ensure anger does not escape our lips. We read about Mark the Ascetic last time we talked about anger. He suggested that anger could be combated with humility and meekness. Now, let us conclude with looking a bit more at St. Mark the Ascetic on anger.
 - *“So you should continually keep in mind the great humiliation which the Lord took upon Himself in His ineffable love for us: how the divine Logos dwelt in a womb; how He took human nature upon Himself; His birth from a woman; His gradual bodily growth; the shame He suffered, the insults, vilification, ridicule and abuse; how He was scourged and spat upon, derided and mocked; the scarlet robe, the crown of thorns; His condemnation by those in power; the outcry of the unruly Jews, men of His own race, against Him: 'Away with him, away with him, crucify him' (John 19:15); the cross, the nails, the lance, the drink of vinegar and gall; the scorn of the Gentiles; the derision of the passers-by who said: 'If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross and we will believe you' (cf. Matt. 27:39-42); and the rest of the sufferings which He patiently accepted for us: crucifixion; death; the three-day burial; the descent into hell. Then keep in mind all that has come from these sufferings: the*

resurrection from the dead; the liberation from hell and from death of those who were raised with the Lord; the ascension to the heavens; the enthronement at the right hand of the Father; the honor and glory that is 'far above every principality and power . . . and above every name that is named' (Eph. 1:21); the veneration of the Firstborn from the dead by all the angels, because of the sufferings He had undergone. As the Apostle says: 'Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. Though He is in the form of God, He did not insist on clinging to His equality with God; but He emptied Himself and took upon Himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man. Being in this likeness. He humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, things on earth and things under the earth' (Phil. 2:5-10). See to what a height of glory the Lord's human nature was raised up by God's justice through these sufferings and humiliations.

- *If, therefore, you continually recall this with all your heart, the passion of bitterness, anger and wrath will not master you. For when the foundations constructed of the passion of pride are sapped through this recalling of Christ's humiliation, the whole perverse edifice of anger, wrath and resentment automatically collapses. For can anyone keep perpetually in mind the humiliation that the Divinity of the only-begotten Son accepted for our sake, and all the sufferings that we have mentioned, and yet be so hard and stony hearted as not to be shattered, humbled and filled with remorse? Will he not willingly become dust and ashes, trampled underfoot by all men?*
- *So, when we are humbled and shattered, and keep in mind Christ's humiliation, what anger, wrath or bitterness can take possession of us? But when forgetfulness of these life-creating truths is accompanied by the sister vices of laziness and ignorance, then these three oppressive and deep-seated passions of the soul, hard to discover and correct, overlay and darken us with a terrible futility. They prepare the way for the rest of the evil passions to become active and nest in the soul, stifling its sense of awe, making it neglect what is good, and providing easy access and free scope for every passion.*

-- St. Mark the Ascetic, Letter to Nicholas the Solitary

- How does reflecting on Christ's sufferings help us deal with anger?

- St. Mark says that reflecting on Christ’s humility and his patient suffering can help us not just with anger but with what other sins? And why would it help with those other sins?
 - Finish with them writing some reflections down in their journals and praying together.

March Meeting 2: Review Anger and “Anonymous Teapot”

- Prayer
- Share “highs and lows”
- Serve tea
- Quote to reflect on and Jesus Prayer
 - *“It is necessary most of all for one who is fasting to curb anger, to accustom himself to meekness and condescension, to have a contrite heart, to repulse impure thoughts and desires, to examine his conscience, to put his mind to the test and to verify what good has been done by us in this or any other week, and which deficiency we have corrected in ourselves in the present week. This is true fasting”*
-- St. John Chrysostom.
- Discussion: Tonight we get to hear from you. I’d like you to look at your journals and review what you have written and what we have discussed about anger thus far. I want to hear from you!
 - What helped you the most when discussing anger?
 - What was unhelpful?
 - What do you hope to put into practice?
 - Has anyone tried out one of the tools suggested and want to share how it went?
 - How do you plan to put this into practice?
 - What did you learn about anger?
 - What other comments would you like to share about this topic?
- Now we will transition to our famous “Anonymous Teapot” activity. Take a moment to think and write down a question or two or more and fold up the paper and place it in the teapot.
 - Leaders please add questions to the pot as well. This always adds to the conversation!
 - Put them out one at a time and have the leader take turns reading and answering them. Try to get through them all!

- (Leaders be sure to write down what questions keep coming up to see what you might need to spend more time talking about in the future. And take notes about what they learned about anger and what was helpful to them and unhelpful.)
- Finish with them writing some reflections down in their journals and praying together.

