

"Seek first the Kingdom of God, the rest will be given to you"

A reflection on overconsumption and simplicity of living...

Objective

At the end of this spirituality activity, the faith community will understand that true happiness does not lie in the possession of material wealth, but rather in seeking the Kingdom of God. We can trust God. He gives us what we need.

Duration

1 heure et 30 minutes

Equipment

General : a Bible, a bird, a bouquet of lilies, a laptop, a projector, uploaded video and speakers.

6 years and under : the laminated pictures from Appendix 2, a wrapped box, photocopies of the pictures in appendix 2, coloured pencils, a song, a laptop with the song and speakers, games for the play period.

7-12 ans : a book, a bible and copies of the laminated Appendix 3.

Teenagers : the advertisements you have chosen and a Bible.

Adultes : Bibles, small papers, pencils, a basket, a laptop, the song, loudspeakers and soft music.

Locales

Use the church or community hall for gatherings and other rooms for activities by age group. Give priority to outdoor activities, weather permitting.



Welcome and Introduction (15 minutes)

All age groups gather together in the church for a common introduction.

To introduce the theme of voluntary simplicity (also called minimalism), it would be helpful to stage a short skit like this one featuring St. Francis of Assisi. The staging is inspired by the biographical passage in Appendix 1.

Francis of Assisi comes in and recounts an incident from his life.



"Hello! My name is Francis, Francis of Assisi. I deeply love God and all his creatures. Every day, I invite animals to praise and to love the Creator. One day while walking with my brothers, I encountered a large flock of birds of all kinds. I left my companions there and ran toward the birds. I spoke to them about one of my favourite biblical passages which talks about living simply; a practice that is close to my heart. I said to them: "My brothers the birds, you should love your creator deeply and praise him always. He has given you feathers to wear, wings to fly with, and whatever else you need. He has made you noble among his creatures and given you a dwelling in the pure air. You neither sow nor reap, yet he nevertheless protects and governs you without any anxiety on your part." I then blessed birds, made the sign of the cross over them and gave them leave to fly away. I rejoined my companions. I was so happy that I gave thanks to God!"

Francis of Assisi comes out smiling and waving his arms in the air.

The leader explains that Francis of Assisi's interaction with the birds was inspired by a biblical text from the gospel of Matthew: Mt 6: 25-34. As this text is read out loud, someone could act out the words.

Gospel of Matthew

(Mt : 25-34 NRSV)

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

[Mimic eating something or putting on a coat.]

Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

[Mimic flying or pecking like a bird.]

And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet, I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these

[A person could circulate holding a bouquet of lilies.]

But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?'

[Mimic the actions of eating, drinking, and dressing.]

For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.



Dispersal

(5 minutes)

Indicate the meeting rooms for each age group. Also introduce the volunteers who will accompany the youth. Then everyone moves to their assigned room.



Activities by age group

(60 minutes)

6 years and under

1. Francis of Assisi meets the children

Have the children sit down. Tell them a special guest will be coming to visit. Francis of Assisi enters the room. The goal is for Francis of Assisi to familiarize the children with what true happiness is and what it means to seek the Kingdom of God.

Hello friends! I am happy to see you again. What did you understand from what I told you earlier in the church? (Let the children express themselves.)

You know, I have come to understand that to be happy in life, we don't need much. For me, wealth is not important. Look how I'm dressed: a brown habit and sandals! I don't need luxurious clothes. I don't necessarily have money in my pockets: God is always there to give me everything I need. True happiness comes from our relationship with God and with others whether they are poor or sick, and with all God's creatures. I consider it a waste of time to put our love in our possessions.

I want to tell you a story to help you better understand what really makes us happy. Somewhere in the room, a gift is hidden. I need you to find it because the pictures of my story are inside. (The box contains the Appendix 2 images.)

Story told by Francis of Assisi, while showing the Appendix 2 picture corresponding to each example.

What makes us really happy is spending time with someone we love. It's helping someone who needs help.

