

“Conscious Collecting is an important part of faith formation. Sometimes we see the fruit of these programs in surprising and delightful ways.”

While this year is winding down, many directors and coordinators are focusing on the seasons ahead: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent and Easter. These can be the busiest times of the programmatic year. Times filled with special focus on our spiritual journey - without and within.

Often we weave opportunities for “Conscious Collecting” into the curriculums of these seasons, particularly during Advent and Lent. I use this term, “Conscious Collecting” as a way to describe our intention when we introduce an outreach ministry and collect a special offering toward that chosen ministry. We look for resources that will teach our children and youth the importance of giving from our abundance to people living in scarcity. This concrete form of stewardship - the choices we make with our financial resources - can leave lasting impressions on our faith communities, both the young and the young at heart.

All of us have stories of successful and energizing outreach projects. One that continues to impress me is the well-developed, easily accessed [‘Nets-for-Life’](#) program through Episcopal Relief and Development. Throughout the years, this program has produced creative resources for a variety of settings complete with images and suggestions for discussion.

‘Nets-for-Life’ provides mosquito nets to protect people from malaria throughout Africa and other countries. It is an easy outreach project that makes a huge impact on those who receive its benefits. Many of our children know what a mosquito looks like and how its bite can feel. Even when an effort is made not to scare the children, learning that in some places these ‘bites’ can bring sickness and maybe death makes a large impression. This can provide opportunities for the Sunday lesson to move into homes and become conversations among families during the week.

If we attempt to offer additional programming to our Sunday morning classes, we are quickly reminded how short these ‘class’ times really are. To continue our desire to support and enrich our teacher’s own experience in this ministry with our children, it can be helpful to provide a simple format for each Sunday’s session. When working at St. Paul’s in Greenville NC, we began each Sunday class during Lent with a focus on one country in Africa, a brief description of that country (including its actual shape), its population and livelihood and images of nets being brought to that country. By doing this children and youth had a chance

to see and hear about people different from themselves. While listening to these brief stories each week, children created outlines of their hands. These outlines were cut out and placed on a mosquito net hung in a shared space outside the classrooms. By the end of that Lenten season, the net was filled with hands of every color and size and carried in with the Palm Sunday procession.

“Conscious Collecting” is an important part of faith formation. Sometimes we see the fruit of these programs in surprising and delightful ways. The first Sunday of our ‘Nets-for-Life’ program, a fourth grade girl approached me after church. When I asked what she had learned that morning in Sunday School, she replied - “We decided that after we collect for the mosquito nets we want to collect money for shoes. They all need shoes!” The picture shown that week was of a group of villagers standing together as they waited for their nets. Seeing their feet exposed inspired another idea for outreach. This was certainly a grace-filled gift to the teachers in those classes.

These opportunities for looking beyond ourselves are an important piece to our growing in faith. For more information, check out [Nets-for-Life](#).

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