

stnicholasday project



A Partnership with
World Vision Canada

December 5th 2010 to January 9th 2011

What is the St. Nicholas Day Project?

Definition:

The St. Nicholas Day Project (SNDP) is a short-term month-long charity drive to raise funds for *World Vision Canada*. Proceeds are specifically targeted to redeem children who are being sexually exploited. Each child can be redeemed from this form of slavery at the cost of \$75.00. (Other organizations such as the Canadian Armed Forces are asked to redeem children forced into military service, which is an outreach World Vision Canada also does for the same cost).

Legend of St. Nicholas:

In Turkey, in the fourth century, a desperately poor family was forced to sell their three daughters into slavery which meant the girls would inevitably be forced into prostitution. The Bishop of the area, Nicholas, became aware of the plight of the three girls.

Legend has it that late at night, he crept to the window of the poor family and threw in three gold coins. The Bishop knew that when the family awoke and discovered them, the parents would be able to save their children and pay their debts. Legend tells us the girls had hung up their stockings by the fireplace so that they would be dry and warm in the morning and they each found a golden coin lodged in the toe of one of their socks. This is part of the tradition of the Christmas stocking and the story is one reason Nicholas is the patron saint and protector of children.

Historical Significance of December 6th:

In the church calendar, St. Nicholas Day has been celebrated on December 6th. In Europe, December 6th is known as “Little Christmas” where children leave their shoes by the front door the previous night and awake to find small gifts and trinkets left in them. There are ethnic groups within Canada that continue to celebrate the story of Nicholas and “Little Christmas” such as the large Dutch community in Victoria, BC.

For many, St. Nicholas the saint has been swallowed up by the consumer figure of Santa Claus. The saint is now mostly remembered by Christian communities.

December 6th is also associated in Canada with the Montreal Massacre. The legend of St. Nicholas is not irrelevant to tragedy as Bishop Nicholas stood up against violence directed towards women in his own day.

Rationale:

St. Nicholas was an historical person who as a bishop was moved by his Christian convictions to oppose an injustice towards children who were unable to protect themselves. December 6th gives the church an opportunity to engage in the serious social issue of the sexual exploitation of children. By partnering with *World Vision Canada* the church can redeem, in the spirit of St. Nicholas, children who are being abused today.

Method:

There should be a special designated Christmas stocking which is put in an accessible and prominent place in the church. It is desirable to bless the stocking and to explain the purpose of the SNDP.

Clergy are encouraged to use the special prayers for St. Nicholas Day offered by their liturgies. Clergy are asked to explain the SNDP aims to their congregations.

The closest Sunday to the 6th should be the initial day of the SNDP and it would be helpful to craft the sermon so that themes of protection of children can be highlighted (see sample sermon). Emphasis should be on a target contribution of \$3.00 as a symbolic offering, recalling Bishop Nicholas` gift (although more is welcome of course).

At the end of services, the treasurer is asked to collect donated funds and keep them separately. After the celebration of Epiphany in the New Year, the treasurer forwards the money directly to: **World Vision 1300-1 World Drive, Mississauga, Ontario, L5T 0A8** and designates the offering towards the redemption of sexually exploited children which is coded at **2485**.

Treasurers are asked to keep a record of donated money and to forward this figure to World Vision volunteer David Peterson (judyanddave@shaw.ca) so that a master total may be calculated and recorded.

**Sexual Exploitation of Children: Did You Know?
10 Quick Facts**

- **Sex Tourism is a big multibillion dollar business** including destinations such as Brazil, Mexico, Thailand, Costa Rica and Cambodia.
- **Children are often tricked** into child prostitution or are sold by their impoverished parents.
- **Unemployment and Poverty** add fuel to child exploitation.
- **Children as young as five-years-old** are forced into child prostitution.
- **A Child at times must serve** up to 30 customers in one day.
- **Up to 1.8 million children** are forced into prostitution.
- **Children are often stolen across political borders** where their chances of freedom are made much more complicated.
- **Children suffer from** sexual diseases, emotional and psychiatric problems.
- **The Majority of Sex Tourists** come from the United States.
- **World Vision** has been a leader in combatting this international crime and in encouraging countries to pass laws against it.