It is making up with a friend after an argument.

It's sharing our toys with others.

It is comforting someone who is in pain.

It is loving Jesus and knowing He loves you.

These small actions move us closer to finding the Kingdom of God.

Pin up the pictures so the children can see them clearly and refer to them.

Francis of Assisi asks the children if they have already done one or the other of the things cited as an example. (Allow time for children to express themselves on the subject.)

2. Colouring

Have several copies of the images in Appendix 2 printed. Invite children to choose an image they like and let them colour it. Children who would like to draw an example of true happiness that has not been mentioned are encouraged to do so.

3. Song

Sing a song such as "Morning has Broken" (Images and words can be found on youtube.com) or "All Things Bright and Beautiful"

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FT_oDqOEGpc)

or "The Ugly Duckling"

(<https://www.lyrics.com/lyric/1108136>)

4. Free Time (games)

7 to 12 years

1. Read about true wealth

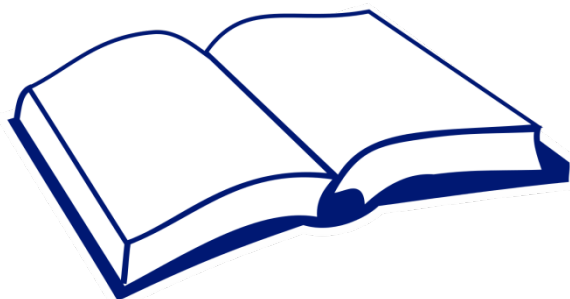
Read a book such as "Maybe God Is Like That Too", Jennifer Grant (amazon.com) or "Thank You, God", J. Bradley Wigger (amazon.com) or "I'm Rich!", Angela Delaunois. If you cannot get it, present this short excerpt from the book to the youngsters:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=irqlWqQYER8>

Ask a few questions:

- What do you understand, what do you remember from the book just read?
- Is it important for you to always have beautiful, big, new toys? In other words, can you still have fun playing with fewer and older toys?
- Where do we find true riches? (friends, family, love, peace, ...)

* The purpose of reading the book is to begin with the children's everyday life to help them understand that true wealth, true happiness, is not found in material objects.



2. Back to the biblical text

Ask the young people the following questions:

- What did you understand about what Francis of Assisi told you?

Re-read the biblical text of Matt. 6: 25-34.

- Are there any links we can make between the book and the biblical text?
- What is the Kingdom of God? (to make peace, to want justice ...) That's what real wealth is!

3. Picture Game

Explain to the youth that they will need to be in teams of two. They will be given laminated pictures. They will have to put them in the right circle. One circle is called Material Riches and the other is called Riches of the Kingdom of God (see Appendix 3).

When all the teams have finished the game, everyone comes together in a big group.

4. Learning to Trust Activity

"So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today." (Mt 6, 34)

- What does that mean to you? (God gives us what we need from day to day. People can give us the things we need when we need them... It is useless to accumulate objects in case we may one day need them ...)



Invite the kids to play a little game to understand what it means to trust God.

Ask them to stand two by two. One young person stands in front of the other with his back to him. He lets himself fall back and trusts that the other will catch him! Then reverse the roles.

Come back in a group and ask them to share what happened. Was it easy to let go? Why? What is the connection with placing our trust in God? (He will never let me down because he loves me, he is there for me ...)

Teenagers

1. Discussion around popular ads

Schedule a discussion with teens about the advertising around us. Here are some examples of questions:

- What are the television commercials that you particularly like? Why do you like them?
- What do you think is the purpose of an advertisement?

2. Analyse de publicités

Watch some advertisements with the youth to see how they encourage us to buy, to consume goods that we may not need. (Bring ads targeting the interests of teens such as cell phones and electronics, and be sure to choose from those selling items.)

3. Discussion about the impact of advertising on my consumer habits

Here are some examples of questions to ask teens:

- Do advertisements make me consume more?
- Before buying something, do I sometimes ask: "Do I really need it?"
- Do my purchases (trendy clothes, latest cell phones on the market, etc.) really make me happier? Why?

