

5 STEPS TO SUCCESS

In nature, the starfish has five points.

In an *Operation Starfish*® campaign there are five steps.

Five easy steps. A simple concept. A simple process.

A way to bring Matthew 25:40 to life —

“As often as you did it for one of the least of my brothers and sisters, you did it for me.”



STEP ONE: ENVISION A MIRACLE

Father Richard Martin, Pastor of Church of the Nativity in Burke, Virginia, was walking his dog late one night just before Lent in 1998. He was thinking about the wedding feast at Cana, wondering if his parishioners could also create a miracle (JOHN 2:1-11). He thought about a family giving up one pizza topping, or doing without one order of French fries during Lent. When he did the arithmetic, he was stunned. His calculation: 2,500 families saving 50 cents a day for the 40 days of Lent would yield \$50,000! Having seen the plight of the poor first hand, he realized that this would indeed be a miracle for the destitute of Haiti.

What miracle can you and your church or school perform? Can you take a family out of the horrible slums and put them into decent shelter? Can you feed a family for a year? Can you feed a village for a year? Can you provide life-saving vaccinations for infants? School supplies for children? Hospice care for AIDS victims? **Sure you can!**

Your first step is to describe what might be possible within the means of your church, parish or organization. Engage others in this discussion. Seek help and advice from Food For The Poor, or from Father Martin and his Haiti ministry volunteers. They are eager to assist you!

STEP TWO: TELL THE STORY

In February, 1999, Nativity Church members went on a pilgrimage to Haiti. They were overwhelmed with the scope of the problems. “How can we possibly make a difference?” one asked. Searching for an answer, Father Martin told his parishioners the story of the young boy and the starfish:



As a young boy walked the beach at dawn, he noticed an old man ahead of him picking up starfish and tossing them into the sea. The creatures had been washed ashore by a storm the previous evening. Catching up with the man, the boy asked why he was doing this. The old man explained to the boy that the stranded starfish would die if left in the scorching hot sun. “But the beach goes on for miles and there are millions of starfish,” exclaimed the boy. “How can your effort make any difference?” The old man looked at the starfish in his hand and then threw it safely into the waves. He turned to the boy and said, “It made a difference to that one.”

A parishioner spoke up after Fr. Martin finished the story. “Why don’t we call our work *Operation Starfish*®?” he asked. Heartened by the Starfish story, and renewed by their pilgrimage, Church of the Nativity parishioners recommitted themselves to helping the poor, at home as well as in Haiti.

*Your second step is to tell the story of your miracle. Describe what can be accomplished when everyone does a small part. Use a light hand — keep the discussion positive. Talk in terms of the excitement everyone can share when the miracle takes place. Use the images, video or other tools that Food For The Poor will make available to you. Father Martin only speaks to his congregation once, at the beginning of Lent. A basket is placed in the vestibule of the church and donations are left there. Accompanying notes often describe the joy of giving small amounts to make big differences. During Lent, the choir chooses a thematic hymn and repeats it occasionally. Nativity’s choir has chosen *That There May Be Bread*.*

Perhaps you might appreciate a personal visit. Food For The Poor can send speakers to you to describe the compelling needs of the poor and the wonderful accomplishments of groups like yours.

Email us at speakers@foodforthe poor.org or request a speaker using our online form at www.foodforthe poor.org.

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STEP THREE: SAVE ONE STARFISH AT A TIME

Don't "over-ask." Let the people take charge. Let go; let God.

Be encouraging. There's no way any of us can solve the problem of world hunger and poverty. But we can make a difference, one person at a time, one family at a time, one village at a time. Just \$9.00 will feed a family in Haiti for a month. What a miracle it is to think that a child putting aside less than 30 cents a day during Lent can actually sustain a Haitian family for a month! Even the homebound can participate.

Perhaps, like The Rev. Jan Dunnivant at The Episcopal Church of the Resurrection, in Nicholasville, Kentucky, you would prefer a *Summer Starfish Project*. Any season can work — it doesn't have to be Lent. Be creative! Tailor your *Operation Starfish*® program to your congregation or group. The concept is simple and flexible. The goal is always the same — serving the poor, one person at a time.

Keep the administration simple. There's no need to spend money that can be better put to work for those who need it most. Handle the funds carefully, with adequate accounting and controls. Keep the trust.

There doesn't need to be much administrative effort. The process is very simple. Donations are picked up regularly from the basket in the church, counted and deposited. Significant or particularly meaningful donations are acknowledged with a note from the pastor. Nativity Church prints a weekly status report in the Church Bulletin. At the end of the campaign, a check is presented to Food For The Poor and an acknowledgment letter is printed in the Bulletin. That's all there is to it! Food For The Poor provides a monthly status report back to Nativity Church describing progress on construction of houses funded by their *Operation Starfish*®.

STEP FOUR: APPRECIATE AND CELEBRATE

It is so very important to say thank you. There will always be a story or two about a particular family's efforts. People

love to hear about the little zip-lock bag full of pennies, or the papier mache piggy bank that was just impossible to open. Don't embarrass anyone, but go ahead and read that note that came from the heart. The stories will be there. You have only to share them.



And speaking of "sharing stories," you are encouraged to post your stories on the web at www.starfishmission.org. This web site, run by Nativity Church volunteers, has a community section where churches and organizations can share their experiences and support each other. Consider a story and a photo for the local media or church publication.

Food For The Poor can help you write a press release.

Nativity Church holds a dinner each year to celebrate its *Operation Starfish*® program. The event is timed to follow their annual pilgrimage to Haiti. People who have traveled to Haiti on previous pilgrimages join with those who have just returned and those who are thinking about going in the future for an evening of food, fellowship, sharing photos and stories.

STEP FIVE: SEE FOR YOURSELF

Go see what a difference your *Operation Starfish*® has made in the lives of the poor. Food For The Poor makes it fairly easy for you to join a pilgrimage to Haiti, Nicaragua, Jamaica, or other poor countries where they work. You will be changed. Your heart will be opened anew. You will see God in the eyes of the poor.

Your congregation will be affirmed by the witness of those among them who see for themselves what is needed and what is accomplished. It is especially heartening to see how young people respond to a third world experience. During the 2002 pilgrimage to Haiti, one 17-year-old from Nativity Church said "My faith has been changed. It will never be the same. I am a different person, a better person."