

Information about St. Nicholas¹ of Myra for Instructors of Older Children and Youth:

IMPORTANT EDITOR'S NOTE:

This sheet is for instructors only and is offered purely as background information about this saint.

While this background information will help you to be better prepared to discuss the life of the saint, we recommend that you limit the details of the discussion with your students to the information included in the attached "Facts for students ..."

The *Touching Safety* program will feature two saints per year—one female and one male—to bring to life the lessons provided through this program. Each lesson is designed to provide students with awareness about certain behaviors that are inappropriate and/or blatantly wrong. Our purpose for including information about a saint in each lesson is to provide positive reinforcement—by giving children and young people examples of role models for "rightdoing" in relationships. We strive to provide an appropriate balance of both elements in each lesson for students.

Though we recommend including information about the featured saint in the lesson for your students, the saint material is an optional part of this program and is not required.

Nicholas of Myra was known for his generosity to the poor, his protection of children, and for encouraging thieves to return what was stolen, to repent, and to change their ways. He protected children from being forced into prostitution. He saved children from death. And, he took children under his wing and treated them with great care and love. In his later years, his caring support of children resulted in him becoming recognized as the figure we refer to as Santa Claus—the image of generosity and love for children around the world.

Nicholas' life teaches us two important things:

1. One of our roles on earth is to give generously to help those in trouble—not for the personal glory, but because it is right and a Christian thing to do.
2. We are called to love one another as children of God. We should help others who are in danger. And, we should stand up to those who behave inappropriately and who encourage others to sin.

Here's how you'll use this information during the lesson:

- Read the *student handout* aloud to your class. Then, ask for a few student volunteers to describe what they learned from the story about Nicholas of Myra.
- The key to this exercise is reinforcing the points that St. Nicholas teaches us about taking responsibility for our actions, apologizing to God and to those whom we have harmed, and helping those who are in danger. These are important characteristics of people who care for each other.

¹ 1999-2003, Catholics on Line, www.catholics.org/saints/.



Facts for students about St. Nicholas of Myra¹

Nicholas of Myra was the child of wealthy parents. After his parents died, Nicholas wanted to distribute his riches in a way that would glorify God. So, he became a special protector of the innocent and the poor.

For example, Nicholas once learned that a family had fallen on hard times and the children were about to be abandoned, so he threw bags of gold into the house at night to help the man save his children. Nicholas knew that without a dowry and without family riches, the young daughters of the nobleman would not have the opportunity to marry and, possibly, would become prostitutes. He threw the bags of gold into the house one at a time, so each of the girls would have her own dowry. When the nobleman discovered his identity, Nicholas made him promise not to tell anyone where the money came from. He was only interested in doing good, not in receiving glory or praise for his actions.

Among the miracles attributed to St. Nicholas are many stories of children he protected and saved. There are stories about children he saved from death and children he saved from harm. Although some of these stories cannot be verified, St. Nicholas was well-known for his genuine care of children, and he went to great lengths to protect them from harm and to help enrich their lives.

Nicholas was not afraid to challenge people who were committing wrongful acts. He called on them to stop what they were doing, to apologize for their actions, and to repair the damage they had caused. Nicholas reminded people that even when you have committed a sin, there is a path leading to forgiveness and healing. By admitting your error, seeking forgiveness, and doing penance for your actions, you are restored to God's good graces.

The pattern that Nicholas established of giving generously to others is the basis for our gift giving at Christmas. St. Nicholas is the inspiration for what we, in the United States, call Santa Claus—the spirit of giving and generosity that is experienced throughout the Christmas season.

St. Nicholas' life teaches us that:

- One of our roles on earth is to give generously to help those in trouble—not for the personal glory, but because it is right and a Christian thing to do.
- We are called to love one another as children of God. We should help others who are in danger. And, we should stand up to those who behave inappropriately and who encourage others to sin.
- We can take responsibility for our actions and apologize to God and to those whom we have harmed. We must also make restitution for anything we take from others, and we must encourage others to do the same thing.

¹ 1999-2003, Catholics on Line, www.catholics.org/saints/.