

Children's Activity: Coin Box

Purpose

Materials needed

- Bible
- news magazines, scissors
- several Week of Compassion coin boxes
- pennies or other coins

Activity

Talk with the children about how the Bible often draws a word picture by calling people "sheep." Sheep are lovable, valuable creatures who give much back to those who care for them (milk, wool, meat). But they don't have much common sense and do some pretty unwise things at times. Shepherds and sometimes sheep dogs help keep them safe and guide them to the places the sheep need to go. Share some sheep/shepherd scriptures such as Psalm 23, Matthew 18:10-14, Revelation 7:15-17. Ask why they think Jesus is called the Good Shepherd.

When Jesus was with his disciples for the last time, he asked them to feed his sheep. He was talking about taking care of people. Invite the children to look through the magazines and cut out pictures of people who need help and care, people who Jesus would want us to try to help. These might include pictures of the aftermath of storms, hungry folk, injured people, etc. Put the coin boxes in several places around the room. Explain that soon families in our church will bring gifts of money for Week of Compassion. Discuss how not only bodies need feeding, but also minds and spirits. Week of Compassion offerings bring food, seeds, water, tools, and medicines to help feed bodies; schools and job training to help feed minds; friendship, comfort after trauma, and evidence of Christian love to feed spirits. Have each box represent one aspect of the offering's focus (disaster relief, refugee aid, development work to meet basic needs and help build strong communities). Invite the children to sort through their pictures and put by each box the ones that illustrate people needing that kind of help. Give each child a handful of coins and invite them to practice feeding Jesus' sheep by feeding coins into the coin boxes, distributing the coins among the boxes as they choose. Afterward, ask why the children made the choices they did. How does it feel to help take care of Jesus' sheep? End with prayer, including thanking God for the wonderful sheep of God's flock and for the opportunity to help take care of them.

Offering Reminder Activity

Purpose

To prompt the congregation to pray about the Week of Compassion offering before it is taken and to remind them of the offering date

Materials needed

- offering plates
- white, brown, and black, thick yarn cut into 3" pieces. These will represent hungry sheep.
- cotton balls. Leave some white. Using food color, tea, coffee, or water color paint, dye some brown and some black to match the variety of colors in the yarn. These will represent well-fed sheep.

Activity

During worship service a week or two before the offering is taken, show the Week of Compassion poster and announce when the offering will be received. Pass around offering plates filled with cotton balls, followed by a second set filled with yarn pieces. Invite each person to remove several cotton balls and several pieces of yarn from the plates, thus making a "flock," take them home, and put them some place where they will be often seen (for example, by the phone, kitchen table, computer, or bedside; on the dashboard of the car).

Jesus has told us to care for the sheep he so greatly loves. For some, life has been wonderful. They are healthy and comfortable like the cotton balls. For others, life has been extremely hard and times have been very lean, as the skinny yarn pieces represent. When you see these cotton balls and yarn pieces, representing Jesus' flock, remember to pray for people in tough situations and for our church's Week of Compassion offering. The offering will help people in such situations remember that they are the sheep of God's pasture and that we care.

Youth Activity: Day of Prayer and Fasting

Purpose

To learn about food security; to get a small taste, in a controlled and worshipful manner, of the hunger that daily besets many people Week of Compassion helps; to pray for the Week of Compassion offering

Preparation and materials needed

- If fasting is not part of your church's tradition, or if you have not fasted before, prepare yourself through research (e.g., an internet search of "fasting as a spiritual discipline" will yield articles from many faith communities), prayer, and trying a dawn-to-sunset fast yourself. If you have any health concerns, consult a physician first!
- Secure written parental/guardian permission beforehand for youth to participate in the fast.
- Find out actual times of sunup and sundown for the day the group will fast. Check at least one morning before the fast to determine the approximate time when the pre-fast meal should conclude. A long-standing tradition is to finish eating by the time a black thread can be distinguished from a white thread in the natural light of the coming day. That can be 30 to 45 minutes before sun-up.
- Invite a small group of youth to prepare a service of worship, to take place during what would ordinarily be lunchtime on the day of the fast.
- Arrange for parents/guardians or other church members to prepare elsewhere and bring in a light meal of soup, fruit, vegetables, and/or bread for eating together after the fast has ended.
- Slow-to-digest foods for the pre-dawn meal, such as oatmeal, fruit, whole grain cereals and breads, dried apricots, dates, and almonds
- Fruit juices, nuts, and dried fruit on hand and out of sight, in case someone physically needs to break the fast before sunset
- Newsprint, markers, and fasteners to create the "scrawl wall"
- Pitchers of water, glasses
- Paper and pencils for note taking
- Board games, music CDs, pertinent videos about hunger

