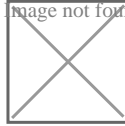


The culture of a Mother's Ministry (Sylvia Leontaritis)

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Soup Kitchen

As the time draws near for Angelo to enter Kindergarten I find myself on a roller coaster of emotions. Excitement. Nervousness. Fear. However, the most prominent emotion, by far, is the overwhelming sense of responsibility that I feel. *Have I adequately prepared him?*

For the past couple years we've spent countless hours practicing letters, numbers, sight words and more. Every weeknight when supper and chores are finished we work in workbooks and flip through flash cards. I breathe a sigh of relief as he recites the alphabet and writes his name complete with all 17 letters. I am gaining confidence in his preparedness to begin his lifelong journey of learning.

Why then do I feel like I am forgetting something—like I'm running out of time?

“Beloved Christians, you and your children shall give account to the just Judge. He will not ask whether you have taught your children the arts or whether you have taught them to speak French, German or Italian, but whether you have taught them to live as Christians.” ~St. Tikhon of Zadonsk

Am I teaching my children to live a Christian life? Do I find time to help those less fortunate? Where have I set the standard, in regards to charity, in my home? Am I teaching them how to follow one of the greatest commandments? “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Mark 12:31)

Giving a few dollars to a person on the corner or cleaning a few items out of my jam-packed closet and donating them to Goodwill is many times the extent of my charity. Oftentimes I *want* to do more, wish *I could* do more to make a difference in someone's life, but I am at a loss at where to begin.

Being the mother of two young children leaves me with very limited spare time. Which means, I need projects that can either be done from home or with my children underfoot. Now and again I find myself feeling useless to the outside world. I oftentimes wish that I were able to help in the same ways I did before becoming a mother. It's a very frustrating feeling! On days like this I try and remind myself that the greatest thing I can do for others is to teach my children how to serve those less fortunate. Children grow like weeds and the time will inevitably come when they will be grown and I will have that time to minister to others more intimately again. However, for now my God-given privilege is to build my home.

“Wise women build their houses but those without discernment destroy them with their own hands.” (Proverbs 14:1) The lessons that are learned and the atmosphere I create within these four walls is the most important mission I will ever undertake—a ministry to my family.



food drive

Recently Angelo and I sat down and tried to think of several family-friendly ways that we could help those less fortunate. You might want to consider choosing one for your household as well. None of them require large amounts of time or money and all of them can be done as a family. Here's what we came up with:

1. **Soup Kitchens**-Many Orthodox Churches hold soup kitchens on a weekly or monthly basis. If you cannot locate one in your area this means there is a need—there are hungry people everywhere. Consider starting one yourself. Contact your parish priest and ask if he'd be interested in hosting such an event at your church hall. Then visit local supermarkets and restaurants and ask for donations of food that is ready to expire; you'll be surprised what they throw out. Next recruit family, friends and other church members by word-of-mouth and advertisements. Start small and see what happens!
2. **St. Seraphim Prison Ministry**-This is an ongoing project that serves inmates on death row at Florida State Prison. Seraphim Blackstock, the founder of the organization visits and teaches them about Christ and the Orthodox Faith. Through the Grace of God and the work of the volunteers many have been converted to Orthodoxy. There is a constant need for volunteers to write letters of faith and encouragement to the inmates. You can also help by donating Bibles, prayer ropes, Orthodox magazines or by making monetary donations to purchase these and other items that are distributed in the prison. To learn more log on to www.stseraphim.webs.com.

3. **IOCC Project Kits-** International Orthodox Christian Charities is an organization that has administered more than \$300 million in humanitarian relief to over 33 countries worldwide. Ninety-Two cents of every dollar you donate goes directly to their aid efforts. IOCC works in conjunction with CWS, Church World Services to distribute school kits for children in countries who do not even have access to pencils. Each kit only costs around \$3.00 when the supplies are purchased during Back to School sales. They have several other kits you can create such as Kid Kits, New Baby Kits, Health Kits and more. Be sure to check out the Kid's Page on www.iocc.org for more details.
4. **Start a Food Drive-**This is a very simple project and a great blessing to those who are hungry. The only requirement is to ask family and friends to donate canned or dry goods. You could also put an ad in your church bulletin asking fellow church members to participate. After you've collected enough food items, drop them off at a local food bank. (Be sure to call before collecting items to ask if they have any restrictions, etc)
5. **Prayer-** St. Makarios of Optina says that, "Spiritual almsgiving is greater than material almsgiving." I believe some of the simplest lessons taught at home,

like praying for those less fortunate, leave some of the strongest impressions. I also believe it is the greatest gift we can give someone. Asking God to bless someone, to keep them safe and healthy and to give them that which is unto salvation, is greater than any material item we could ever offer them.

After compiling this list Angelo and I both chose the project we thought would be the best to undertake at the present time. I decided I'd like to write to an inmate from the St. Seraphim Prison Ministry. He decided on IOCC's School Kits since we were preparing for school he thought it would be appropriate to help other children prepare as well.

We headed to Wal-Mart and filled our buggy with enough crayons, scissors, notebooks and rulers for as many kits as I could afford. That evening we got right to work putting the kits together. As we packed each bag we said a prayer asking God to bless the child who would receive it along with the people who would be delivering them. As we finished up Angelo asked,

"Can we buy more stuff tomorrow?"

"No, I'm sorry but we spent all the extra money we had. We still need to get you a new backpack and the rest of the stuff on your list." I responded.

"I still like my alligator backpack you know." He said glancing at me.

I nodded in acknowledgement but kept silent, curious to discover where he was going with this conversation.

"Do you think maybe I don't need a new one and we could spend that money on more supplies?"

Two days later we headed back to Wal-Mart for more supplies and twenty-two days later Angelo headed off to his first day of Kindergarten. He looked so much bigger than even just the night before. Those shoulders that used to hunch up against my chest as a baby now looked so big and proud as he carried his worn and tattered, green alligator backpack to school. "For I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me...Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me." (Matthew 25: 35-36,40)

By Sylvia Leontaritis

This article was originally published in The Handmaiden, Summer 2009 as "A Mother's Ministry," and was posted here with permission.

Sylvia (Sevasti) Leontaritis is the author of the Orthodox children's book, A POCKETFUL OF SEEDS. She lives on a small farm in Florida with her husband and their three adventurous little boys. They attend services at the two monasteries nearby their home. She is also the creator of the blog, [Adventures of an Orthodox Mom](http://www.orthodoxmom.com), where she and a terrific network of moms share in the triumphs and mishaps of raising children within the Orthodox Faith. Share in the adventures at www.orthodoxmom.com.