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A simple \$2 bill presents both challenges and opportunities

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At our last religious education class before Christmas, my teacher's aide and I gave gifts to our fourth-grade students. Inside a Christmas card were two gifts: something that would help them and something they could give away to help others.

The gift that would help them was a Ten Commandments prayer card. Hope fully, they will put it somewhere that is visible so they will see it often and be reminded of how God wants all of us to live.

The other gift, something they could use to help others, was a \$2 bill. I never imagined the joy they would express in seeing that \$2 bill. "These are rare! Where did you get these?" they asked. It was then that I realized how hard it might be for them to give that gift away.

I explained that they should give the \$2 bill to a person or group that might need it, maybe the parish fund for the needy, or the St. Vincent de Paul thrift store, or to a local parish that was hosting a Christmas Eve dinner. They liked the ideas, but wondered if they had to give that particular \$2 bill.

"Well, you could probably keep this \$2 bill and use two \$1 bills instead," I offered. They liked that plan better. During our first class after Christmas, we talked about what everyone had done with the gift they were asked to give away. Two had given their gift to religious sisters. Two more gave it to a local charity. A couple of students donated it to the parish (with their parents adding extra money on top of the \$2 gift). Some hadn't decided what to do with it yet.

An idea I had thought might be a way to draw the "pay it forward" theme into the classroom setting turned out to be an early life experience in stewardship. It provided a childhood chance to "pay forward" something they had received, something that was precious to them, and rare, something that was a true gift, a gift that hadn't been earned.

It made me think about how willing I am to give away the gifts I've received. Do I use the talents God has given me to help others learn about him every day? Do I pay attention to those around me who are in need, or do I consider my needs (which might truly be wants) first? Is there something God is calling me to within my vocation as a wife and mother that I'm turning a deaf ear toward? Am I silent often enough to let God communicate his plan to me?

When I went to the bank to get those \$2 bills, I asked for one extra, just in case. That extra bill lies on my nightstand today — a challenge to myself to "pay forward" the gifts God has given me in this new year.