Faithful in All Things

We serve God above all else.

- Jesus tells the story of the dishonest steward who “wises up” and begins acting more carefully.
- Young children are familiar with cautions to be careful, so they can easily identify with the before-and-after behaviors of the steward.
- In today’s session, we continue get-acquainted activities and celebrate people who work for God.

Question of the Week

What have you learned from an unlikely source, even a scoundrel?

Core Session

- Getting Started (wooden spoon, doll, coins, plastic cup, mail, tongue depressor, hammer, paints, heavy paper sack)
- Gospel Story: The Smart Worker (play money)
- Pictures of God’s Workers (mural paper or poster board)
- Praying Together

Enrichment

- Discover the Good News (optional: peanut butter, bread, cookie cutters, pine cones, oranges, bird seed)
- Singing Together
- Get-Acquainted Game: Who are We?
- Art: Cordero’s Storyteller and Children
- Story-Review Game: Who is a worker for God?
- Info: Free-Play Centers
- Info: Young Children and the Gospel
- Info: Where You’ll Find Everything Else

Helps for Catechists

- More About Today’s Scriptures
- Reflection
- The Scriptures and the Catechism
- The World of the Bible: Ephaph and Shekel
Getting Started (5-15 minutes)

Children play a guessing game that names different workers and different kinds of work. For this game put together a collection of worker-related objects: wooden spoon, plastic cup and saucer, book, coins, doll, hammer, tongue depressor, box of paints, piece of mail, etc.

The objects are meant to be suggestive. Children might say the coins are used by bankers or grocery store workers or lemonade sellers! Feel free to vary the list with other work toys or tools.

Put the tools in a heavy paper sack. Sit in a circle with the children. Ask a child to draw out one item. Ask:
- What kind of worker uses this?

Allow several answers. Encourage children to act out how they would do that work. You can also ask:
- What work would we like to do when we grow up?

Say:
- Today’s story is about a worker. Listen and hear how he did his work.

Gospel Story (5-10 minutes)

The Smart Worker

Story Focus: Use play money to tell today’s story. (Find reproducible play money attached to this document.)

Once there was a rich man who had lots of money. (Show money; fan it out slowly and carefully.) One day the rich man said to his worker, “Worker, take care of my money. Take care of everything that belongs to me. I have to go away.”

“Oh yes,” said the worker. “Don’t worry. I’ll take care of your money. I’ll do just what you say.”

The rich man went away. And what did the worker do? He lost some money. (Let some money drop.) He threw some money away. (Throw some money around.) He didn’t take care of the money at all!

The rich man came home. He saw money lost. He saw money thrown away. He said, “I’m angry! You did a bad job taking care of my money.”

The worker stopped doing a bad job. He got back some of the money he had lost. (Begin piling the money in a neat stack.) He didn’t throw money around any more.

The rich man said, “Now I’m not angry. Now you’re doing a good job taking care of my money.”

When Jesus told this story he said, “We are workers, too. We work for God. Let’s work carefully when we work for God.”

Pictures of God’s Workers (5-15 minutes)

Children draw pictures of God’s workers.

Across the top of a sheet of butcher paper or poster board write the title God’s Workers. Ask, “Who works for God in our families?” Affirm that setting tables, cooking dinner and feeding pets each count as “working for God.”

Distribute drawing paper and felt pens or crayons. Say:
- Draw a picture of someone in your family who works for God.
- Glue your picture to our poster. (Show the children how to use glue sticks to attach the pictures.)

Take time to talk with each child about his or her picture. Encourage the children to talk about who they drew and why. If children draw pictures of themselves, you might respond:
- Here’s Michael. Michael is God’s worker.

Praying Together (5 minutes)

Adapt today’s Enrichment game as a closing prayer. Ask the children to stand in a circle. One at a time, stand behind each child, lay a hand on his or her shoulder and say, “Who is God’s worker?”

Ask the children to respond, “(Name of child) is God’s worker.”

Say, “Thank you, God, for (name of child),” before moving on to the next child. When you have prayed for each child, pray:

Thank you, God,
For all you do.
Help us, God,
To work for you. Amen.

Note: Distribute At Home with the Good News to group members (or e-mail it to families after the session).
Discover the Good News
(5-20 minutes)
On page 1 of today’s Discover the Good News you’ll find a simple craft activity children can follow to make bird feeders. Children love to extend their stewardship to birds and animals!

If your church grants you permission, children can set these bird feeders on church grounds. Otherwise, they can take them home or even do the activity with their parents.

On page 2 of Discover the Good News you’ll find additional verses for a game song used in the Story-Review Games activity below. (See “People Work for God.”)

Singing Together (5-10 minutes)
From Singing the Good News, sing together:
◆ “I Will Serve God” (songbook p. 8)
◆ “Kum Ba Yah” (songbook p. 9)

Note: To access both the songbook and its attached MP3 files, open your Fall-C Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Singing the Good News.

Invite the children to make up additional verses, drawn from today’s session:
◆ Someone’s cooking, Lord...
◆ Someone’s teaching, Lord...
◆ Someone’s healing, Lord...