April Meeting 1: Introduce topic of prayer

- Prayer
- Share “highs and lows”
- Serve tea
- Quote to reflect on and Jesus Prayer
 - *“The heart itself is but a small vessel, yet dragons are there, and there are also lions; there are poisonous beasts and all the treasures of evil. But there too is God, the angels, the life and the kingdom, the light and the apostles, the heavenly cities and the treasures of grace—all things are there.”*
-- St. John Chrysostom, Homily 43.7
 - We introduce a new topic today - the topic of Prayer. As we are in Great Lent or perhaps not, depending on the year) this is a wonderful topic to focus on. I first want to talk about what we know of prayer before we go too far into the topic. Let’s think about what we hear in the services and what we read in the Holy Scriptures.
 - What kinds of prayers are there?
 - What kinds do you see in the Holy Scriptures?
 - Have them flip through the Psalms and read a few together in groups. What kind of prayers do you hear? Prayers of thanksgiving, lamentation, petition?
 - (Use Anthony Bloom’s book *Beginning to Pray* as a reference) This book talks about two kinds of prayers that we practice in the life of prayer.
 - One is rote prayer - prayers that are already prescribed or written down that have been prayed by the faithful for a long time. A good example of this would be our prayer rules including the Trisagion Prayers.
 - The second is extemporaneous prayer. This is a fancy word for prayers that are not planned, they are the ones that flow from your mouth and your heart in the moment. For example, if you were

hiking and you slipped near a steep edge, you may pray aloud, “Oh, dear Lord, save me!”

- What do you think the benefits of these different kinds of prayers are?
 - Rote prayers are very helpful for us in more than one way.
 - They help us find words to pray when we don’t have words or can’t find words to pray.
 - They teach us to pray as we pray them. They remind us “Thy will be done” not my own.
 - They can be called upon once they are memorized so these prayers are always with us.
 - Because they have been prayed by the faithful and helped the faithful, we know that these prayers are not only safe for us spiritually but they create saints.
- Extemporaneous prayers are helpful to us as well.
- These prayers are called forth usually in great emotional and spiritual turmoil or ecstasy. These are the words and prayers that flow out of our hearts and mouths when someone comes out of a dangerous surgery and the doctor says the procedure went exceptionally well. It’s the response we have when you hear a loved one is near death and needs prayers immediately. These are heightened moments in life where we experience intense feelings and spiritual experiences that words flow quickly and powerfully from our mouths. They are helpful in the moment.
 - Sometimes these prayers are just a word that is repeated “Jesus, Jesus!” or Perhaps “Help me, Lord!” or “Save me!” They are poignant.
 - These prayers are not the kind of prayers that can be sustained for long periods of time though. If we try to sustain these kinds of prayers, we often end up trying to manufacture feelings that are not there of “spiritual or emotional closeness to God”. The truth is, God feels close sometimes and at other times He does not. Either way, return to the rote prayers so you are not swayed by the emotions of the moment.
 - What do you think about these two kinds of prayers?
 - Can you think of a time you prayed extemporaneously and the situation seemed to really call for it?
 - Have you prayed rote prayers before when you didn’t feel like praying and had your heart warmed up to the prayers? What was that experience like?
 - Finish with them writing some reflections down in their journals and praying together.

April Meeting 2: On Prayer

- Prayer
- Share “highs and lows”
- Serve tea
- Quote to reflect on and the Jesus Prayer
 - *“St. John Chrysostom said 'Find the door of your heart, you will discover it is the door of the kingdom of God.' So it is inward that we must turn, and not outward - but inward in a very special way. I'm not saying that we must become introspective. I don't mean that we must go inward in the way one does in psychoanalysis or psychology. It is not a journey into my own inwardness, it is a journey through my own self, in order to emerge from the deepest level of self into the place where He is, the point at which God and I meet.”*
 - Anthony Bloom, *Beginning to Pray*
 - Discussion on Prayer: We will continue talking about prayer and looking at a few of the questions from this article. Tell me what questions you want to discuss together. (read the questions from the top of the article one time through. The read a second time through asking for them to tell which topics they wanted to discuss or focus on)
 - <http://www.orthodoxcustomstraditionsandpractices.com/learning-to-pray/>
 - Finish with them writing some reflections down in their journals and praying together.

May Meeting 1: On Prayer

- Prayer
- Share “highs and lows”
- Serve tea
- Quote to reflect on and the Jesus Prayer
 - *“Without winter there would be no spring, and without spring there would be no summer. So it is also in the spiritual life: a little consolation, and then a little grief—and thus little by little we work out our salvation. Let us accept everything from the hand of God. If He comforts us, let us thank Him. And if He doesn't comfort us—let us thank Him.”*
 - St. Anatoly of Optina

- For discussion: (consider looking at Schmemmann 's book For the Life of the World and talk to your priest for more references if needed.)
 - Why do we pray before meals?
 - Why do we pray after meals?
 - Why do we pray standing up?
 - Why do we pray corporately (or together in church)?
 - Why do we pray privately in our homes?
 - Why do we pray before we go to sleep?
 - Why do we pray when we arise from our beds?
- Finish with them writing some reflections down in their journals and praying together.