St. Nicholas Day Suggested Sermon

The legend goes that long ago, in the fourth century in what is today the country of Turkey, lived a very poor family. The family was so poor in fact that the parents were forced to forfeit their three daughters – they were to be sold into slavery which meant an inevitable life of prostitution.

Now the bishop of the town, a good man named Nicholas heard about the plight of the three girls. Late at night, when the town was asleep, he crept through the streets and alleys to the poor family's home which was dark and still. Quietly opening a window, he threw three gold coins into the room so that the parents could save their daughters.

The girls had hung their stockings by the chimney so they would be warm and dry the next day. When they got dressed in the morning, each girl discovered a gold coin in one of their stockings. No one knew that the coins got there by the lucky toss of the kind Bishop. The joyful family was now wealthy enough to buy their way back out of debt and the children were spared.

Now there are many different variations on this story and it is why on some pawnbroker signs you will see three coins – Nicholas being the patron saint of pawnbrokers (and sailors too!) - but he is best remembered as a patron saint and protector of children.

On this Sunday we celebrate Saint Nicholas Day. Over time, the Bishop, who was a real and historical person, has become intertwined with the figure of Santa Claus. The story of the kindness of the bishop has become trivialized by our culture and given the status of legend and has become a quaint story of the legend of the Christmas Stocking.

It is important for the church to reclaim the story of Nicholas, which is really a story about a man of Christian values who acted in a strong and powerful way to protect the helpless. In the name of Jesus Christ, he took action to protect those who were in danger and unable to protect themselves.

In Jesus' time, children were seen as basically having no value and childhood as we understand it today did not exist. They did not have any status and in the gospel (Mk 10:13-16) we have the story of how the children are being brought to Jesus so that he might bless them. We are told the disciples seem to think Jesus has more important things to do with his time and so they scold the people and try to send them away – now this is one of the few times we see Jesus getting angry:

“When Jesus noticed this, he was angry and said to his disciples, ‘Let the children come to me and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.’”

Jesus has high regard for the children. In Matthew's gospel in chapter 18:10 he tells us that we should *“take care not to despise any of these little ones. For I tell you, that their angels in heaven are always in the presence of my Father in heaven.”*

What Jesus is in fact saying here was something that would surprise his disciples and his audience. Jesus is speaking of what we call “Guardian Angels”. The angels who are always in the presence of God were in fact the most powerful of the angels. Jesus is saying in effect that the children, the most helpless of people are, in fact, watched over by the most powerful of heaven's host.

Jesus in fact stands up for all kinds of people who do not have a great deal of power – he stands up for children, for women, for the sick and for the stranger. Jesus also stood up for us for when we were lost in our sin and estrangement from God when he went to the cross and paid with his life – and by this act and sacrifice of love he bought us back and redeemed us.

In the story of Nicholas, the bishop who is a follower of Jesus takes it upon himself to stand up for the children. Today, we who are the followers of Jesus are called upon to also stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves.

And so today, you are invited to participate in a project that has been adopted by World Vision. Many of you have seen the gift magazine produced by World Vision – in it are wonderful ways to help poor children by buying them school supplies, medicines or by buying their families a goat or cow.

One wonderful thing World Vision also does is to help buy children out of a terrible type of modern slavery for only \$75.00 per child. In many places, boys and girls are forced to be sex slaves. Up to 1.8 million children are trapped in this brutality - children are often lured away or tricked into this terrible exploitation.

So, in the spirit of the Bishop and in a way that captures once again the kindness that he displayed one night by throwing three gold coins into the home of a poor family, you are invited to join with me over the next few weeks by parting with three of your gold coins – three loonies – and drop them in this Christmas sock. Each week, whatever is dropped into the Christmas sock will be collected and set aside and on January 6th, which is Epiphany and the last day of the Christmas Season, the money will be collected and sent to World Vision. Whatever money is raised will be sent with a direction for it to be used to redeem children being sexually exploited.

This will be known as the “St. Nicholas Day Project” and churches are being invited to participate. This Christmas sock will be here all throughout the Christmas season from December 5th through to January 9th which is the Epiphany.

