



Orthodox Stewardship: Responding to God's Gifts
***Educational Materials in Connection with the
Fellowship of Orthodox Stewards (FOS)***
Lesson Outline- Teacher Guide

Developed through a combined effort of the Orthodox Church in America's
Department of Youth, Young Adult, and Campus Ministry and
Department of Christian Education

Purpose: These lessons are intended to be a short addition to your regular church school lessons during the month of September in connection with the appeal for the Fellowship of Orthodox Stewards. However, they can be used at any time. They are designed to help instill the Orthodox understanding of stewardship among Orthodox Christians, young and old.

In addition to the mini-lessons provided below, be sure to copy and distribute the enclosed handout for students to take home and discuss with their families.

For more information on teaching children about stewardship in a family setting read *Giving Children the Chance to Give* by Father Paul Kucynda. This is found in the Resource Handbook for Lay Ministries available online at http://www.oca.org/pages/min_orgs/Resource-Handbook/Stewardship-Education/childrenchance.html.

Teacher Background Information

All of life is a gift, a free gift, given to us by God. This one basic truth frames our relationship with God and one another. It also contains the most important truth about stewardship. If we believe that all we have, even life, comes from God as a free gift, then it is equally true that the only way we can give back to God is freely. We all know that gifts, freely given, are better than gifts given because we must! Consider the greatest gift ever given -- our Lord's free gift of His life for us (cf. Romans 5). Now consider that Jesus has given us charge of His creation by calling us to be good stewards of this world -- to care for it, preserve it, and protect it. The *first* place we are called to care for is the Church, the one place where man encounters God in the most personal way, by communing with God in the Holy Sacraments. Voluntary stewardship means that we are free to choose. We are free to say *Yes* or *No*. We are free to accept Christ's life as our life, or not. But because our Lord loves us so much, He also shows us that, although we are free to say no, it is infinitely better to say *YES!*

The above text was taken from the Fellowship of Orthodox Stewards website. For more information on the Fellowship and Christian stewardship go to: http://www.oca.org/pages/min_orgs/FOS/index.htm

Objectives:

1. The students will be able to acknowledge that all things come from God.
2. The students will be able to list and describe life, time, health, talents, and resources (financial resources, physical abilities, intelligence, etc.) as gifts given freely to us from God.
3. The students will be able to discuss how an offering to God is using a gift in a way that is pleasing to Him.
4. The students will be able to list reasons why everyone should offer back the gifts they have received from God.
5. The students will be able to name ways that they may offer the gifts life, time, health, talents, and resources back to God.
6. The students will be able to identify the Fellowship of Orthodox Stewards as a group of people who feely share the gifts God has given them to help the Church help others.

Possible Scripture References:

- ❑ Regarding an Orthodox Christian understanding of stewardship: Psalm 24:1-2; Genesis 1:26 ff; Matthew 25:14-15; 1 Corinthians 4:1
- ❑ Regarding the use of our gifts: 1Peter 4: 9-11
- ❑ Regarding charitable deeds: Matthew 6:3-4
- ❑ Regarding the quality and amount of gifts: Mark 12: 41-44
- ❑ Regarding the Last Judgment: Matthew 25: 31-46
- ❑ Regarding the proper use of gifts: Matthew 25:14-30
- ❑ Regarding concern about physical needs: Luke 12: 22-34; Mark 8:1-9; Luke 12: 15-21
- ❑ Regarding the use of the gift of our bodies: 1 Corinthians 6:19; "Let us commend our self, each other, and all our life unto Christ our God (from the divine services).

- ❑ Regarding holding back God given gifts: Acts 5:1-11 (only for use with older students).
- ❑ Also see the FOS appeal information distributed to each parish published in The Orthodox Church newspaper and posted on the Orthodox Church in America's website on www.oca.org.

Lesson Ideas:

Select activities that are most appropriate to your group's age, size, as well as the time you have, the resources/materials at your disposal, etc.

Pre-school/ Kindergarten/ Primary (Grades 1-4)

1. Read verses from Matthew 25:31-40
2. Discuss the ideas that God gives us many things for which we thank Him and sharing is a special way to say thank you.
3. Using stories from the bible, explain how Christ shared His gifts of healing, His knowledge of God, the Father, etc. Make the connection that Christ shared His gifts by helping people.
4. Read the book "The Doorbell Rang" by Pat Hutchins and discuss how we share trusting that it's the right thing to do and that there will always be enough if we do what God wants.
5. Read Matthew 8:1-9 (Christ feeding the 4000). Discuss how Christ shared His miraculous abilities with the crowd out of love for them, how each person also kept sharing, and that God provided enough for everyone with even seven baskets of leftovers!
6. Have students brainstorm ways they can help others by using their time, talents, bodies, money, etc.
7. Conclude by reminding students that when we share the gifts God has given us and help others we receive even more and can help more people.

