

IDEAS FOR INCLUDING CHILDREN IN YOUR STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM



INVOLVE

Create a Team to Look at Everything Through the Eyes of a Child: Children learn through observation. Sometimes adults understand what is happening, yet a child might perceive a very different meaning in the same experience. Often, that other lesson is at variance from the intended one. For example, what does a child learn when the offering plate reaches him or her and most of the adults in front have not made a gift? Adults may understand that they have mailed a check to the church at the beginning of the month, but the child sees only that many, if not most, of the adults give nothing. When you have a group searching out these incongruous teachings, it will help reduce the confusion of children and provide consistent teachings of discipleship within the faith community.

Pray For, With and About the Growth of the Children of Your Church: Children are not only the future of the church, they are its present! Adults have much to teach children in their spiritual growth and maturation as disciples of Jesus Christ. Children have much to teach adults in their openness to the wonders of God's creation and the movement of the Holy Spirit in individual, familial and congregational lives. Children can be teachers as well as learners about being good stewards of God's gifts to us.

Include Stewardship in "Children's Time": During this special time in worship, include lessons or stories about giving and receiving, helping others with the resources one has, responding to people in need, and similar themes that teach the practice of stewardship. This is especially fertile during periods of stewardship emphasis, such as your annual or capital campaign.

Let a Child Place the Family Offering in the Plate: Explain to the child prior to the worship service that when the offering is received, he or she will be the family representative to place it in the plate. Make this a special responsibility with significant personal acknowledgement.

Involve Children in the Annual Stewardship Campaign: Sunday school classes can focus on gifts of time, talent and treasure during successive weeks. Enlist a couple of children to "share their story" in worship, interpreting the significance the ministries of the church have to them and their families. Prepare bright, colorful commitment cards for children and receive them on Commitment Sunday with the rest of the church.

INFORM

Teach Comprehensive Stewardship: Christian stewardship is more than giving money; it deals with all of our spiritual gifts. Help children identify the spiritual gifts that God has given them to be the unique person they are. Teach them about the management of their time, talents and energy, as well as their money.

Tell Stories...Lots of Stories: Tell biblical stories; ones from books; popular stories told to children; stories about how the ministries of the church are helping others, especially children. They help them to understand the love and activity of God; describing ways in which God's people can respond with gifts that have first come from God. The purpose is for children to recognize that God is the source of all that we have and all that we have belongs to God. Stories of service, sacrifice and compassion teach values, provide a stabilizing context for life, and elicit lively responses.

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INSPIRE

Make Giving Celebrative: Help children experience joy and pleasure in giving. Let them know that through their gifts they are not "giving up" anything; rather they are responding to God's love.

Provide Materials and Support to Parents to Teach Money Management and Christian Stewardship at Home: Encourage parents to use these available materials by providing them with training or support groups.

Teach Tithing at Home: Encourage families to have multiple receptacles or "piggy banks" for children so that when they receive allowance, gifts or earnings, it can be quickly divided between savings, a tithe of 10% to God, and the balance for expenditure on self, family and friends. Parents do not have to say a word to children to pass on decisions, priorities, commitments and habits, as they can model the behavior they want to teach in an effective manner.

IMPLEMENT

Use Envelopes: They help children learn planning and excitement about giving and the regularity of giving. Invite them to color and adorn their envelopes and then display them after they have completed their function as containers for offering. Each envelope should have a place for their name and a place to record gifts of time, talent and/or treasure for the week. Encourage parents to support their child by:

- Writing the child's name on the box of envelopes
- Remembering to bring the envelope to church each week
- Teach the child to remember their envelope each week
- Plan the offering ahead of time, such as at mealtime or bedtime
- Have the child fill out the information on the envelope
- Placing artwork made during the worship service in the envelope and offer it as well
- Remembering together the gifts that they have made

Plan Special Offerings which Engage Children: Have periodic offerings that challenge children and allow them to succeed in meeting an ambitious goal. Objectives such as the Heifer Project allow diversity in financial goals; chickens cost less than sheep, and sheep cost less than cows. There is a tremendous amount of learning that occurs about geographical, cultural and religious perspectives in such an offering.

Plan Special Offerings of Children's Objects: Items such as toys, children's books, or new underwear can be offered, with children helping to deliver, distribute or ship them after all has been received.

Publicize, Study and Implement a "Children's Charter": It would be designed by parents, workers with children, and educators to publicize the role and urgency of ministries to, for, and with children. See an example of a "Children's Charter" on page 23.

Involve. Inform. Inspire. Implement.

A CHILDREN'S CHARTER TO THE CHURCH*

NURTURE TO THE CHILD

Children are a heritage from the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is a gift.
- Psalm 127:4

The Church is called

- To receive, nurture and treasure each child as a gift from God;
- To proclaim the gospel to children, in ways that empower them to receive and respond to God's love;
- To give high priority to the quality of planning for children and the preparation and support of those who minister to them; and
- In fulfillment of the Baptismal covenant, to include children as members and full participants in the Eucharistic community and in the church's common life of prayer, witness and service.

MINISTRY TO THE CHILD

Then Jesus took the children in his arms, placed his hands on each of them, and blessed them.
- Mark 10:16

The Church is called

- To love, shelter, protect and defend children within its own community and in the world, especially those who are abused, neglected, or in danger;
- To nurture and support families in caring for their children, acting in their children's best interest, and recognizing and fostering their children's spirituality and unique gifts;
- To embrace children who seek Christian nurture independently of their parents' participation in the church; and
- To advocate for the integrity of childhood and the dignity of all children at every level of our religious, civic, and political structures.

MINISTRY TO THE CHILD

A little child shall lead them.
- Isaiah 11:6

The Church is called

- To receive children's special gifts as signs of the Reign of God;
- To foster community beyond the family unit, in which children and adults know each other by name, minister to each other, and are partners together in serving Christ in the world; and
- To appreciate children's abilities and readiness to represent Christ and His church, bear witness to Him wherever they may be, and according to gifts given them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world, and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the church.

* The Most Reverend Frank Griswold, an Episcopalian priest, originally prepared this charter for a national conference on children's ministries.