4. Text of Matthew 6, 25-34

Re-read this passage of Matthew with the teens.

Here are some examples of questions we can ask them:

- What do you understand about this biblical text?
- According to Jesus, where is true happiness found?
- Is seeking the Kingdom of God what can really fill my heart? (Peace, love, justice, forgiveness...) Can you give examples from your own experience?

The facilitator, during this discussion, can express the fact that God is Providence. If, for example, I need new clothes, maybe a friend will give me some, which are very beautiful...



Adults

1. Biblical Sharing

Invite the adults to sit in small groups. Provide a facilitator by group. Begin by each small group rereading the text of Matthew 6: 25-34. Afterwards, some questions can be asked, such as:

- What touches me in this biblical text? What concerns me?

- "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today." (Matt. 6: 34)

Do I see the Providence of God in my life? In other words, do I want to possess without recognizing the gift? Do I know that if I present Him with what I need, He will provide?

- Do I thank God before meals? Is it really God who provides for my needs or is it only me alone with my earnings who meets my needs?

- For me, what does it mean to seek the Kingdom and justice of God?

- Am I able to recall moments in my life where seeking the Kingdom of God made me deeply happy?

- "nor gather into barns..." Am I in need of a conversion regarding my consumer behavior? Do I tend to find my happiness in the purchase of material goods, in buying things that I do not really need and that will end up in the attic? Give examples.

- Do I hold onto things without wanting to give them up in fear that I may someday need them? Am I too attached to my material goods? Give examples.



2. Singing

In our consumer society, we are over-consuming and often seek comfort in amassing wealth rather than finding our true happiness in God. Take a moment to ask God for forgiveness.

Sing a song such as Kyrie Eleison or "Lord, I Want To Be A Christian in my heart" (Videos and words on youtube.com).

Lord I want to be a Christian in my heart in my heart
Lord I want to be a Christian in my heart in my heart
In my heart in my heart
Lord I want to be a Christian in my heart in my heart

Lord I want to be more loving in my heart in my heart
Lord I want to be more loving in my heart in my heart
In my heart in my heart
Lord I want to be more loving in my heart in my heart

Lord I want to be more simple in my heart in my heart
Lord I want to be more simple in my heart in my heart
In my heart in my heart
Lord I want to be more simple in my heart in my heart

Lord I want to be like Jesus in my heart in my heart
Lord I want to be like Jesus in my heart in my heart
In my heart in my heart
Lord I want to be like Jesus in my heart in my heart



3. Personal Commitment

Ask everyone to write down on a piece of paper the step he has to take to be more concerned with seeking the Kingdom and the righteousness of God. In other words, according to the awareness gained today, how is the Lord calling me to be more trusting of Him concerning my material needs?

Provide some soft music during this process. People come forward to place their papers in a basket. At a prayer service, these papers could be part of the offering.

Concluding Prayer (10 minutes)

All age groups return to the church.

Project a video of "All Things Bright and Beautiful"

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FT_oDqOEGpc)

or "Morning has Broken"

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h5D3LEjGF8A>)

Close with a spontaneous prayer and/or the Our Father.



To Go further.....

If the community would like to explore the theme of voluntary simplicity, one could at another time, show the film: Minimalism: a documentary about the important things.
www.minimalismfilm.com

Research a blog about finding balance in your life, connecting with who you are, and creating a lifestyle where you wake up each morning eagerly anticipating the day ahead.
<http://www.choosingvoluntarysimplicity.com>



Share your experience with us !
Send us your photos !
info@greenchurches.ca



Annex 1

Biographical excerpt on Francis of Assisi preaching to birds

Thomas of Celano

First and Second Lives of Saint Francis

(English translation by David Burr, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu>)

