

# Religions of Star Trek

## Lesson 2: The Prime Directive

Star Date 2.07.2021

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**Objectives:** Exploring the *Prime Directive* and how it relates to the Seven UU Principles and the Five Core Questions.

**Materials:** Teachers should download lesson plan and attachments onto their desktop, **login to Unity's YouTube account.**

**Time allotment:** Suggested for 60 minute online class.

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### 1. Zoom Welcome (as youth arrive into the breakout classroom)

- Teachers and youth are expected to log on to zoom at 11:15am (15 min before class begins at 11:30am) so that everyone can be organized into correct breakout classrooms. We want to make sure there is an attentive adult in each breakout classroom with youth.
- Greet youth and ask everyone to correct their display name as needed. Ask everyone to select "gallery view" to see everyone else.
- Staff will attend to attendance.

### 2. Zoom Icebreaker: Show and Tell (5 minutes, begin while waiting for everyone to arrive)

Invite each youth to get *a pet, a plant, or a picture* that is important to them. Have them share, one at a time, about what they chose and why.

### 3. Chalice Lighting

Light a chalice at your home, invite youth to light their own chalices and say together: "*We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith, the light of truth and the warmth of love.*"

**Teacher reads:** (from creator of Star Trek, Gene Roddenberry)

*"The strength of a civilization is not measured by its ability to fight wars, but rather by its ability to prevent them."*

### 4. Brief Check-in (5 minutes)

Continue weekly ritual/check-in (e.g. sharing a joy or sorrow so that everyone feels present in class).

5. **(Re)Introduce the Seven UU Principles and the Five Questions** (10 minutes)

**Screen share** lesson attachment 2a (Seven UU Principles and Five Core Theological Questions).

- Teachers help remind and familiarize youth to these fundamentals of our church.

**Screen share (with audio)** Gene Roddenberry introducing the pilot episode “The Cage”: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4crko7wlbpw> (7:36 min)

**Questions for Discussion:**

Gene Roddenberry delivered a very different kind of story instead of the “space western” that film producers wanted. He was particularly interested in the human condition and our place in the universe.

- How do the UU principles and core questions relate to what he was trying to explore?
- Can you think of any episodes or scenes from Star Trek that address any of these questions or similar principles?

6. **Introduction to Star Trek’s Prime Directive** (15 minutes)

**Teacher asks:** Who can tell us what the “Prime Directive” is?

**Screen share** lesson attachment 2b (Prime Directive) and invite three different youth to read each version of the Prime Directive aloud:

- (a) The Prime Directive was introduced in the Original Star Trek series. This is how it was first defined:

*“No identification of self or mission. No interference with the social development of said planet. No references to space or the fact that there are other worlds or civilizations.”* (from Episode “Bread and Circuses”)

- (b) Later the Prime Directive was defined more fully, becoming a very complicated Star Fleet Order with 47 known sub-orders. But we are not going to get that geeky. The Star Trek website “Memory Alpha” describes it this way:

*“The Prime Directive, also known as Starfleet General Order 1 or the Non-Interference Directive, was the embodiment of one of Starfleet’s most important ethical principles: noninterference with other cultures and civilizations. At its core was the philosophical concept that covered personnel should refrain from interfering in the natural, unassisted, development of societies, even if such interference was well-intentioned. The Prime Directive was viewed as so fundamental to Starfleet that officers swore to uphold the Prime Directive, even at the cost of their own life or the lives of their crew.”*

- (c) Or another way of putting it...

*The Prime Directive was put in place to protect the right of each sentient species to live in accordance with its normal cultural evolution. This right is considered sacred, no Star Fleet personnel may interfere with the healthy development of alien life and culture.*

*Such interference includes the introduction of superior knowledge, strength, or technology to a world whose society is incapable of handling such advantages wisely. Star Fleet personnel may not violate this Prime Directive, even to save their lives and/or their ship unless they are acting to right an earlier violation or an accidental contamination of said culture. This directive takes precedence over any and all other considerations, and carries with it the highest moral obligation.*

## 7. Questions for Discussion:

- Do you understand what this means?
- Why do you think this was put forward as being important?
- Can you think of any current or historical events that might cause debate about the “Prime Directive” or what it means? (E.g. war in Syria and our foreign policy)
- Do you think it would be easy to follow?
- What UU principles does this remind you of?

