

Hands-On Sunday School

embodied * play-based * virtue-building

We teach through the body because of the Incarnation of Christ.

The Savior of us all, the Word of God, in His great love took to Himself a body and moved as Man among men, meeting their senses, so to speak, half way. He became Himself an object for the senses, so that those who were seeking God in sensible things might apprehend the Father through the works which He, the Word of God, did in the body. – St. Athanasius

guidelines:

1. **Teach with SPACE.** The room focuses on the prayer corner. Story areas and activity areas are based on church and faith themes so that children can learn through their whole bodies.
2. **Classroom flow is integrated into the layout of the class in order to establish a directed and predictable physical routine** every week. Some movements around the room will require carrying things, such as entering the room with a flower for the icon corner. The routines that you have every week will be routines that teach.

3. **Sensory-centric set up.** The room set up is based on the need for children to learn through all of their senses, including touch and movement.
4. **Transitions that teach.** When you move from one activity to another, give the children a thoughtful framework for their actions. Movements into the room, into story time, into activities, and into snack times can all be centered on a Christian theme. For instance, have children find lost sheep to bring to the Good Shepherd for story time.
5. **Repeat Lessons.** Base the lessons on the lectionary so that the children can relate their class experience to the Gospel they hear in church. Use the same scripture for 2-3 weeks, building the lessons up each week. The first week, provide a sensory means of learning. The second week, add a way to act out the story along with the sensory means. On the third lesson, enhance the

sensory experience to help the children apply the lesson from the previous two weeks. Along with these sensory changes, build like this: story with sensory anchor in week one, focus and expand on one part of the story in week two, apply the lesson to daily life and church life in week three.

6. Refer often to the Central Somatic Anchors of

Scripture and Tradition. These include: Trees, water, gardens, light, sheep, journeys, seeds, shelter, desert/wilderness, fishing, healing, family/being a people, reversal/contrasts.

7. Augmentative and alternative communication

(AAC). Use speech output devices, picture sequences, visual schedules and timers, and pictorial language to help all students communicate.

8. Choose one Gospel per 3 weeks/month based on the guidance of your priest and parish education

director. The lessons should fit with the overall goals of your community. If there is an overarching Sunday school theme, three weeks can be devoted to the Hands-On Series, with the other two weeks following the theme.

Mini Lessons to Be Used This Month

- The Bird Nest Game on Stillness ([Psalm 83:3](#))
 - The children work together to make a nest in front of an icon of the Savior. Around the room, “worms” (pool noodles), “leaves” (large cutouts), and “feathers” (real feathers on some tables) have been placed or hidden. The children pretend to be birds and go to gather these things and bring them back to the nest. When everyone gets back to the nest, they win. No matter how much they have to do, they always come back to rest by Christ. Stillness with Christ is the goal of all of our other activities.
- Every time the children come to the classroom, they will bring a candle and/or a flower from the boxes by the door to the candle stand and flower basket in the icon area across the classroom.

- Once all children are gathered, we will practice our cross. Then we will pray the Lord's Prayer. I will have several copies of a [visual Lord's Prayer](#) available as well.
- Every time the children are gathered and ready for story, they will find the lost sheep and bring them back to the Good Shepherd. They will sit down on the green carpet in front of the icon of the Good Shepherd in order to hear the story and watch the story sequence.
- When the story sequence has been told once, the children will help put it in order the second time.
- After sequence, the children will move to the sensory bin to act out the story. For the third week of a lesson, there will also be a "big" sensory element added, like a pretend boat for the fishing story.
- In the Duplo Church area, there will be peg dolls that the children can help decorate so that they can put themselves into the church they build.

- Wiggle waters/still waters
 - This game is one to help contrast wiggling and stillness. The teacher calls out, “Wiggle waters!” The children wiggle as much as they can until the teacher calls out, “Still waters!” Then they try their hardest not to move. If you move after “Still waters,” you’re out. Children try to be the last one who stays still.
 - At first this game is simply about contrasts, but when they get the hang of it, they will turn away from the prayer corner to wiggle and will turn toward the prayer corner for the still time. This helps them to learn and practice stillness in prayer (though they won’t be praying during the game).

- Jesus Prayer Matching
 - This is a [laminated visual sequence of the Jesus Prayer](#) that will be available for the children on the wall by the prayer corner as well as on the resource

shelf. The children match the pictures as they say the prayer.

- [Prayer Rope Lesson](#)

- This lesson goes along with showing what happens when we go around and around the prayer rope. Eventually, our hearts become lighter as we grow closer to God.
- This lesson is to place black circles on the floor and have the children step from circle to circle after first saying, “Lord, have mercy.” The reason for the whole-body movement is that many children lack coordination to use a prayer rope and become frustrated when they try it first without understanding. After stepping around the circle, they kiss the icon. On the second round, they get a balloon to raise after each time they pray, “Lord, have mercy,” to remind them of how we start to feel our burdens lighten when we pray to the Lord.

- The final part of the lesson is to hold the prayer ropes in their hands and walk around the circle saying, “Lord, have mercy.” This way they put together the words, ideas, and the new way to pray.
- The Sign of the Cross
 - We will practice making our cross before the Lord’s Prayer. We will sing the song from Presbyteria Gigi Shadid, “[God is the Boss.](#)”
- We will sing, “Let all that you do, be done in love. First Corinthians 16:14” in each class.