Intermediate (Grades 5-8)

1. Give students the following scripture citations: Psalm 24:1-2, Genesis 1:26 ff, Matthew 25:14-15, 1 Corinthians 4:1. Explain that these scriptures frame the Orthodox Christian understanding of stewardship. Define with students what this understanding is.
2. Read other scripture references suggested (choose those that seem the most appropriate for the age of the students) and ask the students to define the specific ways that Christ calls us to be stewards of the church.
3. For the younger students in the intermediate grades: using magazines, students look for and cut out pictures of people using their talents to help others. Make a collage of these pictures and have the students label the talents that these people are using, and how they are giving them freely back to God.
4. For the older students in the intermediate grades: students go through newspapers, find examples of people using their talents to help others, cut out the articles, paste them on a larger piece of paper, and write a paragraph describing the talents that are being used. They then share each article with the rest of the class. Students may work in pairs or in small groups if the group is large.
5. Have a discussion about and list on a large piece of paper the ways that people in your parish serve the Church today.
 - a. Question the students about how the "talents" that have been given freely by God to us, are being used by these individuals to freely give back to God. (i.e. the priest, the deacon, altar servers, handmaidens, the church choir, sisterhood members, church school teachers, gardeners, church cleaners, prosphora bakers, church council members, etc.). For an additional resource see the "Our Part in God's Plan" video distributed to parishes in connection with vocations.
 - b. Once this list is made, ask the students to brainstorm a list of ways that they already participate in their stewardship to the Church. Discuss what talents are being used, and how. What other ways can they participate in the life of the Church and use their own talents?
6. Students will discuss the reasons the Church needs our financial support as well as our talents in other areas. Why does the Church need money? What do we do with it? Discuss the meaning of tithing (offering the first 10% of what you have back to God; see Gen. 14:20; Num 18:25-32; Deut. 14:22) and why it is important to remember to give back to God, since EVERYTHING we have comes from God.
7. Create or decorate alms boxes. These can be purchased already made at a local craft store and then decorated, or can be made from cardboard boxes. Have the students list ways they can earn money at home, or at the parish (doing chores, walking the dog, having a bake sale, washing cars etc.) to raise money to put into their alms boxes. Choose a specific project in the Church that this money will help support. This can be for a project that is ongoing at the church. The funds could be used to support seminarians, to help with a building project, to purchase candles, to buy food for a food closet, or to raise funds for camp scholarships. Other ideas could include using the money to help with meals for elderly parishioners, combined with a visit or cards from the students. This should be done with the teacher discussing the needs of the parish, and receiving the blessing of the parish priest before beginning.

Teens and Young Adults (Grades 9 and up)

1. Explain that the scriptures listed above frame the Orthodox Christian understanding of stewardship. Have students read the scriptures listed above and, based upon each reading, have them articulate something about the Church's understanding of stewardship. This can be done as a group with different students reading and reporting on different scripture readings, or by having all the students read all the scriptures, write a definition, and then compare their definitions to create one for the entire group.
2. Write the following categories in separate columns on a large writing surface: Life, Time, Health, Talents and Resources: have the group brainstorm all the gifts God has given them in each of these areas.
3. Instruct students to go through newspapers and cut out articles that reflect how people act as stewards of the gifts God has given them. Remind them these should include examples of good stewardship and bad stewardship.
 - a. Using the articles, have students create a bulletin board display that shows the realities of good and bad stewardship.
 - b. Have the group choose one article and debate if the story represents good or bad stewardship.
4. Ask participants to reflect on a gift they received from a special person in their life and ask them if the relationship they had with the person effected how they used and cared for that gift. Ask students if there is a difference between sharing because you have to share and doing it out of love, because you want to share. How does Christ's teaching in Mark 12: 41-44 inform us about the difference?
5. Say, "Sometimes we forget that our bodies are gifts from God." Ask students where they have heard the phrase, "Let us commend ourselves, each other, and are whole life unto Christ our God." Ask them why they think this phrase is repeated so much in the Church. Read 1 Corinthians 6:19. Have students to reflect on their stewardship of their own God-given body and identify ways that they are good stewards of their body and ways they are poor stewards of their body.
6. Have students discuss the reasons the Church needs our financial support as well as our talents in other areas. Why does the Church need money? What do we do with it?
 - a. Discuss the meaning of tithing (see Gen. 14:20; Num 18:25-32; Deut. 14:22) and why it is important to remember to offer back to God what He has given to us back, namely EVERYTHING. Tell participants that the Old Testament guideline for financial support was a tithe or 10 %. Discuss Matthew 25:14-30 and Mark 12:41-44 and how these words of Christ changed this understanding.
 - b. Have participants calculate how much they would be contributing to the Church if they gave a tithe (10%) of all they made. Challenge participants to make a commitment to pledging some sort of financial support to the Church in addition to their other types of stewardship and offering.
7. Read Acts 5:1-11. Discuss the following questions:
 - a. Why do you think Anani'as and Sapphi'ra died at that moment? (Because they chose themselves over God and His people, and separated themselves from God, Who gave them life.)
 - b. In what ways do we hold back from offering our God-given gifts and talents? Keep in mind the various categories of gifts discussed [life, time, health, talents, and resources (financial resources, physical abilities, intelligence, etc.)].
8. Instruct students to go to the website of the Fellowship of Orthodox Stewards (http://www.oca.org/pages/min_orgs/FOS/index.htm) before the next class and choose an area(s) of ministry that the Fellowship supports that interest them. Have the group select a FOS supported ministry they would like to support and/or in which they would like to become involved. Have the group discuss how they could utilize their gifts for this ministry individually and as a group.



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**For more information about supporting efforts such as these go
to: <http://www.oca.org> and click on the FOS flame.**