## 8. The Prime Directive in the Original Series (15 minutes)

**Teacher summarizes:** There are many Original Series episodes that deal with the Prime Directive and with correcting problems that arise by failure to follow it... along with many jokes made about how many times Captain Kirk himself breaks this “rule” even after he has said the following:

*“A starship captain’s most solemn oath is that he will give his life, even his entire crew, rather than violate the Prime Directive.”* (James T. Kirk, from episode “Omega Glory”)

**Watch** some clips that show how the Original Series dealt with violations of the non-interference rule:

- In “Patterns of Force,” Kirk and Spock try to correct problems caused when a Federation cultural observer influences a society to emulate a Nazi-style culture:  
**Screen share (with audio)** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5c6Mcy3Ynrl> (3:12 min)
- In “A Piece of the Action,” the Enterprise has been ordered to a planet where a space vessel had been reported missing 100 years earlier. Kirk and his crew arrive to find a culture like Chicago in the 1920s period, and most of the residents appear to be gangsters carrying Tommy guns. They discover that an Earth book *Chicago Mobs of the Twenties* was left by the crew of the earlier space vessel, which became a guiding source for the planet’s inhabitants: They modeled their society based on 1920s Chicago! And the gangs now want Kirk to supply them with phasers to use

against their enemies. Kirk and his crew try to correct this accidental influence that has created a world of gangsters, but it doesn't quite work:

**Screen share (with audio)** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5o1rH63laDA> (3:53 min) with episode ending <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FbBuNGVDNCM> (2:04 min)

**Questions for Discussion:**

- What did you think about how they tried to fix things?
- What do you think influenced Star Trek writers of that era? (*Hint: think about 1960s in American culture.*)
- How do you think the “Cowboy/Adventure” genre of many shows of the time may have shaped how Gene Roddenberry thought about the Prime Directive?

**9. The Prime Directive in the Next Generation Series** (10 minutes)

**Teacher Summarizes:** The Next Generation Series faced many of the same criticisms about breaking the Prime Directive. Captain Picard and his crew ran into many missions where the Prime Directive was something they had to deal with. Many of the Next Generation Star Trek (NGST) writer's found the Prime Directive a rich idea source from which they could explore social and character issues. From Captain Picard:

*“The Prime Directive is not just a set of rules. It is a philosophy, and a very correct one. History has proven, again and again, that whenever mankind interferes with a less developed civilization, no matter how well intentioned that interference may be, the results are invariably disastrous.”* (Jean-Luc Picard, from episode “Symbiosis”)

**Watch** a clip where the crew of the Enterprise wrestle with how to apply the Prime Directive:

- This is a clip from the NGST episode “Pen Pals.” Data has been in contact with a little girl who is on a doomed planet. The crew debates what they should and shouldn't do to help:

**Screen share (with audio)** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3kMiL1LBDvo> (4:24 min)

**Questions for Discussion:**

- Why do you think it is so hard to follow the Prime Directive?
- What different issues does the Enterprise crew have to weigh when facing these situations?
- How could those issues relate to our world right now? (*E.g. giving military aid to one side of a conflict.*)

- Looking at the Seven UU Principles and the Five Questions, which ones might relate to the issues raised by the Prime Directive?

**10. Announcement:** Next Sunday, there is no RE class because of Presidents' Day Weekend.

**11. Extinguish the chalice,** saying together: *“May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts.”*

**12. Leave zoom breakout classroom:** wait until all youth have left, click “Leave” then “Leave Meeting.”

## Viewing clips, in order of sequence:

- Gene Roddenberry introducing the pilot episode “The Cage”  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4crko7wIbpw> (7:36 min)
- In “Patters of Force,” Kirk and Spock try to correct problems caused when a Federation cultural observer influences a society to emulate a Nazi-style culture:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5c6Mcy3YnrI> (3:12 min)
- In “A Piece of the Action,” the gangs now want Kirk to supply them with phasers to use against their enemies. Kirk and his crew try to correct this accidental influence that has created a world of gangsters, but it doesn't quite work:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5o1rH63IaDA> (3:53 min)  
with episode ending <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FbBuNGVDNCM> (2:04 min)
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