INTRODUCING STEWARDSHIP TO CHILDREN

Using Well What God Gives Me
Matthew 25: 14-30

Introduction
Most everyone knows that as the weather starts to get colder the trees get ready for winter by dropping their leaves - and in the case of some trees, dropping their seeds all over the ground. (Show an example of a maple or oak seed)

I have a special tree in my yard that's sort of a favorite - and so I have mixed feelings during the time of year that the leaves fall. I love to watch the leaves turn colors, but I hate to see them all drop off. But as for the seeds, I'm always glad to see them fall. Do you know why? (Ask: What happens when a plant's seeds get scattered?)

That's right! Every year when my favorite tree drops its seeds it helps to make new trees. And so what started as one tree in my yard has become four! Every year we seem to have more. What a waste it would be if that tree never dropped its seeds.

Jesus once told a story about a man who gave money to three of his servants. Two of them went out and used that money to buy and trade things and ended up making even more money (kind of like my tree used its seeds to make more trees). But the third was so worried about losing the money he was given that he went and buried it to keep it safe. He didn't lose any of the money - but he also wasn't able to use it to make any more.

Like many of Jesus' stories, he tells this one to help teach us a lesson: God doesn't want us to hide our gifts and blessings. Instead he wants us to use them to spread his love and his message in the world. When we do, we help inspire others to do the same. It's like we're planting seeds that keep growing more and more of God's works in the world.

1. Have the children tell about a time when they have been asked to take care of something that didn’t belong to them (helping with a neighbor’s dog, watering their mother’s plant, playing with someone else’s toy, etc.). Allow them time to think and
share and follow up with questions such as: How does it feel to do a good job? How does it feel when you don’t do your best?

2. From a translation that children can understand well, read the story from Matthew 25:14-30 about how the workers took care of the things the master gave to them. For younger children, point to what you are reading so they will understand that this story is directly from the Bible. For older children, ask them to open their own Bibles and follow along as you read. A good older reader may even read some or the entire story for the class. Emphasize that some of the workers did a good job following the master’s request but someone did not.

3. Draw the children’s attention to this lesson’s title: Using Well What God Gives Me. Ask them what they think the title means? In the Bible story, the workers were given money to use well. Ask the children to think about whether money is the only thing that God gives to us to use well?

4. Invite the children to help make a list (on sheets of paper or on the chalkboard) of things that they know that God expects them to have responsibility over. As the children mention various things, which will likely include material items, encourage them to think of not only their belongings but also think about their friends and family. Give time for this activity and guide the children’s thoughts so that they can realize that actually everything that they have ultimately comes from God.

5. Have the children fill out the Talent Resume (Appendix A). When finished, help the children to choose one thing (a tangible item, a talent, an idea, or a character trait) from their list that they know God has given to them. Help them as they try to decide what they will choose. A child might have a happy smile that they share easily or be good at playing the piano or always show a sharing attitude, etc. Help the children understand that all that they have comes from God. Just as in the Bible story when the master entrusted his possessions to the workers (Matthew 25:14), God trusts each of us with the things He chooses to place in our lives. Children can also understand that God puts things in our lives matched to exactly what He knows is best for each of us, just as the master in the Bible story matched what he gave to each worker (Matthew 25:15).

6. Ask the children what happened to the worker who did not use what the master gave to him correctly. Help them to understand that whatever God has given to them as a blessing is something that He expects them to use to bless others. Children may also realize that when a person uses what God gives in a wise way, just as the worker
in the Bible story (Matthew 25:21), God recognizes and celebrates what that person does.

7. Using Appendix B as a guide, let the children talk about the ways they can use their talents and abilities to help around their own parish and home.

8. Provide each child with a copy of the Commitment Card (Appendix C). Help them write the one thing (which they have previously chosen from their own Talent Resume or from the list of Parish Opportunities) that God has given to them as a blessing and three ways that they can use it to bless someone else. For instance, if the child plays the piano, he might agree to play a song for an older neighbor who does not have many friends. If the child saves her allowance regularly, she might give an extra offering to help her church’s mission to the poor. If the boys and girls want to combine their funds, they might ask the priest about someone in their community who needs some help to buy groceries. Every person counts and everything God has given to us can be used to bless someone else. Guide the children’s thinking at this point since ideas such as this may be hard to consider initially. However, once the children understand the concept, they will quickly suggest ways to use their God-given abilities to bless others.