Activity

Secure written parental/guardian permission beforehand for youth to participate in the dawn-to-sunset fast. Have a short meeting a week before the experience to talk with parents/guardians and youth. Explain that fasting as a spiritual discipline has been practiced throughout the centuries by faithful people, including Moses, Queen Esther, Jesus, Dorothy Day, and Cesar Chavez. This will be an abstinence-from-food-only fast; water will be available throughout the day. Share some of your research about and experience with fasting. A strong body and mind are important precursors. Among those who should not fast from food are youth under age 12, the elderly, those with physical conditions and illnesses that would be affected by not eating, pregnant women, and nursing mothers. If people have concerns, they should consult their physician before participating. There will be some discomfort. Suggest participants abstain from caffeine for several days before the fast; withdrawal from caffeine can cause headaches. Explain publicly that all are welcome. Youth who wish to participate but who should not fast should bring with them (preferably non-odorous) foods to be kept in a separate area. When they need to eat, they may slip away from the group, quietly eat in a place out of sight of the others, clean up the food remains, and then rejoin the group. Also explain that the motivation for the day of fasting and prayer — to experience in a small way, in a context of worship and prayer, the hunger that daily besets many of the people whom Week of Compassion helps, to pray for all who need God's sustenance, and to pray for the Week of Compassion offering — is central. It is not a loss of face if someone cannot continue with the intended fast; bodies are different. Fruit juices, nuts, and dried fruit will be on hand in case they are needed.

A rough outline of events is suggested below. The specific content and flow of the experience is really up to you. Come prepared with plenty of ideas and planned activities so youth don't get bored, but be flexible. Especially assess energy and attention from afternoon onward as the physical effects of the fast become more evident. Revise your plan accordingly!

Have a “lock-in” for the youth beginning the evening before the fast. Enjoy time together in prayer, preparation for the fast, and fun. Try not to overindulge on food as that may make the next day harder. The purpose of being together before the fast is so that all may wake up and together eat a healthy meal before sunrise. Finish the meal and clean-up before dawn. Post an easily accessible “scrawl wall” (large sheets of paper) and markers. Invite participants to record there any time during the day how they are feeling and their thoughts and questions. Restate the parameters of the day (no food or chewing gum till after sunset, water always available, etc.) given at the meeting the prior week.

Gather as a group and read aloud John 21:1-19 (from which the offering theme comes) and Ezekiel 34:11-16, 25-31. Name and commit the intentions of the fast to God. Ask for strength and guidance to persist through the fast. If possible, go outside to watch a beautiful sunrise and to listen to the sounds of the beginning of morning.

During the morning, focus on learning about hunger and food security. Defined in U.S. Department of Agriculture materials as “access by all members [of a household or a community] at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life,” food security is a critical problem for many people throughout the world. Have the youth investigate the issues, using either materials you provide or by traveling to and using the computer resources of a library or school to investigate on the internet. Excellent resources include:
<http://www.bread.org/learn/hunger-basics/> (Bread for the World is a collective Christian voice/ organization working to end hunger and poverty in the U.S. and abroad)
<http://www.foodsresourcebank.org/> (FRB’s goal is to support the efforts of the world’s poorest communities to produce or earn enough to feed their families year round.)
<http://www.pcusa.org/hunger/downloads/presbyterian-cws-poverty.pdf> (background and creative activities on poverty and the problems it causes, including hunger. The youth may enjoy doing some of the activities during the afternoon.)
<http://www.fao.org/> (The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Striking visuals are the food security maps at http://www.fao.org/faostat/foodsecurity/FSMap1_en.htm.)
<http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/FoodSecurity/> (The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s briefing room about food security in the U.S.)

After a time for research and “input,” invite participants to share what they have learned. Include a morning break for physical activity and games; participants may not feel like doing such later in the day.