For every \$75 raised, one child is helped and given shelter, medical care and counseling and, where possible, even vocational training. If you can part with a little change we can make a big difference together.

It is hoped that this project becomes something many churches and organizations do. Last year, 2009, five Anglican churches and one branch of the Royal Canadian Legion participated. \$1300 were raised and sent to World Vision.

Today is St. Nicholas Day when we look behind the legend and see a good man who acted in faith and who made a difference. What will one small act do? Perhaps best to leave the last word to a saying of the Rabbis that “*Whoever saves one life saves the entire world.*”

Please help to save somebody’s world.

Resource # 3

The following includes prayers and a home Christmas ritual that will help make the legend and themes of St. Nicholas more concrete to children. It also includes meditations and reflections that clergy can use or Bible study leaders can incorporate into their classes.



St. Nicholas Day Prayer for Families

Home Prayer for St. Nicholas Day

(Gather in circle)

Dear Lord, thank you for this day and for this special time of year.

We remember how Bishop Nicholas bravely stood up against those who would hurt children. Thank you for his kindness and we give us we pray courage to stand up against whatever hurts children and for those who cannot protect themselves. **Amen.**

A Family Service for Decorating the Home for Christmas:

Gather where the tree is waiting to be decorated or some other appropriate place in the home. The candy canes and chocolate coins, an angel ornament and Christmas stockings may be placed in the center of the family for prayer and their blessing.

Dear Lord, there are many wonderful reminders of St. Nicholas here.



The Candy Canes:

We have our candy cane and its shape reminds us of a long hooked staff that a shepherd carries while protecting their sheep. This is also the staff of a bishop and Nicholas as a bishop watched carefully over his flock and the children who are its lambs. We remember also Jesus who is our Good Shepherd. When we place a candy cane on the tree help us, we pray, to remember that Jesus asks us to watch over his sheep and to protect his children.

Bless Lord these candy canes, which remind us of the sweetness of your love. **Amen.**



The Chocolate Coins:

We have our sweet chocolate coins. They remind us of the three gold coins that St. Nicholas gave to save the children. Help us to remember that to serve you it will cost us of our time and energy and our resources. Help us also to remember that you Lord Jesus were born into the world at this time to pay with your very life for our salvation. Lord, when we enjoy these chocolate coins, help us to remember the sweetness of showing kindness to others. **Amen**



The Angel Ornament:

We have our Christmas angel. Angels are messengers of the good news of God`s love. Help us to remember that Jesus told us the angels watch over the children. Help us to watch over the little ones and to be messengers of good news for them. **Amen.**



The Christmas Stocking:

Lord, bless this special Christmas stocking so that it will remind us of how St. Nicholas tossed three coins into the dark and how they landed in the girls` socks that were hung up by the fireplace. When we see this Christmas sock, help us to know that our acts of kindness will always land in a good place and our actions are never wasted. Bless every golden coin that we place in it during this Christmas season, knowing that like St. Nicholas, we are doing a good deed for children in danger. **Amen.**

A Blessing Prayer When Placing the Chapel Stocking

Lord, we remember that St. Nicholas gave three golden coins to help children in need. Because of his kindness, he protected three children from harm. Bless we pray our gifts which in the spirit of St. Nicholas we place in this Christmas stocking. May it serve as a reminder that we are one family and we must care for each other. **Amen.**



Meditations

Mother Theresa

“We do violence to one another when we forget that we belong to each other.”

The Talmud:

“Whoever saves a life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world.”

The Talmud: Hillel the Elder

“If I am not for myself, then who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, then what am I? And if not now, when?”

Jewish Levels of Charity (Tzedakah):

From the least noble to the most meritorious:

1. Giving an act of charity reluctantly.
2. Giving less than one is able or obligated to - but freely giving it.
3. Responding after one has been asked to give.
4. Responding before one has been asked.
5. Giving without knowing who will benefit from your act of charity although they know you are the patron.
6. Giving when you know who will benefit but your action remains anonymous.
7. Giving a gift when neither party – the giver or the receiver – will ever know each other.
8. Giving that will enable the other to become independent.



