



40 ideas for 40 days

Activities and projects to use at home – with friends, family or by yourself. Try one or try them all.

Compiled by Genevieve Callard, in the Episcopal Diocese of Western Michigan. May be copied and used appropriately for nonprofit educational purposes.

Spend time with what you care about, and start a “cause”

1. Research topics that you feel passionate about (creation, child labor laws, immigration, the food industry, homelessness)
2. Share what you've learned with others (in school, work, your community or church) and educate others
3. Write a letter to a politician or corporation to protest or praise something you feel passionately about.

4. Knit or crochet a prayer shawl or scarves, hats or mittens for homeless.
5. Give away 40 possessions – one for each day. Only two rules: 1) no junk; the items have to be of value to someone. 2) No item could be replaced within the coming year.
(From Way to Life: Christian Practices for Teens edited by Dorothy C. Bass and Don C. Richter)

Create something for Lent (for examples and instructions for all of these, see the appendix)

6. Create an “Alleluia” banner, and bury it. Then dig it up or bring it out again on Easter.
7. Create a Lent Garden or a Lent/Easter diorama (the ones with peeps or Legos are great!).
8. Create a table Labyrinth.
9. Create a prayer altar or table.
10. Make hot crossed buns, pretzels, Simnel cake or other Lent related food.
11. Paint and decorate prayer stones.
12. Make a Lent paper chain.



Do something new – or do something old in a new way

13. When you go to church spend time to explore before or after the service, looking at all the objects and illustrations (such as stained glass windows).
14. Change your pew or seat for Lent – get a new perspective on things and make sure you sit where your child can see what is happening during worship services.
15. Go for a nature walk and collect “treasures” such as feathers or leaves.

16. Send a hand written note or write thank you cards (with your children) to friends, teachers or whomever.
17. Look at the geography of Jerusalem.
18. Have a meal with someone you don't know, or don't know well. Companion is from the Latin: com-, together + panis, bread "one who eats bread with another."
(From Way to Life: Christian Practices for Teens edited by Dorothy C. Bass and Don C. Richter)

19. Paint your nails purple (for the Liturgical season). When you notice them, say a prayer.

20. Turn off the tv for a day (a week, a month).

21. Alternately, when you watch tv, actually watch the advertisements. Discuss with your children what it is they're trying to tell you about yourself (that you need this car to be more prestigious, that you smell and therefore need deodorant, etc.). How does the media give us bad images about ourselves?



22. Read a book you love for at least 15 minutes a day just for the joy of it.
23. Schedule something you love to do into your calendar in the next 30 days. Spend time with friends, family, or alone.
24. Give up reading work e-mail when you're with your family, or trolling facebook, twitter and other websites.
25. Give up soft drinks, fast food, tea or coffee. Give the money you save to help an organization you care about.

Take on a new prayer or spiritual practice (and remember that it takes 21 days in a row to form a habit).

26. Pray when you leave the house or get into the car.

27. Daily spiritual reading – Forward Movement’s “Day by Day” or www.d365.org.

28. Take time to sit for even 30 seconds and enjoy complete silence and stillness.

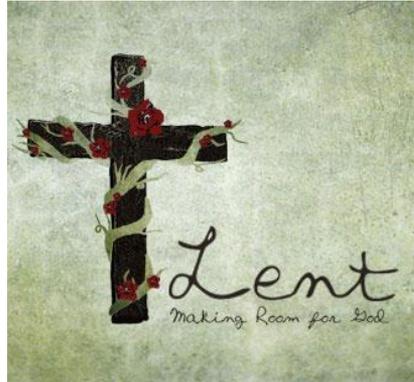
29. Meditate or Contemplate.

30. Say the Daily Office.

31. Journal.

32. Pray with Prayer beads.

33. Read the Bible – start with the Psalms or one of the Gospels if you don’t know where to start.



34. Honor the Sabbath. Take time to rest and relax – however you do that, and whatever day is possible for you.

35. As part of the bedtime routine, [bless your child](#) (click link for a book about this) with the sign of the cross or sing a special song.