Intentionally turn to God during what would ordinarily be lunchtime. Spend an extensive time in worship, with prayer, music, the Word, and creativity. Reading the story of Jesus’ fast after his baptism (Luke 4:1-15) may be helpful. Include prayer for all who hunger and for the Week of Compassion offering and thanksgiving for the blessings of God. Ask for God’s strength to sustain the fast.

During the afternoon, focus on the work of Week of Compassion. Consult the WoC website for specific information. Talk about hopes for the offering, what it will accomplish, and ways to promote the offering in the congregation. Perhaps talk through other work the youth could do to alleviate local hunger. A USDA publication (<http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsec/FILES/wecan.pdf>) makes great specific suggestions for growing a garden and giving away the produce, adopting an elderly person or shut-in who has difficulty meeting their nutritional needs, and holding a food drive to benefit local food banks.

The afternoon might also include Bible study (see Youth Activity 1), videos about hunger or areas of the world where Week of Compassion works, quiet time for reflection, skits developed by the youth based on their learnings about hunger or fasting, music and songs, board games, etc. Some suggestions for videos can be found at <http://www.churchworldservice.org/Film/index.html> (Church World Service’s library of videos, which are free to borrow) and <http://www.pcusa.org/hunger/downloads/videos.pdf> [an annotated list from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)’s Hunger Program]. The last few hours before sunset may seem to crawl. Remind youth to record their feelings and thoughts on the scrawl wall.

Just before the natural light begins to decrease, discuss as a group their observations about hunger. Given all that has happened during the day of fasting and prayer, what new connections can they make to the work of Week of Compassion? As dusk falls, gather outside if possible to watch the sun set and to hear the sounds of the day's end. When the sun (finally!) is fully down, lead the group in saying, "Amen." Come inside and break the fast gently with juice and a piece of fruit. Then gather in worship, thanking God for God's presence and strength for all who hunger and lifting up those who will continue to be hungry. Join together at Jesus' table with Holy Communion. Pray for the work of Week of Compassion, alleviating suffering throughout the world and showing our love for God. Read again the scriptures of John 21:1-19 and Ezekiel 34:11-16, 25-31. Then recess to a light meal prepared by other church members.

To share the experience and learnings of the day with the wider congregation, perhaps arrange for youth to speak about it during a worship service, write about it for the church newsletter, share a skit they developed, or, with youths' prior permission, post the scrawl wall, with a bit of explanation, where it can be seen by many.

Dramatic Interpretation: Feeding Jesus' Sheep through Week of Compassion

Set-up: A pastor explains WoC during a children's sermon. An adult plays the pastor. At least two to four young people sit around the pastor but facing the congregation so their voices can be heard. Additional children are welcome although they would not have a speaking part. Child A is ideally elementary-aged; Child D, middle school- or high school-aged. Children's parts can also be combined, if needed—A and B done by one person, C and D by another. If memorizing a part is beyond the scope of a particular child, he/she can read from a script. When action shifts from this group to the disciple group, this group freezes in place until it is again time for them to speak.

Off to one side, two to four adults are seated around a mock fire circle, perhaps suggested by a circle of rocks with a pan or grill over them. Several paper fish hang partially over the side of the pan. Loaves of bread are close by. One adult, sitting slightly in front of one side of the fire, portrays Jesus; another, sitting slightly in front of the fire on the opposite side, Simon Peter. Any others, sitting behind the fire, are (silent) disciples. When action shifts from this group to the pastor and children, this group freezes.

Pastor: [Addressing Child A] ____ [name of child], I'm sorry your grandmother is in the hospital. I will visit her again tomorrow. [Addressing all of the children] Soon our church will receive the Week of Compassion offering. It is an offering of our love and money that helps care for God's family throughout the world.

Child A: I want to keep my money! I want to buy a _____. [Fills in the blank with something materialistic for his/her own use, like a video game system, expensive doll, cell phone, etc.]

Pastor: It's fine to have some special things for ourselves. Jesus also wanted us to share what we have so other people can have a decent life. His last message to his disciples was for people to take care of each other. It happened like this: After his death and resurrection, Jesus went to where the disciples had gone fishing. He made them breakfast and then settled in for a heart-to-heart talk with Simon Peter.

Jesus: Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?

Peter: Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.

Jesus: Feed my lambs.

