

Nine ways your kids can get money for almsgiving

Do your kids practice giving alms? Almsgiving is central to the Catholic faith, and a great way for kids to exercise compassion and grow in character.

But before kids can practice almsgiving, they need alms to give, right? And most kids are pretty short on cash. Below, we're going to round up some easy ways your kids can remedy that situation. But before we get to the practical stuff...just what the heck are "alms," anyway?

What are "Alms"?

Well, according to the [Online Etymology Dictionary](#), the word *alms* has its origins in an ancient Greek word, *eleos*, meaning "pity, mercy"—or, in a slightly different form, "compassionate." Today, the word is used almost exclusively in the context of a religious obligation.

"Giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God."

So says the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* ([#2447](#)), summing up the many calls to almsgiving throughout the Bible. And, bonus: it's also an act of penance ([#1434](#)), a reparation for sin.

Pay attention to those Old Testament prophets and books of wisdom, particularly the end of the Book of Tobit, and you'll see this connection made again and again: Want to get right with God? Make up for your sin by giving to the poor.

By the time of Jesus, this form of "sacrifice" was seen as an

adjunct to, or even sometimes a replacement for, ritual animal sacrifice.

See? Getting your kids to give alms to the poor is going to be so much easier than getting them to sacrifice an animal. And less messy, too.

Three quick tips: Be intentional; Make it a team effort; Make personal connections

As with any new habit that you want your kids to develop, you're going to have to be pretty intentional at first. Set some goals or "trigger events" for when you're going to invite your kids to try almsgiving:

- Maybe it's something your family wants to focus on twice a year, during Advent and Lent.
- Or maybe you want to try giving money to a special cause once a month.
- Or perhaps you're going to raise money for every special collection at Church, or every time there's a house fire in your town.

Set a goal, and stick with it for a year so that almsgiving becomes a habit. If you have a [family mission statement](#), you might include it in that statement.

Even if you don't have a family mission statement, make almsgiving for a special cause a family team effort, at least initially. Keep a jar on your meal table to track your family's progress, or make a chart, or check in on the results as a family. Set a realistic fundraising goal, and offer a "reward" if your family reaches it—a special dessert, maybe, or a day off chores. (Hey, it works for public broadcasting!)

Looking for a good cause?

- Check out your local charities that give to the poor.

Your local Catholic Charities office is a good place to start; other options probably include the local food shelf and Red Cross office.

- Otherwise, check out the websites of [Catholic Charities](#) and [Catholic Relief Services](#), the official domestic and international aid organizations of the Church in the United States. (Our friends in other parts of the world will want to check out your national bishops' conference website, or [Caritas International](#).)

Whatever charity you choose, try to make it personal for your kids. If it's a local charity, try to make a personal visit when you make the donation so kids can connect their hard work to a specific place and face.

For national or global causes, show kids videos about the need; then, if your donation triggers a "thank you" e-mail or letter from the receiving organization, share that with your kids, too.

Here, then, are some simple ways that your kids can raise money for special collections and special causes.

Nine ways kids can raise money for a cause

1. Sell lemonade & other goodies

The good old lemonade stand still works, even if local municipalities are cracking down in some places. But why stop at lemonade? Make homemade cookies, too, and have yourself a sidewalk bake sale. You're going to need a location with decent foot traffic for this to be successful.

Or take your bake sale on the road: Have your child take orders for homemade cookies (or pies, or other treats) from friends and neighbors, and then spend a morning baking and

delivering orders. Not simple—but (mostly) fun and memorable!

2. Perform a service

Kids can perform special services for you or your neighbors to raise cash: washing cars, pulling weeds, sweeping, babysitting, and other chores are obvious options. But your kids might have more fun doing something like writing a customized poem, being a singing telegram, or sharing another talent.

3. Put on a show

What kid doesn't like putting on a show? This idea may require some guidance on your part in the "scripting" and costume departments—or you could leave your kids to figure it out on their own. When they're ready, have them sell tickets to friends, family and neighbors to attend the performance.

A variation on this theme would be to hold a neighborhood talent contest, or a singing competition.

4. Hold a contest

You know those 5K charity runs that are so popular these days? If your kids have a small posse of neighborhood friends, they can do something similar—but why stick with a boring old run? Practically anything can be turned into a competition: jumping rope, twirling, running an obstacle course, corn hole, bowling—you name it. You could make this into a major neighborhood event—or you could just send your kids around the neighborhood rounding up kids for a "___ contest for charity."

5. Scrounge for change

Younger children and kids can be encouraged to look for loose change in all the usual places: under the fridge, under seat cushions, on sidewalks, and so on. If you have a metal detector, they might have fun using that as well. Nooks and crannies near vending machines and other places where people handle coins are a good place to look, too.

6. Asking

Older kids and teens might fall back on the ancient practice of begging on behalf of the poor: St. Francis did it, as did St. Teresa of Calcutta, and a whole bunch of people in between. For some people, begging requires a heap of courage and humility, which also makes it a spiritual practice.

Older kids can ask friends, neighbors, and acquaintances for money for the cause. (If they opt to canvass the neighborhood, it's a good practice for them to be accompanied by an adult.) Check with your kids' school before encouraging them to ask classmates for funds.

7. Birthday for charity

You're probably familiar with this concept: Instead of receiving presents at their birthday party, some kids ask their guests to bring money or items for a special cause. Search "birthday for charity ideas" on your favorite search engine for lots and lots of ideas. And hey—you don't need to have a birthday to throw a party for charity!

8. Raise money on social media

My own kids don't have social media accounts, but if your teens do, they might enjoy launching a social media campaign to raise money for a cause. Or you can launch your own campaign, and show it to your younger kids. Link to a major charity on Facebook, and it will prompt you to add a donate button to your post. If you do, it will then prompt you to invite friends to donate, which they can do by clicking on a button right on the post. Your kids will have fun tracking the progress online as people respond.

9. Encourage kids to tithe part of their income

Finally, older kids and teens who receive an allowance or earn income from a job can be encouraged to tithe part of that income. Even younger children can be nudged toward spending some of their birthday card money on almsgiving. The practice of tithing goes back to the time of the ancient Israelites, who were called to set aside the "first fruits" of their labor—literally, the first fruits of the harvest, and the first-born animals—to be given back to God. The idea is to practice the virtues of humility and generosity, recognizing first that all that we have—even what we "earn" by our labor—ultimately comes from God, without whom we would have nothing. By giving some of that "gift" back to God, we imitate God's generosity—and as Jesus is always saying, generosity enlarges the heart not only for giving, but for receiving God's love.