Meanwhile, at a time when many were joining the brothers, most blessed father Francis was passing through the valley of Spoleto. He came to a certain place near Bevagna, in which a great many birds of various types had congregated, including doves, crows and some others commonly called daws. When he saw them Francis, that most blessed servant of God, being a man of great fervor and very sympathetic toward the lower, irrational creatures, quickly left his companions on the road and ran over to them. When he got there, he saw that they were waiting expectantly and saluted them. Surprised that the birds had not flown away as they normally do, he was filled with joy and humbly begged them to listen to the word of God. Among the things he told them, he said the following:

"My brothers the birds, you should love your creator deeply and praise him always. He has given you feathers to wear, wings to fly with, and whatever else you need. He has made you noble among his creatures and given you a dwelling in the pure air. You neither sow nor reap, yet he nevertheless protects and governs you without any anxiety on your part."

Both Francis and his companions agree in reporting that, when he had spoken thus, the birds exulted marvelously in their own fashion, stretching their necks, extending their wings, opening their mouths, and gazing at him. Francis walked into their midst, touching their heads and bodies with his tunic. Finally he blessed them and, making the sign of the cross, gave them permission to fly off to some other place.

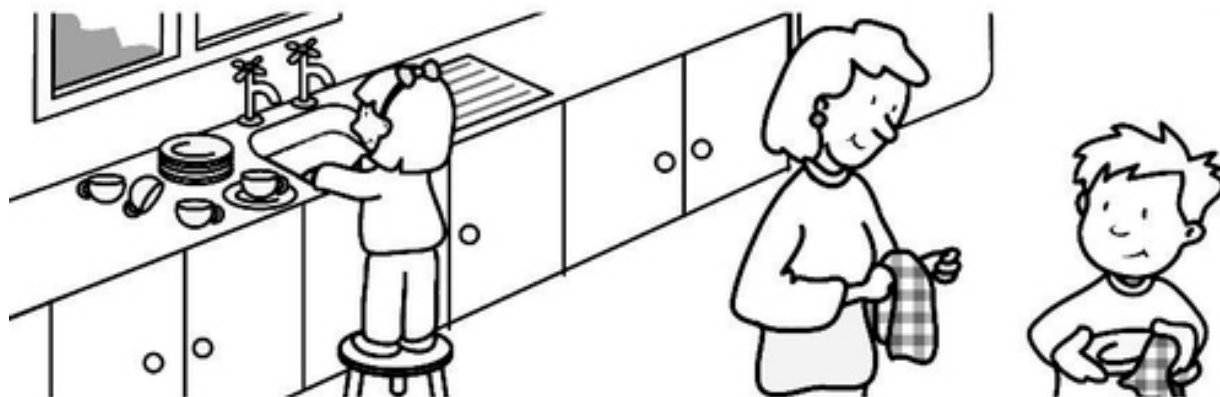
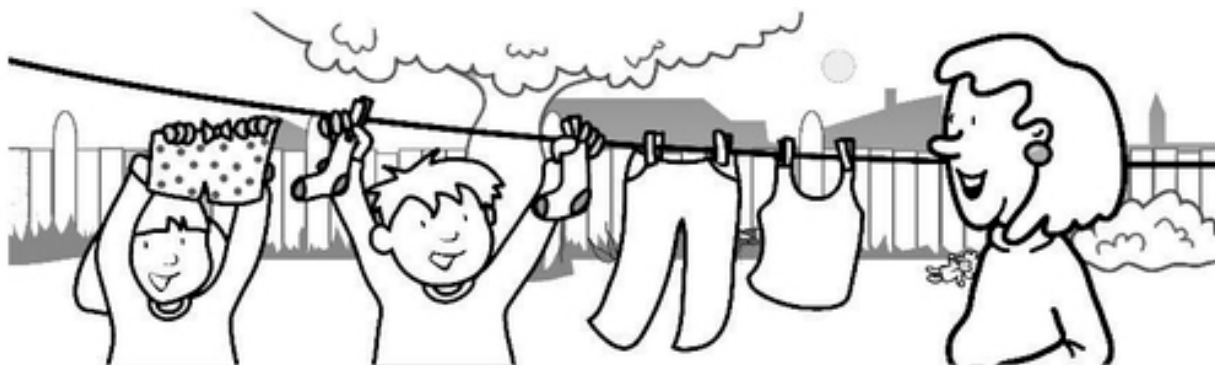
Rejoicing, the blessed father went off with his companions, giving thanks to God whom all creatures worship. Since he had now been made simple by grace and not by nature, he began to accuse himself of negligence for not having preached to the birds before, since they listened to the word of God with such reverence. And thus it came about that, from that day on, he exhorted all birds, all animals, all reptiles, and even nonexistent creatures to praise and love the creator, for every day, when the name of the savior was announced, he himself saw their obedience.