Child B: Feed my lambs? I didn't know Jesus had sheep. Didn't he travel around too much to look after a bunch of sheep?

Pastor: When Jesus said, "Feed my sheep," he was using a metaphor, a word-picture, to say, "Take care of people." Jesus is called the Great Shepherd because he cared for people as completely as a shepherd takes care of a flock of sheep. One reason he traveled so much was to heal, teach, and share God's love with as many people as he possibly could. Jesus really loves every person!

Jesus: [leaning in closer toward Peter] Simon, son of John, do you love me?

Peter: Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.

Jesus: Tend my sheep.

Child C: That's the second time Jesus asked the same question. Was Jesus hard of hearing?

Pastor: No. He just wanted to make sure Peter was not hard of heart.

Jesus: Simon, son of John, do you love me?

Peter: [sounding hurt] Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you!

Jesus: Feed my sheep.

Child D: Why didn't Jesus spend his last time with the disciples talking about God?

Pastor: I guess he figured they had listened enough; they had been with him throughout his ministry. Now he wanted to make sure they took action, sharing and showing God's love by helping care for other people. That's what we do when we give to Week of Compassion.

Child B: Our church helps take care of people by _____. [Mention several examples of how your congregation tends Jesus' sheep locally, e.g., cooking meals for families who have had new babies or who have lost a member by death, building houses for poor families, providing overnight shelter for homeless people, etc.]

Pastor: Yes, we do. We have a very caring congregation! Through Week of Compassion, we help people who live further away, people we might not be able to get to when they need help.

Child C: Like who?

Pastor: Like people whose homes have been destroyed by a hurricane or an earthquake. Refugees who have had to scramble from their homes and leave almost everything behind because of war and genocide. And poor people in struggling communities who need food, healthcare, tools, seeds, clean water, job training, and schools.

Child D: I thought everybody had to go to school.

Pastor: No. Some children don't get to because their village has no school, no teachers, no books.

Child A: No playground?

Child C: No hanging out with friends between classes?

Child B: Do refugees have to leave their friends behind?

Pastor: Often—yes.

Child C: And some people don't even have clean water?

Child A: That's not so bad. You wouldn't have to take a bath!

Child D: Yeah, but no safe water to drink, either.

Child A: What happens when somebody gets really sick, or their grandma has heart trouble?

Pastor: Through Week of Compassion, we help provide the assistance needed. We ourselves won't be there in person, but because we give to the offering, folks get help.

Child B: Do you mean, through Week of Compassion, my offering money could help someone who has been scared by a bad storm?

Pastor: Yes!

Child C: My money might help someone learn to read?

Pastor: Yes! [Child A leaps up and runs toward the back of the church.] Hey, where are you going?

Child A: To get my offering money. I'm going to help somebody else's grandma!

Child D: Yeah. Way cool! Let's do it! [Remaining children run toward the back.]

Pastor: [Shakes head in amazement and, with a big grin, gives the "two thumbs up" sign.]

Jesus: [Stands, looks out at departing children, nods head in affirmation, smiles, and makes a gesture of blessing.]

Sharing Calendar

Both urgency and joy fill the work of Week of Compassion. The calendar below highlights some of the challenging situations we address when feeding and tending God's sheep in the U. S. and around the world. Each day suggests a donation of coins or bills. Your household can decide what unit is best for your situation each day.

"If we want something to be done we must just do something—one thing, one small thing. The problem is that so few people really believe that small things have any kind of effectiveness at all. And yet what else is there to do? Except, of course, to do nothing—which is the most potent kind of doing that there is, perhaps, and the most limiting of all, because it dooms us to a motionless present. To do nothing is deadly doing." -- Joan Chittister, writer and spiritual thinker

