



Lesson #2

Meet John Winebrenner!



Scripture Reference: Acts 20:28 2 Cor. 13:14



Goal: Our church is part of a denomination founded by John Winebrenner.

Most children attend Worship or Sunday School at a church of their parents' choosing. While they may be familiar with the name of their church, they probably know very little about that church's specific beliefs or even that it is only one part of a whole denomination. This lesson is designed to help the children become acquainted with the concept of what a denomination is and more specifically, with the Churches of God denomination and its beginnings. By taking part in the interactive activities listed, children will get a glimpse of the past and how it relates to them today.



Opening Activity:

(For this activity, you need a chair for each child.)

Arrange the chairs in a circle and have the children sit on them. Choose three or four types of fruit and whisper the name of one type of fruit into the ear of each child. Assign yourself a type of fruit, also. Each fruit should be used about the same number of times. For instance, you might have 4 children be bananas,

4 others apples, 3 grapes, and 3 pears. Begin by standing in the middle of the circle. Explain that you are going to play a game called "Upset the Fruit Basket!" You will call out the name of a fruit. Everyone who is that type of fruit must trade places. At the same time you will try to take one of their places, leaving someone else standing in the middle to call the name of another fruit. Instead of just calling out one type of fruit, a person may call out 2 kinds or may say, "Upset the Fruit Basket!" at which time everyone must switch places.

Play the game for about 10 minutes, then ask: **How did it feel to be the person left standing in the middle, to be "locked out" of a seat? Most of us didn't like being in the middle. It made us feel singled out – not a part of the whole. Today we're going to meet a visitor from the past who experienced that same feeling first hand. He may not have been "locked out" of a seat like we were, but he was "locked out" of his church.**



Bible Experience:

(This activity consists of a monologue portrayal of John Winebrenner, the founder of our denomination. You may dress in character and present the monologue yourself using the script provided below, find someone else who would be willing to do so.

If someone is dressing in character, you will need clothing similar to what a man would have worn during the 1800's.

(If you are dressing for the part, you may wish to arrange ahead of time for another adult to stay with your class while you get into costume.)

Gather the children together in front of the area from which the monologue will be presented.

Script*

Come into the room dressed in 1800's period clothing. Stand in front of the children as you address them.

Good morning. My name is John Winebrenner. I come to you this morning in the name of Jesus, to tell you a little bit about myself and about some new churches I started. I am a minister of the Gospel. I spend my days telling other people how much Jesus loves them and how He wants them to stop sinning and live according to the Bible. However, I must warn you, not everyone has always agreed with what I've said and done. I'm also known to be rather long-winded, but seeing how you are of a young nature, I promise not to go beyond my time limit this day.

I was born on March 25, 1797 in a log house in Frederick County, Maryland. My parents, Philip and Eve Winebrenner, had a total of six children; I was number five. We spoke mainly English and some German in the home

where I grew up. My family attended a church called the German Reformed Church, but my mother was the main one who taught me about God. Even as a child, I knew I wanted to be a minister. I used to preach to my friends, and if none of them were willing to listen, I would go out into the forests and preach to the trees.

Growing up in the country, I attended a country schoolhouse until I was old enough to be sent into the town of Frederick to the academy. An academy would be similar to what you call a high school. When I had graduated from the academy, I went away to Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. My mother was pleased that I was going to become a minister. My father was not. He wanted me to be a doctor or a lawyer or a storeowner. Perhaps he felt I would spend my life as a minister being poor because they were not paid very much money. Money was not of great importance to me. I only wanted to do what I knew *God* wanted me to do. I never did finish college, but I was able to work alongside another minister who trained me. Before long, I was assigned to my first church. Actually, my first church or pastorate was four churches. Some of the churches I would preach at two Sundays each month, while others I would only speak at one Sunday each month. One of the churches was known as the Salem Reformed Church in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. It was this church that had a hand in me starting the Churches of God denomination of which your church is a part.

I worked really hard at my four churches. I started Sunday School classes. I taught the people how important it was to pray and to tell others about Jesus. I even helped to build a new church building for the Salem Church. I served God with all my heart, and with all my soul, and with all my strength.