Children can also listen to and sing along with the song “Magic Penny.” (Open your Fall-C Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Companion Music for options on obtaining this music.)

Get-Acquainted Game (5-10 minutes)
Who Are We?
Children play the Get-Acquainted Game. Sit in a circle with the children. Turn to the child on your left and ask for his or her name. Then stand up, help the child up and say: “This is (child’s name).”

Help children continue this activity around the circle, until all the children are standing up together. Children can then jump up and down and cheer!

If older children find this game quick and easy, repeat once or twice, either reversing directions or asking the children to switch places before each round.

Art (10-15 minutes)
Cordero’s Storyteller and Children
Gather children around the poster of Helen Cordero’s pottery figure Storyteller and Children, attached to this document.

Invite children to tell you what they see in the poster. Can they guess what the grandfather is doing with all these children?

Explain that the artist wanted to show someone telling stories to children. How are the different children sitting or lying or standing as they listen? How do we like to sit or stand or lie down when we listen to a story? Encourage the children to try out different story-listening poses with their bodies.

Ask a volunteer to be the storyteller. The storyteller sits in the center while the other children gather around him or her, holding their bodies ready to listen to a story. Repeat this activity several times—then invite children to gather around you to hear today’s story again.

Story-Review Game (10-15 minutes)
Who Is a Worker For God?
This game helps children practice group members’ names as they affirm one another as God’s workers. Tie the game to today’s Core Session by asking:
◆ How does a (name a worker from the game played in today’s Getting Started Activity) work for God? (Repeat with several kinds of workers.)
◆ Who works for God at your house? your church? your school or day care center?
◆ How can we be workers for God?

Help children give answers that reflect both future wishes (“I want to be a firefighter!”) and present experience (“I feed the cat each day.”)

Stand in a circle with the children. One child stands in the center and asks, “Who is a worker for God?” The child then points to someone and the group answers, “(Child’s name) is a worker for God.”

That child goes into the center and asks the game question. Continue play until all the children are in the center.
Free-Play Centers

Each week during free playtime, try to offer various activities from which the children can choose. Set up special interest areas, incorporating these in your session plans as appropriate. You can choose materials related to the day’s theme, as well as materials that are fun to use throughout the year.

For example, this week you could make the tools you used in today’s Story Preparation and Game available in a free-play center. More general play centers could include:

◆ Books: Bring library books or collect books from thrift stores, yard sales and parents. Make the reading corner cozy with an area rug and pillows.
◆ Imaginative play: Provide simple dolls or stuffed animals, squares of fabric and blocks for children to transform into a thousand scenarios! You can provide an appealing alternative to store-bought blocks by collecting branches and log sections in various lengths and widths.
◆ Art table: Supply scissors, crayons, felt pens (contrary to what you might expect, thin markers and crayons are easier for preschool hands), several kinds of paper, glue sticks or paste. Occasionally add an unexpected material, such as macaroni to string into necklaces or paper shapes in various colors to sort into egg cartons.

Plan to leave the same interest areas in place for several weeks or longer. If you have no cupboard space or share your space during the week, you can pack away materials for each area in plastic milk cartons, tubs, cardboard produce boxes with lids, etc. You can introduce centers gradually over several weeks, making assembling the materials an easy-to-manage project.

If you are blessed with a helper, he or she might take charge of a games center in which children can take turns playing the games above.

However, you will probably want to gather in one group for the Getting Started activity, the story, songs and closing prayer. In general, consider inviting only three or four children to each interest area at a time.

Young Children and the Gospel

Today’s gospel story might puzzle us: why would Jesus praise a dishonest steward? All kinds of imaginative answers are possible; Jesus may be humorously likening our own situation to that of an irresponsible steward. We may have been wasting our time and money for years!

Jesus may be reminding his listeners of a theme beloved in the Jewish tradition, in which a rascal (like the patriarch Jacob, who stole his brother’s heritage!) wins God’s blessing.

For young children, we introduce stewardship by defining a steward as a worker. We are all workers for God: all stewards of God’s good gifts. In the song “Magic Penny,” Malvina Reynolds strikes the right note: money is fine, but love is best of all. (Open your Fall-C Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Companion Music for options on obtaining this music.)

Where You’ll Find Everything Else

◆ Attached to this Session Plan you will find:
   — Backgrounds and reflections for today’s readings, titled More about Today’s Scriptures.
   — A printable version of today’s Gospel Story for use at home (to distribute or e-mail to families).
   — Play Money photocopy master for use in telling today’s gospel story and in free play.
   — Directions for the game People Work for God.
   — For catechists, information on Engaging Children with Autism.
   — A family paper, At Home with the Good News, to print and distribute or to e-mail to families for use at home.
◆ Open your Fall-C Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Seasonal Articles to find:
   — Information on Fall-C’s Models of the Faith.
   — An article exploring The Pauline Pastoral Letters.
   — A reproducible handout for parents titled Parents as Primary Religious Educators.
   — The Introduction for Preschool/Kindergarten for Living the Good News.
More about Today’s Scriptures

Today’s readings call us to use our resources—financial and otherwise—for justice and compassion. In Amos, the prophet condemns the callousness of those who observe rituals but set their hearts on greed and dishonesty. In 1 Timothy, Paul urges prayers for peace, godliness and dignity, made possible by Christ Jesus, who bridges the gap between God and humanity. In Jesus’ story from today’s gospel, the master appreciates the shrewdness of an unfaithful servant.