September 2019 Lectionary Texts

- September 1 (Ecclesiastical New Year): Luke 4:16-22
 - Jesus reads from Isaiah, scripture fulfilled
- September 8 (Sunday before Holy Cross): John 3:13-17
 - Moses lifted up serpent, Jesus lifted up, God so loved the world
- September 15 (Sunday after Holy Cross): Mark 8:34-38;9:1
 - Take up your cross
- September 22: Luke 5:1-11
 - LOTS of fish, fishers of men
- September 29: Luke 6:31-36
 - Love your enemies, be merciful

Hands-On Lesson Plans for September 2019

- September 1: Stillness Theme from Y2AM Ministry Plan
 - All children participate in Bird Nest building game as a way of orienting around Christ for stillness, rest, fulfillment, and the better way (like Christ's words about Mary who sat at His feet).
 - If there is additional time in the St. Nektarios (Hands-On) Classroom, we will enter with prayer and get acquainted with the room for a few minutes with the teachers' guidance. It's best that the children not be left alone in the room, since it needs to stay in order.

- September 8: Sunday before Holy Cross
 - Because the Elevation of the Holy Cross is a major feast, we will center the lesson on the Gospel lessons from the previous week and this one.
 - We will read aloud the lesson from last week, [Luke 4:16-22](#)
 - There will be a large box in the story area with a large icon of the Lord. Because Christ fulfilled the scripture, we will look in the box to find out what the scripture means.

- Inside the box are smaller gift boxes with items that represent the things that Jesus read from Isaiah and fulfilled in Himself: googly eyes to represent the eyes of the blind being opened, squishy hearts (or hearts cut from pretty paper) to represent the good news preached to the poor, and the Bible verse with the key and cross printed on the back to represent the release of captives, liberty to the oppressed, and acceptable year of the Lord. Another option for older children is to have a paper doll with no moving parts, and to add brads to help the arms move to represent liberty to the oppressed.
- The remainder of the lesson time will be devoted to prayer, making our Cross (since Holy Cross is later that week), and becoming acquainted with the patterns in the classroom.
- September 15, 22, 29: Three-Week Series Begins
 - Each week we will read [Luke 5: 1-11](#)
 - We will place the visual sequence on the wall after the first reading. (See pdf called Fishers of Men)
 - After the first sequence, we will read again and have the children place the sequence pages.

- We will then switch to acting out the story. We will have a big fishing net to act out the casting of a net all night without catching anything. When we get to the part where Jesus tells them to cast into the deep, we will pour a bunch of felt fish into the net. Everyone will pretend they are heavy and that they are sinking the boat. We will ask the question, “How do we fish for people?” and build up the discussion a little every week.
- Next, we will move to the sensory bin, which a teacher will open. In the sensory bin, there will be over 100 plastic fish mixed in with water beads. On top of the water beads will be two boats like in the story. Teachers will talk through the story while demonstrating the story, and they will hold out an empty net for the part where Peter, James and John caught no fishes. But they cast out into the deep because Jesus asked them, and then...The kids get a fishing net and try to catch enough fish to sink the boats.
- On the last week, we will bring in a sensory pod, which looks like a giant inflatable canoe. After the sequencing, we will

have children take turns volunteering to act out the story in the boat as Jesus or a disciple.

- Some themes to guide the direction of the discussion while we act out the story with the net: We will notice that at Pentecost the Holy Spirit caught the whole world in His net. We will ask what kind of things make us closer to God? What “catches” us? When do we notice God? Why did Simon Peter cast his net anyway? (He trusted Jesus.)

Classroom Areas

- [The Prayer Corner](#) (links to tutorial)
 - Every part of the prayer area is accessible to children. They can reach the icons for veneration. The prayer ropes are where they can touch them. There are visual prayers on the wall nearby. The pattern of praying with felt candles and flowers is built into the class flow, and children can offer more candles if they'd like.
- Living Icons Area
 - To help learn about saints, including our patrons, we have height-adjustable golden halos on the wall alongside clothing and symbols often seen in icons. The children can learn about the language of icons by dressing up as their patrons or touching the elements (such as laurel crowns and crosses for martyrs) that appear in the church's visual prayers.
- Christ the Good Shepherd Story Center
 - The icon on the wall adjacent to the prayer corner centers the story center. There is a "grassy" green rug for children to gather on for story after finding the lost lambs (small

stuffed sheep that will be hidden around the room ahead of time to remind them every week that Christ seeks and saves that which is lost). Next to the icon is a wall with Velcro tabs so that we can lay out the story sequences each week.

- Sensory Bin Story Enhancement Area
 - Every week there will be some sort of tactile element to help the children touch the story. For the lessons around water, it will be water beads (no spills and easier to clean than water). For desert or wilderness, kinetic sand. For seed parables, a few pounds of mustard seeds or beans. For gardens or feasts of the Theotokos or the Myrrh-bearers, rose petals and/or lavender petals.
- Duplo Church
 - This is an Orthodox Church made of Duplos with peg dolls that represent the children. We will sometimes demonstrate feasts or processions using the Duplo church. The children can also play with it during free time if there is any.
- We Are Living Stones

- This foam block area is framed by the [scripture I Peter 2:4-6](#) where we learn that we are building on Christ, the cornerstone, and no one who trusts in Him will be put to shame.
- The foam blocks will be used both formally and informally in many lessons. For instance, I expect that we will build a boat from the blocks for the lessons on the Fishers of Men.
- Scripture posters
 - Relevant scriptures will be posted on the wall near the areas. For instance, by the sensory bin, “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”
 - There will also be a poster of I Corinthians 16:14 near the prayer corner, because we sing it every week. “Let all that you do be done in love. I Corinthians 16:14.”