

transforming generosity

Welcoming Children With Boundless Joy

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BY RICHARD FELTON



In church one Sunday many years ago, the stewardship chair was speaking about that year's pledge drive. While he was speaking, a young child started crying. In an effort to be funny, the man said, "My father (a priest) often says 'a crying child should be like your pledge. They should be carried out.'" Thankfully, that comment did not elicit laughter but boos from the congregation.

In today's Gospel, the disciples seem to be acting like security guards and they are trying to keep children away from Jesus. Jesus will have none of it. Instead he orders the disciples to let the children get close to Jesus. He honors the children and their desire to be close to him.

How we, as individuals and as a church, honor children says a great deal about our commitment to transformational generosity. Nothing transforms our church and our faith like welcoming children into the center of our worship. Whether they are part of the congregation or integral to the worship through singing in a choir or assisting with the service, children can elevate the wonder and joy of our praise and thanksgiving.

And we must also honor children with meaningful programs of Christian formation, ministry and mission. There are few cities and towns across America where there are not children who are suffering. Too many children go to bed hungry and hopeless. That truth is an affront to God, and we, as "the Episcopal branch of the Jesus movement" must work and give to reduce that suffering.

Finally, we must honor children with our own sense of loving generosity. Jesus says the reign of God belongs to the children. They are not to be shunned or turned away. They are to be welcomed as the future of God's realm. Let us lift them up and follow in their boundless joy and God's boundless presence.

Richard Felton is the Executive Director/CEO of the Episcopal Network for Stewardship (TENS). For over 30 years, he has helped churches thrive through inspiring generosity from every member.

For reflection ...

- ❖ How can you make your church a place of joyful welcoming to children?
- ❖ Have you considered making children an integral part of your stewardship program? How would you or do you do that?