36. Pray for others you see as you walk to and from classes or drive to and from work.

37. Fast.

38. Practice compassion and be kind to people.

39. Practice forgiveness daily, in little and big ways. Forgive someone who doesn't deserve it (maybe even yourself).

40. Tithe. Give 10% of your own money to help people in need.

The Roots of Lent

from Living the Good News (<http://www.buildfaith.org/2012/02/18/the-roots-of-lent/>)



In the early Church, Christians often suffered hostility and active persecution by their neighbors. Conversion was not taken lightly, for its repercussions echoed in all circles: family, friends, livelihood, politics and social life. Likewise, the Church needed to clarify the meaning of

Christian faith and life so that its members would form a community that could withstand the pressures of an inhospitable environment.

Understanding this need for clarity of faith, the Church required the candidates for baptism, known as catechumens, to undergo a long and rigorous period of training, instruction and scrutiny. The final stage of their preparation came in the last few weeks before Easter when they entered into an especially intense time of fasts and frequent meetings for prayers, instructions, blessings and exorcisms.

The laity, those who had already entered into the community of the redeemed, also recognized the need for personal preparation for the Easter feast. By the end of the second century, all Christians fasted at least a day or more in preparation for Easter, depending upon the level of their devotion. By the fourth century, it had become customary for devout priests and lay persons to join the catechumens in their more intense fasts, instructions and other preparations. During this time began the emergence of what is now the traditional number of days to fast before Easter: 40 days, following the biblical witness of Jesus' 40-day fast in the wilderness, Moses' 40 days with God on Mount Sinai, and Elijah's 40 days of wandering as he journeyed to Horeb, the mountain of God.

In the early centuries of the Church, Lent was dedicated in particular not only to the preparation of catechumens for Baptism, but also to the preparation of penitents for reconciliation and re-admittance to the Eucharistic assembly of the Church.

At first, only those doing public penance received ashes on their foreheads to begin their penance (sixth to seventh centuries). By the 10th century, all the faithful began their Lenten observance with the imposition of ashes as a sign of their repentance and mortality.

Thus, Lent traditionally has become a time for fasting, abstinence, corporate and private prayer, self-discipline, serving others, study, reflection and penance. It is a special time for the whole Church to be on a retreat, to take inventory and reexamine priorities, to leave sin and self behind in the love and service of God and our neighbors. To keep a good Lent means to draw closer to God and one another and to prepare ourselves once again to renew our covenant with God through the reciting of our baptismal vows. Lent is a time to prepare to enter afresh into the mystery of Jesus' resurrection and our redemption.

Discussing Lent with your children - Thinking Ahead to Holy Week

by Dr. Elizabeth L. Windsor



It is hard to believe that Palm Sunday is almost here. And if Palm Sunday is almost here, then Holy Week isn't far behind! Parents, especially those of young children, are often confused as to how best handle the crucifixion as we tell the story of the Easter miracle.

The events of Jesus' death are shocking and violent, but we cannot fully live into Easter if we have not experienced Jesus' death. There are ways to approach this with children that make it easier to share the whole story. Here are some of the things I have learned in twenty-five years as an educator and a parent:

1. Children - even very young ones - know that bad things happen. The Easter message is that good always triumphs over evil - even if it doesn't seem to at the moment. This is a message children can hear and understand.
2. When you talk about the crucifixion, always continue immediately with the Resurrection. I have found the following kinds of language helpful: "Jesus loved people so much that some people were scared by it and they put Jesus to death on a cross. But love is so strong, that not even death can destroy it, so God raised Jesus from the dead."
3. If your children are visual learner, you may only want to share the story in words - the shorter the better. Use art that reveals the empty tomb instead of Jesus on the Cross as you tell the story.
4. Some children are curious about how crucifixion actually kills. They will ask questions such as "Did it hurt?" ("Yes"), "How does crucifixion kill someone?" ("Slow suffocation"). You do not need to dwell on the gore, but an honest answer that is short and to the point is helpful to children and allows you to move on to the resurrection.
5. Other children worry that Jesus was alone. He wasn't - his mother and the Beloved Disciple were there, along with other women. Two other men were crucified with him. And most importantly, God was with Jesus.

Experiencing the events of Holy Week and Easter can be a powerful way for children to share in the defining moment of our Christian faith while being held in a safe and familiar environment. The events of Holy Week are all great places for embodied learning – we shout and parade with Jesus on Palm Sunday, have our feet washed, taste bread and wine, strip the altar and raise the joyous “Alleluias” on Easter Day. With careful planning, parents can help children experience the mystery and wonder of both Holy Week and Easter.

More explanation – Activities and Crafts

Alleluia Banner

This can be done in many different ways. But, basically, you create the word “Alleluia”, put it into a plastic box (or plain box wrapped in plastic) and bury it in the yard (or tuck it into the basement or a closet, if you don’t have a yard). The idea is that this is a



physical representation of putting aside something that is special, so that when we take it back out, it’s even more special. You can read more about it, find background information and a special liturgy here:

<http://www.buildfaith.org/2011/02/02/saying-goodbye-to-the-alleluia/> and here:

<http://www.buildfaith.org/2012/02/04/farewell-alleluia/>



Lent Garden

A Lent Garden is an indoor “garden,” or large pot, filled with dirt, and decorated to remind you of Lent. If you do a websearch for “Lent Garden”, you can find many different examples, but one of my favorite is here:

<http://featherglen.blogspot.de/2012/04/getting-ready-for-holy-week.html>. Some ideas

- Put one rock in for each day
- Plant grass seed or bulbs and watch them grow and come to life
- Create a “tomb” out of quick-dry clay
- Use sand instead of dirt, and make patterns in the sand



Lent/Easter Diorama

This would be similar to our Advent and Christmas crèche (or Nativity scene). Two things to remember 1) be creative, 2) add things as the weeks go along. On the web I found some made out of Star Wars figures, some done in Easter baskets, and some out of Legos and Peeps.

http://www.bricktestament.com/the_life_of_jesus/index.html

Table Labyrinth

For directions (with pictures), please go here:

<http://featherglen.blogspot.com/2012/03/tutorial-making-finger-labyrinth.html>



Prayer altar or table

Having a prayer table or altar is a long standing practice in many traditions and households. It can be prominent or hidden just for you, it can be large and the size of a dining room table or small enough to carry around with you. The most important thing is that it's yours – your place to reconnect with God, and with yourself & God together.

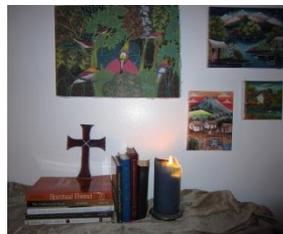


- 1) This can be a small table, bench, shelf, or even a small area on your desk. It can also be portable and put into a shoe box (the plastic ones are great). If it's for children, make sure they can see it (child-sized) and that there isn't anything they could eat, choke on or break (and feel bad about).
- 2) Put in a cloth – a pretty scarf, piece of fabric, pretty dish towel or anything. For Lent it could be purple, to go along with the church season.
- 3) Fill it with things that are representative of what you want to think about or having meaning for you. Some ideas for symbols are:
 - A heart to remind us of God's love
 - A nail to remind us of God's sacrifice
 - A dish of ash from the Ash Wednesday service, or from your own burnt Palm Sunday branches
 - A bean to remind us that we are growing in our relationship to God
 - An almond, the ancient symbol for patience
 - A feather to remind us of the Holy Spirit and God's grace
 - A piece of bread to remind us of those who are hungry
 - A band-aid to remind us of those who are hurting

- A silk or plastic flower to remind us of those we love
- A paperclip to remind us of our connection to the world and everyone in it
- A stone to remind us of the empty tomb and the wonders of our faith
- A piece of purple cloth to remind us that Jesus is King
- A vial of oil, or a piece of scented cloth, scented with myrrh (web search myrrh oil to find where you can find it in your local area) to remind us of Jesus being wrapped and laid in the tomb. The scent also reminds us of our baptism and confirmation, and is used to heal and bless.
- Water in a dish or jar (if you can get some blessed water from church, even better) to remind us of our baptism. Water also can remind us of all those without fresh and drinkable water.