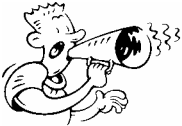
As I mentioned earlier, however, not everyone agreed with what I said and did. One Sunday when I arrived at the Salem Church to preach, I noticed several people standing outside. When I tried to open the door, I understood why they were standing there. The door was locked! The people who didn't like my way of preaching and teaching were inside the church. They locked the door to keep me (and anyone who happened to agree with me) from entering. We had been locked out of our own church! Can you imagine?!

They thought they would discourage us and force us to do things their way. But that wasn't the way *God* told me to do things. I walked to the banks of the Susquehanna River, followed by all the others who had been locked out. There we had our own worship service. We decided we would start a new church, a church like those talked about in the book of Acts in the Bible, the church of God. In fact, we wouldn't just start one new church but hundreds, even thousands, across the whole United States, and we would call them all Churches of God. Yours was one of those churches.

I guess the lesson I hope you all learned today, in addition to learning a little about how your church got its start, is that we need to listen

to God first. Others may give us advice on what to do or how to do it, but we need to do what God tells us to do. He is perfect, and He knows best.

It seems I've reached my time limit, so I will bid you farewell. In the words of the great missionary Paul, "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." (2 Cor. 13:14 NIV) *Walk out of the room.*



Life Application:

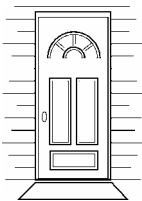
(For this activity, you will need a simple puzzle or map of the United States, a small amount of poster putty, colorful pushpins, and a copy of the attached paper containing the list of states currently having Churches of God.

If using a puzzle, you may put it together ahead of time or allow the students to put it together in class.)

Say: John Winebrenner helped to start many new churches across the United States. What name did he give to all those churches? What is the name of our church? All the churches John Winebrenner started joined together to form a denomination. A denomination is a group of churches that believe the same things about God. Our church is a part of the denomination started by Winebrenner; the denomination's official name is Churches of God, General Conference. Let's see which states currently have Churches of God in them.

Lay out the map or puzzle of the United States and the sheet of paper with the state names listed. Allow the children to each choose a state name. Help the children to locate the individual states. Have them place a small ball of putty on each of those states on the map and gently stick a pushpin in the putty/dough, being careful not to push it all the way through to the map or puzzle. Continue until all the states on the list have been located.

Say: John Winebrenner had a dream of starting new churches across the United States. By looking at our map, we can see his dream came true. Though Winebrenner died in 1860, his dream continues to live on. New Churches of God are being started each year throughout the United States and even in some other countries. We'll learn about those in a future lesson.



Closing Activity:

(For this activity, you will need notebook paper, pencils, a sheet of white construction paper, a sheet of black construction paper, a black marker, and poster putty.

Ahead of time, cut the white construction paper a little smaller than the black, mounting the white paper on the black to create a framed effect. On the white paper, write the caption "Dear John." Post this in plain view on the wall of your classroom.)

Say: **John Winebrenner was a dreamer, but he also was a brave man, a man who trusted God. He was willing to do whatever God asked him to do, even if other people didn't agree with him. Have you ever had to take a stand for what you believe in? What happened? It sounds like many of you have learned to trust God much like John Winebrenner did. We know the John Winebrenner we met earlier in our lesson was just someone dressed up portraying him because the real John Winebrenner died over 140 years ago. But if you could write him a letter today, what would you say to him or ask him? We're going to do that right now.**

Have the children write "Dear John" letters, either expressing thanks for what he did or posing any questions they would like to ask him. When finished, hang these letters on the wall around the "Dear John" sign. Conclude by saying: **Today we learned about the man who started our denomination. Next Sunday we'll discover what our denomination believes about the Bible.**

***Resources used:**

Kern, Richard, John Winebrenner: 19th Century Reformer, Harrisburg, PA: Central Publishing House, 1974.

States Currently Having Churches of God

Arizona

Arkansas

California

Florida

Georgia

Illinois

Indiana

Iowa

Kansas

Maryland

Michigan

Mississippi

Missouri

New Mexico

New York

North Carolina

Ohio

Oklahoma

Pennsylvania

South Carolina

Texas

Virginia

West Virginia