Scripture to Meditate Uponⁱ

(As suggested in *For All the Saints Prayers and Readings for Saints' Days*.
Anglican Book Centre, Toronto. 1994. Page 367)

Ezekiel 34:11 & 12

“I, the Sovereign Lord, tell you that I myself will look for my sheep and take care of them in the same way as shepherds take care of their sheep that were scattered and are brought together again. I will bring them back from all the places where they were scattered...”

Reflect: *St. Nicholas, as a shepherd of his people, looked for the little ones in his flock who were in danger. If Jesus really is our Good Shepherd, and we try to become more like him, how are we seeking the children who are Jesus' lambs?*

1st John 4:7-14

“Dear friends, let us love one another, because love comes from God. Whoever loves is a child of God, and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. And God showed his love for us by sending his only Son into the world, so that we might have life through him. This is what love is: it is not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the means by which his Son is to be the means by which our sins are forgiven.

Dear friends, if this is how God loved us, then we should love one another. No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in union with us, and his love is made perfect in us.

We are sure that we live in union with God and that he lives in union with us, because he has given us his Spirit. And we have seen and tell others that the Father sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world.”

Reflect: *A person can see the invisible wind in the way it sways the grass and the trees. Can people see the invisible God in the way we live out our lives?*

Mark 1:13-16

Some people brought children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples scolded the people. When Jesus noticed this, he was angry and said to his disciples, *‘Let the children come to me, and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I assure you that whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.’* Then he placed his hands on each of them, and blessed them.”

Reflect: *What are the obstacles that prevent the children from coming to be blessed? What obstacles are in our lives that prevent us from acts of kindness?*

Additional Scripture:

Matthew 6:2 & 3

“So when you give something to a needy person, do not make a big show of it...when you help a needy person, do it in such a way that even your closest friend will not know about it. Then it will be a private matter. And your Father, who sees what you do in private, will reward you.”

Reflect: *In Judaism, there are eight levels of charity – the second most worthy form of giving is to give anonymously. Why should an anonymous gift be held in such honour?*

Matthew 18:10 & 11

“See that you don’t despise any of these little ones. Their angels in heaven, I tell you, are always in the presence of my Father in heaven.”

Reflect: *The “Angels that are in the presence of my Father in Heaven”, in Judaism, the most powerful of the angels. Jesus would have shocked his audience by making a claim that the angels that are the most powerful are the Guardian Angels of the children who were in his society the most helpless. What does this say to us with regards to how we view the children of the poor?*

ⁱAll scripture is from *The Good News Bible With Deuterocanonicals / Apocrypha Today’s English Version*. American Bible Society. New York. 1993.

Resource # 4

Christmas Stockings:

The children are encouraged to participate in the SNDP at their own level of understanding. The creation of Christmas stockings as a Sunday school project will encourage the Project to take place at home. The intention is that after the Christmas season, funds are brought to the church and specially recognized during the offerings taken during the service, and then included in the funds directed to World Vision.

The attached patterns and pictures will help in creating Christmas stockings which may then be decorated.

Sample stockings:



Pictures, patterns and instructions courtesy of Mrs. Jean van Dyk

ST. NICHOLAS STOCKINGS

Materials: Felt in various colours. (The pattern fits the 9"x12" size sold at craft stores, or buy in fabric stores by the meter.)
Yarn in contrasting colours; about 36" for each stocking.
Large eyed darning needle
Decorations: hand- made or bought

METHOD ONE

1. Copy pattern (see below) on to heavy card paper. Cut out on black lines, and use a paper punch to cut out holes.

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2. Arrange card paper pattern on felt fabric, pin and cut out. Before removing pins, mark felt through the holes with a marker pen.
 3. Thread a large darning needle with yarn. Make a large knot in the end.
 4. Using the pen marks as a guide, sew the two stocking pieces together. One strand of yarn is enough. The needle will go from the top mark down through the felt, and then bring the needle around to the facing side again to go down through the second mark, and so on. This will give an attractive bound edge. When finished sewing, make a good strong knot and cut off excess yarn.
 5. Fold down the cuff at the top of the stocking. Glue it down or leave it loose. With the remaining yarn, use the needle to thread a loop at the back top, in order to hang the stocking.
 6. Decorate with felt figures glued on, or self-adhesive stickers from a craft store.