	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
NUTRITION	Jesus said, "Feed my sheep." Tell of a time when someone showed care for you by giving you food. Give two units in thanksgiving.	One in four children in developing countries is underweight. Give one unit for each pound you weigh.	Demand at food banks across the United States increased by 30% the most recent year for which statistics are available. Give one unit for every five cans of food in your kitchen.	The cost of "a night on the town" for a couple can provide emergency food supplies for a family of five for a month. Give one unit for each "date" or celebratory outing you had last month.	In the U.S. each month, 28 million low income people receive government supplemental nutrition assistance ("food stamps"). Give one unit for each time you ate out last month.	Maternal and child malnutrition cause more than one-third of child deaths. Give one unit for each meal you eat today.	In the United States, 40-50% of all food ready for harvest never gets eaten. Give one unit for each meal you ate today where you did not finish what was on your plate.
HEALTH	Jesus said, "Tend my sheep." Tell of a time when someone cared for you when you were sick. Give two units in thanksgiving.	Close to half of all people in developing countries suffer at any given time from a health problem caused by water and sanitation defects. Give one unit for each faucet in your home.	More than a billion people worldwide do not have access to clean water. Give one unit in thanksgiving for each glass of water you drink today.	More than 2.1 million people die each year from water-borne diseases. Most of them are children. Give one unit for every time you turn on the faucet today.	Between 2000 and 2007, measles deaths dropped 74% worldwide, primarily due to increased vaccination. Give one unit if you have been vaccinated for measles.	Worldwide, 4 million newborns die each year within the first month of their life. Give one unit for each child you consider part of your family and extended family.	Two-thirds of U.S. Americans are overweight, and half of those are considered obese. Give three units as a sign of commitment to help improve U.S. health.
REFUGEES, POVERTY	Jesus said, "Tend my sheep." Tell of a time when someone helped you through a rough time. Give two units in thanksgiving.	Worldwide, 11.4 million people have become refugees—fleeing conflict and persecution by escaping across international boundaries. Give one unit for each year you have lived in your home.	The United States admits approximately 50,000 refugees each year. Give one unit for each person you know who came from another country.	Worldwide, 26 million people are "internally displaced"—fleeing their homes because of conflict and persecution by escaping to another part of their own country. Give one unit for each time you have moved in your life.	2.5 billion people live on less than \$2 per day—less than the cost of many mealtime beverages. Give one unit for each cup of coffee or soda you drink today.	400 million fewer people live in absolute poverty today than in 1990. Give one unit in gratitude for this improvement.	Many poor villages still lack reliable electricity. The United States uses 22% of all electricity consumed in the world. Give one unit for each electrical appliance in your home.
EDUCATION, BASICS	Jesus said, "Tend my sheep." Tell of a time when someone taught you something you have found helpful in life. Give two units in thanksgiving.	Nearly a billion people entered the 21 st century unable to read a book or sign their name. Give one unit for each time you write your name today.	Providing an education to girls and young women is one of the strongest ways to end cyclical poverty. Give one unit in thanksgiving as you name each girl and woman important in your life.	The cost of a video game console can provide a sewing machine and job training so a poor family can start their own business and become self-sufficient. Give one unit for each video game your family owns.	Worldwide, over 100 million elementary school-aged children do not attend school. Give one unit for each year of formal education you have received.	One out of every three urban dwellers lives in slum conditions. Give one unit for each bedroom in your home.	Clean water reduces disease and improves nutrition. 1.6 billion more people can get safe drinking water today than in 1990. Give one unit in gratitude for this improvement.

Sources: Church World Service, United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, United States Department of Health and Human Services, United States Department of Homeland Security, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, The Central Intelligence Agency's World Factbook, The World Bank

Sharing Calendar (continued)

Daily Giving Devotion

- At a time appropriate for your household, read the day's entry in the sharing calendar. Discuss the situation described and its relationship to your household.
- Read John 21:15-17, 19, the theme scripture for Week of Compassion 2010:
When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep." After this he said to him, "Follow me."
- Invite each member of the household to describe one experience they have been part of or have seen since the last daily giving devotion of someone caring for someone else.
- Consider your household's sharing calendar contribution for the day, and add the contribution to your coin box.
- Offer a prayer for the people and situations highlighted in the sharing calendar, and for the people your household will meet in the coming hours:
Thank you, O God, for being our shepherd, ever present and ever loving. Thank you for determinedly seeking us out, for guiding us through the dark valleys in our lives, for carrying us gently in your arms. May we share that love and care with others. Today we offer a gift to Week of Compassion and pray especially for [the day's highlighted group]. We ask that you would strengthen them, provide them with the assistance they need, bless their lives, and show them your love. Help us to see the needs around us today/tomorrow, and to show your love through our actions. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.
- Remember to take your coin box to church on the day when the Week of Compassion offering is given.