

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

JOY Session

OBJECTIVE: To show children that they are capable of doing good to others, no matter how small their service may be. God calls us to love Him through loving others, and we can do this in small ways everyday.

PREPARATION:

- Become familiar with the story *One Starfish at a Time* (included).
- Become familiar with the excerpt from St. Theophan's *Letter to a Young Girl* (included).
- Find a local hospital or nursing home that will receive greeting cards made by the children in this session's activity.
- Have crayons or markers and some paper ready for the activity portion of the session.

OPENING PRAYER: In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Lord Jesus Christ, bless us today and everyday. Amen.

ICE BREAKER: Have the group sit in a circle on the floor. Group leaders and other staff should all sit in the circle with the participants. Have each child ask the names of the people to their right and left. Once the names are known, the group leader should go into the middle of the circle and randomly select a player, walk up to them and say "*(name)*, bumpity bump bump bump." That person then has to say the names of the people sitting/standing beside him/her before the middle person finishes saying "bumpity bump bump bump." This is a fun way to make sure that everyone in the group knows each others names and feels comfortable with one another.

BRIDGE: Begin by reading the story provided:

"One Starfish At A Time"

One day a man was walking along the seashore. He noticed that during the night many seashells and starfish had washed upon the beach. Enjoying the morning sun and cool sea air, the man walked for miles.

As he strolled along, he noticed a small figure dancing in the distance. It made him chuckle to think of someone celebrating life in such an uninhibited way. As he got closer,

however, it became apparent that the figure was not dancing. Instead, she seemed to be repeatedly performing some ritual.

He drew nearer and noticed that the small figure was a child. She was picking up starfish and tossing them into the surf. He paused for a moment, puzzled, then asked, "Why are you throwing these starfish?"

"It's low tide," she replied, "If I leave them on the beach, the sun will soon dry them and they will die. I am throwing them into the ocean so they can live." The man considered her actions, impressed with the child's thoughtfulness. Then he motioned up and down the miles of the beach. "There must be thousands of starfish along here," he said, "you cannot possibly make a difference."

The young girl stopped. Her face darkened. She chewed thoughtfully on her lower lip, "You're probably right," she said softly. She looked down at the sand. Then she leaned over, carefully picked up another starfish, pulled back and arched it gently into the sea.

In a tone that was both gentle and bold, she said, "But I made a difference for that one."

DISCUSSION:

Ask the group for feedback about the story, allow them time to answer and share their thoughts after each question.

- What did you think the little girl was doing at first?
- When you found out what she was doing, what did you think?
- Was she making a difference? How so?
- Does working to make a difference always have to be a huge task?

Allow the group to reflect back, and then state in your own words:

Making a difference can be something small. It can be as simple as picking up garbage outside, recycling, donating clothes or food, helping someone in need, throwing starfish back into the sea...etc.

- How can a young person, people just like us, make a difference in the world? *(Allow participants to share their ideas)*
- What are things in everyday life we can start to do to love and serve others? *(Allow participants to share ideas; you can get them started with basic things such as serving our family members - helping out around the house, being nice to your sibling even when he/she is being mean, etc)*

BRIDGE: *St. Theophan's Letter*

State in your own words: This is a letter that a very wise and holy man, St. Theophan, wrote to a young girl who had asked him what she should do in her life. She, like you all, wanted to be a loving person and make a difference in the world. So - how do we do it? Let's hear what St. Theophan has to say.

You ask, "Must one do something?" Of course one must! And do whatever comes along - in your circle of friends and in your surroundings -and believe that this is and will be your real work. More will not be demanded of you. It is a great misconception to think, whether for the sake of heaven or, as the modernists put it, to "make one's mark on humanity," that one must undertake great, reverberating tasks. Not at all.

It is necessary only to do everything according to the commandments of God. Just what exactly? Nothing in particular - only those things which present themselves to everyone in the circumstances of life, those things which are required by the every day happenings we all encounter.

This is how God is. God arranges the fate of each man, and the whole course of one's life is also the work of His most gracious foreknowledge, as is, therefore, every minute and every encounter.

Let's take an example: a beggar comes up to you; it is God who has brought him. What should you do? You must help him. God has brought the beggar, of course, desiring you to act toward this beggar in a manner pleasing to Him, and He watches to see what you will actually do ...If you do what is pleasing to God, you will be taking a step toward the ultimate goal, the inheritance of heaven.

Generalize this occurrence, and you find that in every situation and at every encounter one must do what God wants him to do. And we know truly what He wants from the commandments He has given us. If someone seeks help, then help him. If someone has offended you, forgive him. If you yourself have offended someone, then hasten to ask forgiveness and to make peace.

-Excerpt from *Letter to a Young Girl* by St. Theophan the Recluse

ACTIVITY: *Cards for Children*

Have the participants make cards to send to a hospital for children. They should be happy cards to cheer the patients up. Explain to the group that these kids are just like them, only sick, and sending them a happy card would definitely make a difference in their world.

WRAP UP & CHALLENGE:

State in your own words: The problems of our world are way too overwhelming for any one person to make a difference all alone. If just one person saves just one starfish, however, then this world has become a better place. If just one person

makes just one person smile or laugh, or feel loved, then this world has grown in joy. If just one person gives to a poor child, visits a nursing home, or cheers a sick person up in the hospital, then this world has increased in love. God doesn't expect us to change the world all by ourselves, but He does want us to try to influence the world in a positive way. Doing all that we can to help make a difference in people's lives is just like throwing the starfish back into the sea.

CLOSING PRAYER: Christ our God, we thank you for illuminating our lives and setting the ultimate example for us, which is to always do good unto others and love one another. Please show us the small ways we can make changes in the world by serving and loving others. Amen.