Amos 8:4-7

Although Amos was from the southern kingdom of Judah, his mission was to the northern kingdom of Israel around 760–750 BCE when, under Jeroboam II, the kingdom was enjoying great prosperity. Its wealth and power rested, however, upon injustice.

In Hebrew society, justice included faithfulness to the responsibilities of all members of the community, springing from the basic bond of their covenant with God. Injustice thus resulted when the rich and the strong used their power exclusively for their own benefit. Such violations of social and economic justice were common at this time. False scales made transactions particularly oppressive on the poor, who could eventually be reduced to selling themselves and their families into slavery.

Those who oppressed the poor shrugged off their evil actions. Apparently, they thought God was only concerned with the nation’s political status. Thus, they interpreted “the day of the Lord” (v. 9) as a time of Israel’s vindication against its enemies, but Amos reinterpreted the concept to include judgment upon Israel too.

1 Timothy 2:1-8

Today’s reading begins a section on community order (2:1–3:15), focusing especially on the offering of prayer. First, prayer is to be offered for all people. The assertion of the universality of God’s grace may be aimed at those who taught that only the enlightened few would be saved.

Second, prayer is to be offered for civil leaders. Prayer for pagan authorities was part of Jewish worship. The early Church, whose members were few and mostly from the lower class, prayed for the civil authorities as guarantors of the social structure within which the Church’s mission could be pursued in tranquility. Finally, prayer is to be offered as an outgrowth of unity in the community.


The parable of the dishonest steward has puzzled interpreters from early times onward. Many scholars teach that this story has only one point of contact to the behavior of believers: the steward’s quick and resolute action in establishing a new life for himself. Thus it is a parable of crisis, stressing the need to make a decision about Jesus and to act on it.

Recently another approach has been taken, based upon the economics of the time. The bills probably represented goods received by the debtors on credit. The amount by which the steward reduced the bills may have been interest on the cost of the goods. Such interest was illegal, but was common in commercial transactions and justified in such cases by some rabbinic interpreters. Or the amount may have represented the steward’s own commission on the transaction. Thus, the steward gives up the profit (his own or the rich man’s) in return for the debtors’ gratitude.

In verses 10-13, Luke supplies three sayings of Jesus that give clues about how to unravel this parable. These guidelines reflect the attitudes of fidelity and trust that servants ought to display in their commitment to serve their master.
Reflection
The scenario of today’s gospel happens today. Rumors of layoffs circulate. Even conscientious employees dread downsizing, the pink slip or the boss’s call. The job may not be fulfilling, but it pays the rent! The insurance is good—and who in their right mind likes job hunting?

Continuing contemporary comparisons, we sometimes see a movie and marvel at the villain. We don’t necessarily like their morals; we simply enjoy their creativity. We’re intrigued: how did they rob that bank so cleverly, plan their escape so deftly, evade the police so calmly? We give an oddly ironic respect to fictional characters we could never condone.

So the rich man grudgingly admires the rascally steward. His scheme is blatantly dishonest: inviting the master’s debtors to falsify their accounts, creating a network of indebted people to feather his future nest.

Luke’s gospel features a cast of shady characters with whom Jesus regularly dines. His hospitality is broader than ours; he finds good everywhere. Jesus sees creation with larger eyes, rarely condemning.

We can learn even from the villain, he suggests. What’s the lesson? We too are stewards. All we possess is on loan; any wealth we think we own is ultimately God’s. Do we use it as an end in itself, or do we use it for others, especially the poor?

The Scriptures and the Catechism
Today’s readings remind us of the importance of our Christian commitment to social justice (CCC, #2401–25). In our consumer society, this demands a careful consideration of our attitude toward wealth (CCC, #2426–42). Both Amos and Jesus recognize how greed can consume us and diminish our commitment to God and others. Our challenge is to work daily to get our priorities right by adopting the attitudes and values of Jesus, especially with respect to God (CCC, #212–13, 222–27, 253–56).

The World of the Bible
Ephaph and Shekel
Amos (8:5) talks about merchants who tamper with the ephaph and the shekel. These two words act as a summary of the bartering system that relied on weighing the proper amounts for payment by using balances.

The ephaph measured the dry capacity for grain or flour (roughly two-thirds of a bushel) and the shekel was the most common basic monetary unit. Driven by their greed, businessmen could use deliberately false or inaccurate weights, for example made by chiseling out the undersurface or using two similar looking but different weights, to defraud the unsuspecting, the ignorant and the poor.