

2 Cents-A-Meal

Responding to Hunger in the World

A Sample Exercise for Young People

"FEEDING THE FIVE THOUSAND"



FOCUS

We are called to serve those in need. Students should be able to tell about the source of that call and to explain how the 2 Cents-A-Meal program works.

GATHERING

1. Set a date for a regular 2 Cents-A-Meal gathering in your Church

Asking the children to bring their canisters forward during the offering works well. They especially like to pour their coins into a nice, noisy soup kettle.

2. Prepare Object Lesson. Scatter several pennies around the classroom ahead of time for the children to find (reserve two for yourself). When all are gathered, ask what a penny can buy. Is it worth much? Then hold up your two cents and tell the class that today they will learn how two cents can change someone *else's* life as well as their own.

3. Lead the children in prayer (here is a suggestion):

"Almighty God, Whose loving hand hath given us all that we possess, grant us grace that we may honor thee with our substance, and, remembering the account which we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of thy bounty, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

4. Choose one of the children to read John 6:1-14(RSV)

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. And a multitude followed him, because they saw the signs, which he did, on those who were diseased. Jesus went up on the mountain and there sat down with his disciples. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a multitude was coming to him, Jesus said to Philip, "How are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" This he said to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what are they among so many?" Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place; so the men sat down, in number about five thousand. Jesus then took

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the loaves and, when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. When the people saw the sign, which he had done, they said, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!"

5. Engage the children in discussion.

Note that this is the only miracle story, which appears in all four gospels. Now introduce the story from John. This story tells us a great deal about Jesus' own view of ministry. Having withdrawn to the hills, no doubt in search of some rest, Jesus and his disciples became aware that a large crowd had followed them. As it was late in the day, the people would soon need to be fed. Jesus challenged the disciples by asking them how they planned to solve this problem. Philip clearly saw the problem as overwhelming, noting that 200 denarii, better than half a year's pay for a laborer, would not even buy enough food to make a dent in the problem. Further, the only food on hand was five barley loaves, meager bread of the poor, and two fishes. Yet Jesus took these, blessed them and provided abundant food for all five thousand guests, with twelve baskets of leftovers! He showed us that when we freely offer what we have to God, wondrous things happen, no matter how meager our offering. It is our place to respond to the needs of those around us with whatever resources we have, no matter how inadequate to the task. God provides the sufficiency! Further, he showed us that we are to respond to the whole person. Teaching and sharing our faith with others is not enough. We must respond to those around us with compassion and meet physical as well as spiritual needs.

6. Introduce the 2 Cents-A-Meal program

This is one way we all can respond. Explain that in this program, one places a 2 Cents-A-Meal container on the table where family meals are shared. Each family member then puts at least two cents in the container for each meal they eat. Note that two pennies aren't good for much else. Most stores even keep dishes of them to use when customers don't have any when making a purchase. Two cents seems very inadequate in the face of world hunger. Yet, two cents a meal for a year is over \$21.00 per person. This may not seem like much, but what if you multiply it by the number of people in your family? Then what if we could multiply that by all the families in the parish, in the diocese, in the church at large. Suddenly, all our small gifts put together have made a very large one which can make a real difference to those in need. Through the faith of his church, God has supplied the sufficiency to make a difference.

Now stress that this is only half the program. The other half is to say a prayer at the family meal for those in need. This can be added to your usual grace at meals. If the family doesn't usually say a grace, this would be a good time to start. Now we have myriad dollars and prayers offered for the hungry. They are fed and we have responded as Jesus did to the needs of those around him. He trusted in God and fed, body and soul. This is his charge to us.

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EXPLORING

Make 2 Cents-A-Meal containers.

In preparation, gather containers with removable lids. Coffee cans, cocoa, or Kool-aid containers work well. It is best to have straight-sided containers. The children could be asked to bring colored paper, markers, glue, felt, tissue paper, sequins (fish scales) or other materials to use in decorating the containers. Each should say 2 Cents-A-Meal." Any number of symbols would work, such as loaves and fishes. Help the children cut a coin slot in the lid. Ask the children write a brief prayer for those in need. This could be done as a group or individually. Instruct them to place their containers and prayers on the dining table so they are handy at mealtime and let them know when the in-gatherings will take place.

CONNECTING

Option 1: Ask the students if they can remember a time when they were really hungry, perhaps after school. How would they have felt if no one offered them a snack, or even dinner, but gave them a lecture instead? Would they feel cared for?

Option 2: Ask the students if they have ever been confronted with a problem that seemed too big for them to solve. How did they feel? What would have made a difference for them?

Option 3: Using magazines, newspapers, or TV reports, ask the students to find examples of hunger in the world. Note any information on ways the world is responding to those needs. Are any class members participating directly in one of these responses?

GOING FORTH

Gather the group for a final prayer (here is suggestion): "Almighty and most merciful God, we remember before you all poor and neglected persons whom it would be easy for us to forget: the homeless and destitute, the old and the sick, and all who have none to care for them. Help us to heal those who are broken in body or spirit, and to turn their sorrow into joy. Grant this, Father, for the love of your Son, who for our sake became poor, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

Teacher: Let us go forth in the name of Christ!

Students: Thanks be to God!