9. If there is time, conclude with the “Stewardship Popcorn” fun exercise.

Follow-Up
1. Ask each child to take their commitment card and show it to his or her priest, asking how he or she might follow-through with this commitment.
2. Ask the children to share the letter (Appendix E) about this study with parents.
APPENDIX A

TALENT RESUME

My Name ________________________________
My School ______________________________
My Age ____________
1.) I think I am good at ________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

2.) Others tell me I am good at ________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

3.) I am creative when it comes to ________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

4.) The best feature of my personality is ________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

5.) I think I work best with (age group) ________________________________

6.) Some jobs I have successfully completed are ________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Opportunities to Use My Talents at my Parish Church and at Home

- Singing in the choir
- Helping with the kitchen work at coffee hour
- Serving at the altar (boys)
- Help teachers in Sunday School
- Watching my younger brother or sister
- Washing dishes/setting the table
- Tutorial services
- Shovel snow/rake leaves/mow lawns
- Run errands for the homebound
- Bring pets to visit the elderly
- Extra chores around the house
- Help keep their school clean
- Plan and perform plays in church
- Organize a walk-a-thon or read-a-thon
- Toy drives
- Clothing drives
- Youth Stewardship Committee
MY STEWARDSHIP COMMITMENT

Name: ________________________________

This is the talent I have discovered God has given me to use:

________________________________________

I promise to share my talent so that others can be blessed in the following ways:

1. 
2. 
3. 

This is when I will do it:

________________________________________

Signed: ________________________________

Date: ________________________________
“Stewardship Popcorn” Exercise

A group of family and friends are gathered around a table. A popcorn popper, salt, butter, and a container for the popped corn are placed on a table. Give to each person one kernel of unpopped popcorn to hold.

Remind them that it is hard, small, insignificant and unappetizing by itself. Discuss what is within the shell (the white, fluffy, popped corn) and how to get the insides out (heat). Then gather the kernels, enough necessary to make a full batch of popcorn. Prepare to drop the kernels into the popper. Before proceeding, explain the symbols:

- **The CORN = US**  We are potentially beautiful, with just the right talents, when we “go-it” with God. We are hard and unappetizing without Him.
- **The POPPER = CHURCH**  Into which Jesus invites us all
- **The HEAT = GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT**  Who brings out of us the person we should be and the talents we need. Together, with other kernels, we become God’s sweet smelling community.
- **The SALT and BUTTER or SPREAD = SACRAMENTS**  The Sacraments make us more flavorful and appealing, more Christ-like. They give us the strength to continue sharing ourselves with others.

Then let the popping begin. Notice how some of the kernels, like people, respond more quickly and that, when they are filled with the heat (the Holy Spirit), all dance around, even over-flowing the popper (Church).

When the corn is popped, eat it.

The lesson is not over. Some of the kernels do not pop. They were in the same heat for the same length of time. That is like the people who come to Church but don’t let it make any difference in their everyday lives or those who don’t come to Church at all.
Letter to Parents

July, 2010

Dear Parents:

Glory be to Jesus Christ!

Christ Himself has called each of us, including our children, into a life of stewardship. We must provide them with opportunities to know the joy of accepting this call. When we do this while they are young, it becomes the way they choose to live their lives.

All that we have and all that we are comes as a gift from our very generous God. Stewardship teaches us to be grateful for the gifts entrusted to us. We each have a responsibility to make a plan for how we will return a portion of our gifts of time, talent, and treasure in service to others. We have all been blessed in certain ways.

As parents, it is important that you help your children recognize and nurture the talents received. We each make a difference when we share our gifts. An important way you impact the lives of your children is to model a life of stewardship by giving of your time, talents, and treasure for the good of others and by helping your children find opportunities to do the same.

Finally, we ask that you support your parish and our God-blessed Diocese as we strive to educate all of our Diocesan faithful about the true meaning of Christian stewardship.

Blessings,

The Stewardship Commission
The American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese