

\$10 To Memorize And Recite The Ten Commandments

NASHVILLE, Tenn. -- George Kelley believes the nation has lost its moral conscience and he plans to do something about it -- one child and \$10 at a time. The 76-year-old retired flower shop owner has started a ministry out of his home that pays children \$10 each to memorize and recite the Ten Commandments.

With the help of donations, Kelley said nearly 7,000 children nationwide have taken advantage of the offer over the past five years. He hopes eventually to persuade 10 million children to participate. "When I say 10 million, you say that's crazy," Kelley said, chuckling. "Well, if you have a small dream, nobody pays any attention to it." Kelley's project was born out of disgust in 1997 after a part-time cook murdered seven workers at three Tennessee restaurants -- a string of slayings that terrorized the Nashville area. Kelley saw the crimes as another sign that young people did not understand right from wrong. "Kids were running around shooting each other for tennis shoes and jackets," he said.

With help from friends, Kelley and his wife, Marion, started the Ten Commandments Project. The Kelleys, both Presbyterians, felt children who memorized the Ten Commandments perhaps would think about them when tempted to lie, steal or get involved in other wrongdoing. At first the Kelleys were concerned about how they would fund the effort, but supporters started sending donations -- from \$15 to \$10,000 -- and a wealthy friend promised to help when needed. "It turned out, when our bank account got a little low, somebody would send some money in," George Kelley said.

To qualify for the \$10, children must be 16 or younger, live in the United States and recite the commandments to a pastor, rabbi, priest, teacher or other "authorized" adult witness. The witness then must sign an affidavit form they can download from the ministry's Web site -- tencommandmentsproject.org -- pledging that they heard the child's recitation. "An authorized witness is not a relative," Kelley said. "They would be inclined to fudge a little." Marion Kelley said she and her husband have not been concerned about fraud, partly because they write checks to individuals -- instead of to groups of several children at a time. Fabricating affidavits "would be a lot of trouble for just \$10," she said.

Also, adult leaders of youth groups whose members want to participate often call the Kelleys first for permission to act as authorized witnesses, providing more assurance that the affidavits are real, Marion Kelley said. Brian Runge, a Lutheran pastor in Houston, discovered the project while surfing the Web. He brought the idea to St. Mark Lutheran School in Houston, where more than 100 students participated and earned their money during the fall. Many planned to donate the funds to needy children in Zimbabwe. "The Ten Commandments are the basis of moral law for human beings, regardless of what your perspective is," Runge said. "The more kids that know them, the more they'll know how to live." Angela Gloyna, an 11-year-old fifth-grader, called the \$10 payment "a big incentive," and she joked that a similar offer on all her studies would make her a millionaire.

Classmate Sophia Pereira, also 11, said "they taught us a lot of stuff we had to do, like not to believe in other gods and not to murder." About 500 students at David Lipscomb Elementary, a Church of Christ school in Nashville, also memorized the commandments last year, then gave their checks to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis. For the retired couple, the ministry has become a passion. "We try to dream up ways to promote it," he said. "Marion thought we ought to get a

couple of camels and donkeys and go across the nation as Moses." The Kelleys concede that some children will participate simply for the excitement of receiving a letter and check in the mail. However, they have faith that the young people will remember the lesson well after the money is gone. "We hope someday that it won't be the \$10 that's important, but that they'll have God's word in their heart," Marion Kelley said.

Ten Commandments Project: <http://www.tencommandmentsproject.org>