May Meeting 2: Review of our discussion on Prayer

- Prayer
- Share “highs and lows”
- Serve tea
- Quote to reflect on and the Jesus Prayer
 - *“You cannot, having never prayed before, start with eighteen hours of dialogue and prayer with God continuously like this while you do other things. But you can easily single out one or two moments and put all your energy into them. Simply turn your eyes Godwards, smile at Him and go into it. There are moments when you can tell God 'I simply must have a rest, I have not strength to be with You all the time', which is perfectly true. You are still not capable of bearing God's company all the time. Well, say so. God knows that perfectly well, whatever you do about it. Go apart, say for a moment 'I'll just have a rest. For a moment I accept to be less saintly'.”*
 - Anthony Bloom, *Beginning to Pray*
- For Discussion: Let’s open up our journals and review what we have covered about prayer thus far. We began with looking at the types of prayers in the Holy Scriptures. Do you remember what kind of prayers we see in the Scriptures?
 - Then we talked about two forms of prayer: rote prayer and extemporaneous prayer. Can you remember some of the benefits of rote prayer? Can you remember some of the benefits of extemporaneous prayer? (flip back to that lesson to review if they need a refresher)
 - Then we discussed some practical questions about how we pray and where.

- We discussed why we pray around meals and during certain times of day.
- What are you taking away with you about prayer? What are you hoping to implement into your prayer rule?
- What hurdles do you have to prayer?
 - How do we try to combat them?
 - Often we don't feel like praying. The Fathers say it is wise to read a quote from the Church Fathers or from the Scriptures. This can rouse the spirit to pray. Does anyone need help with out to have access to these types of resources?
 - Finish with them writing some reflections down in their journals and praying together.

June Meeting 1: Final Meeting

- Prayer
- Share “highs and lows”
- Serve ta
- Quote to reflect on the Jesus Prayer
 - *We are all called to pray without ceasing, says St. Paul in 1 Thess 5:17. The real questions is, how. The Jesus Prayer provides one good way to pray constantly. In fact, the Jesus Prayer is the most widespread and most specifically Orthodox spiritual prayer, according to Metropolitan Corneanu. Our task is to draw nearer to God. St. Isaac of Syria says that it is impossible to draw near to God by any means other than increasing prayer. (found on St. Vladimir's website)*
- Discussion: This is our final meeting for the school year. We have enjoyed the journey we have been on with you. We have covered four topics over the course of the academic year: friendship, beauty, anger, and we ended with prayer. Tonight is about the leaders hearing from you. We want to discuss the year and what we hoped to talk about in the future. (Be sure the leaders are taking notes during this time to record what feedback you receive from the girls.)
 - What did you appreciate about this group?
 - What would you like more of?
 - What would you like less of?
 - How often would you like to meet?
 - Do you want to meet over summer? (If we are able to schedule it and it works for the leaders)
 - What was your favorite topic?

- What was your least favorite topic?
- What was your favorite meeting?
- What do you hope to talk about in the future? (spend a good amount of time taking notes on this question so you can build a list to brainstorm for next year)
- Let's end the night with the "Anonymous Teapot". Pass out paper for them to write a question on and put in an empty teapot. Have the leaders answer the questions. And close the night out in having the girls write some reflections down in their journals.
- Finish with them writing some reflections down in their journals and praying together.

Ministry Origin and History

In 2013, Lauren Pulley (now Matuska Lauren!) had a vision for mentoring the young ladies at St. Athanasius Orthodox Church of America in Nicholasville, Kentucky. She had seen these girls grow up from babies to children to young ladies. She hoped to play a more intentional role in their lives and thought of creating a ministry where the girls were invited into her apartment and served tea while they discussed and prayed together. Lauren hoped to discuss spiritual matters and topics that would be better suited for girls ranging from 7th grade to seniors in high school. The ministry launched with her assistant Frederica Lewis and was instantly a hit with the young girls. The group consisted of about three faithful young ladies.

By the following year, the Pulleys were called to attend St. Vladimir's Seminary so Lauren needed to find someone to support Frederica with the ministry. Lindsay Buhler was brought on and helped play a supportive role during the year while also bringing her young baby with her to the meetings. The group grew in size and they were faithful in attending. They especially liked meeting over summer even though people missed due to traveling and such. It helped them stay anchored between academic years. We made t-shirts that matched and delighted in the joys of deepening mentorship.

The third year of the ministry, Frederica moved to pursue a career out of state and so Lindsay found someone to assist her in co-leading - Kathryn McCord. They continued to meet in a home and serve tea as always while discussing topics close to the girls' hearts which we did not cover yet.... Dating. We covered dating only briefly in past years because of the ages of our girls in attendance but since they were mostly in high school now, the topic was a pressing one to discuss. By this year, we established regular email correspondence with the mothers and the parish priest, Fr. Justin Patterson, to ensure we covered the topic of dating with full disclosure to the parents since this is truly a topic to be directed primarily by the parents. Email correspondence with the mothers turned out to be very fruitful and beneficial. They appreciated all that we were doing and they loved staying informed.

The fourth year of the ministry began without Lindsay Buhler as a leader because she moved away, and Sarah Werner was already helping out in youth ministry the past year,

so she was an obvious pick to replace and support Kathryn as they continued the ministry. This takes us to the present, the academic year of 2017-2018.

Afterward

This ministry can be a vital and life-giving ministry to the young women of a parish as they navigate the challenges of adulthood. If you are interested in implementing this ministry in your parish but still have questions about how to do so successfully, please contact Lindsay Buhler and she can direct you to the right people or answer your questions directly. Please pass along these materials to whomever you see fit. This is not for sale by others. It may be distributed freely to the faithful.

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