METHOD TWO (Adult supervision required)

1. Pin pattern to felt and cut out. Two or three thicknesses of felt can be cut at the same time.
2. Match up backs and fronts, then staple together. Be sure your staples close properly; otherwise children could be hurt by the sharp points.
3. Thread a piece of yarn or string through a large darning needle and pull it through the top back of the stocking. Remove needle and knot yarn for a hanging loop.
4. Decorate as in method one.

METHOD THREE (Helping adult hands required)

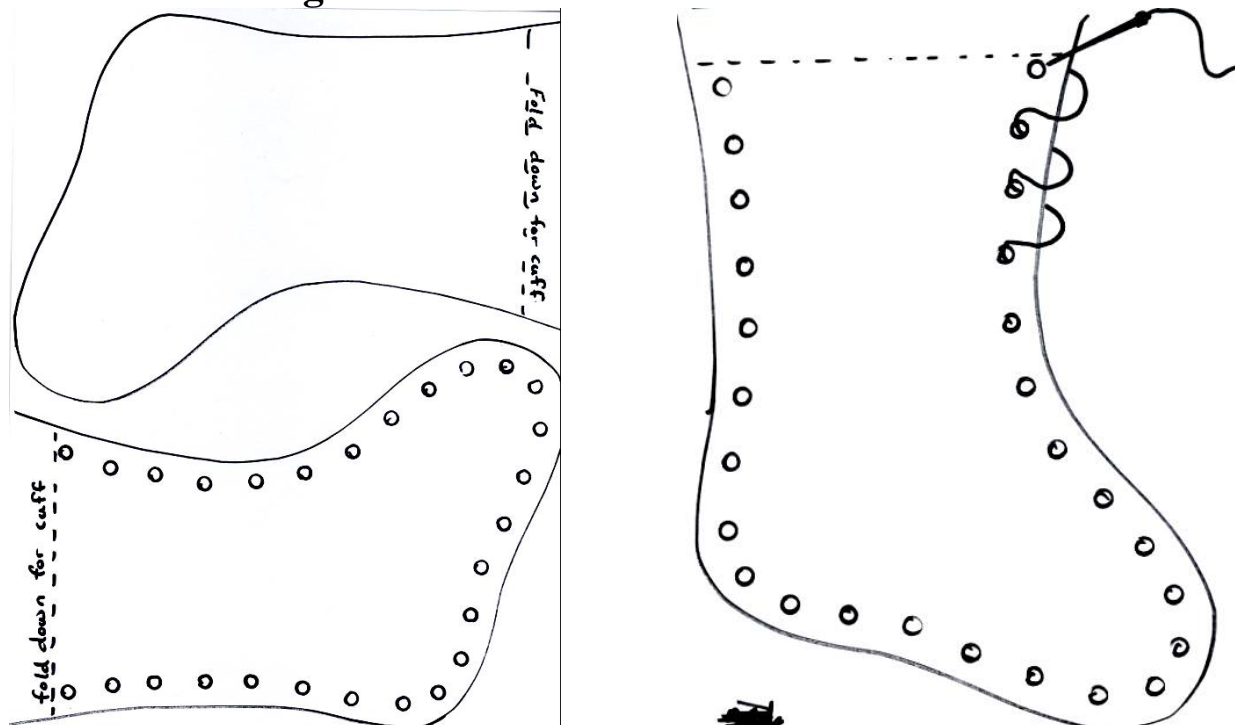
1. Pin and cut out as in method two.
2. Using a hot glue gun, place a bead of glue around the edge of one piece. Carefully place the matching piece on top. Press down with a

ruler or other tool to bind the pieces together. Be very careful not to touch the hot glue. It burns!

3. Glue on a small strip of felt for a hanging loop.

4. Decorate as above.

Patterns: Enlarge to 8.5 x 11 inches.



Conclusion:

Thank you for your consideration of The St. Nicholas Day Project. I hope this presentation has been clear and please call me if there is any question I can help you with.

Most Sincerely,

The Rev. David Peterson

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