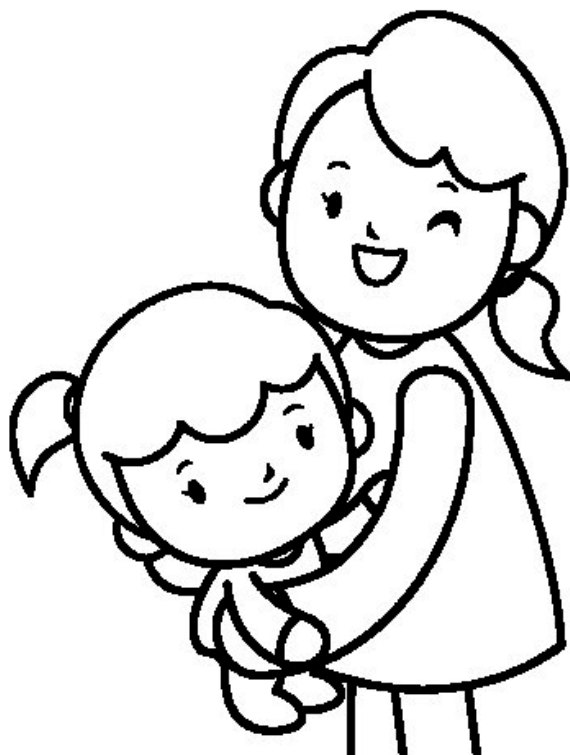
Annex 2



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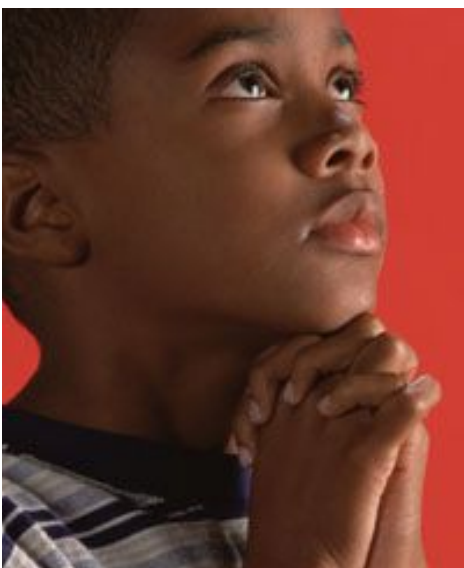


Cdn5.coloritou.com



Annex 3

Wealth in the Kingdom of God



Annexe 3

Material Wealth





Annex 4

Pictures of typically Canadian Birds and Flowers



Canada Jay (or Gray Jay or Whiskey Jack)
Credit : diapicard – pixabay.com

Canada's National Bird



Common Loon

Credit: Hooker475 - pixabay.com



Snowy Owl

Credit: Doug Swinson - Unsplash.com



Canada Goose

Credit: PublicDomainPictures – pixabay.com



Black-capped Chickadee

Credit : Bonnie Kittle - unsplash.com



Blue Flag

Credit : WolfBlur – pixabay.com



Trillium

Credit: Ebowalker – pixabay.com



Western Red Lily

Credit: stafichukanatoly - pixabay.com