4) Put in a book

- a. Book of common prayer, Bible, daily thoughts or spiritual readings are common
- b. Add a book of maps of the holy land
- c. Or add a book of “Calvin and Hobbes” comics, or a favorite children’s book – something that purely brings you joy



5) Perhaps a journal or note cards (and pretty pens)

- a. Write whatever you want in your journal – there are no wrong things
- b. Send notes of thanks or thoughts to others for whom you care for

6) Spend time there each day – 30 seconds to an hour (or anything else). What matters most, as you begin, is that you’re consistent.

7) Add things as you wish

8) You can have little altars all around. In your office at work, by your bed, traveling with you in your car. These can simply be things that bring you back to God

More explanation – Lent related food

Cooking is something that can be done alone or with others. When you are alone and cooking, it can be a time of contemplation – intentionally putting things together, for both fun and sustenance. With others, it can become a wonderful time for community – passing down the mysteries of a special recipe or simply sharing joy in the mess that's made (especially when working with children).

Recipes

Hot Cross Buns

From buildfaith.com and by *Sharon Ely Pearson*

It is one of the peculiarities of the observance of the great *fast* of Lent that several of the customs surrounding it have to do with food: pretzels, simnel cake, and hot cross buns. Hot cross buns are perhaps the strangest of these customs as they are sweet rolls that are eaten on the most important fast of all, Good Friday.

The origins of this very English custom are not entirely clear. It has been suggested that hot cross buns originated in the pagan cult that preceded Christianity in Britain. But the earliest historical mention of them is traced to a 12th century English monk who is said to have marked buns with the sign of the cross in honor of Good Friday. A 14th century record tells how a monk of St. Albans distributed spiced cakes to the needy on Good Friday, inaugurating an annual tradition, though he carefully guarded his recipe.

Whatever their origins, there were certainly ideas associated with these buns that some would regard as superstitions. Hot cross buns were eaten after sundown to break the Good Friday fast. In the Middle Ages, they were believed to have powers of protection and healing. People would hang a hot cross bun from the rafters of their homes for protection through the coming year. And if someone was sick, some of the dried bun would be ground into powder and mixed with water for the sick person to drink.

In the reign of Elizabeth I, when Roman Catholicism was banned, making the sign of the cross on the buns was regarded as popery and the practice was banned. But neither Church nor State could

suppress the popular custom, so legislation was enacted to limit consumption of hot cross buns to legitimate religious occasions such as Christmas, Easter, and funerals.

Recipe for Hot Cross Buns *(from allrecipes.com)*

Ingredients

Original recipe makes 12 buns

3/4 cup warm water (110 degrees F/45 degrees C)

3 tablespoons butter

1 tablespoon instant powdered milk

1/4 cup white sugar

3/8 teaspoon salt

1 egg

1 egg white

3 cups all-purpose flour

1 tablespoon active dry yeast

3/4 cup dried currants

1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1 egg yolk

2 tablespoons water

1/2 cup confectioners' sugar

1/4 teaspoon vanilla extract

2 teaspoons milk



Directions

1. Put warm water, butter, skim milk powder, 1/4 cup sugar, salt, egg, egg white, flour, and yeast in bread maker and start on dough program.
2. When 5 minutes of kneading are left, add currants and cinnamon. Leave in machine till double.
3. Punch down on floured surface, cover, and let rest 10 minutes.
4. Shape into 12 balls and place in a greased 9 x 12 inch pan. Cover and let rise in a warm place till double, about 35-40 minutes.
5. Mix egg yolk and 2 tablespoons water. Brush on balls.
6. Bake at 375 degrees F (190 degrees C) for 20 minutes. Remove from pan immediately and cool on wire rack.
7. To make crosses: mix together confectioners' sugar, vanilla, and milk. Brush an X on each cooled bun.

Simnel cake

(The following is from Wikipedia) Simnel cake is a light fruit cake with two layers of almond paste or marzipan, one in the middle and one on top, that is toasted, and eaten during Lent in the United Kingdom, Ireland and some other countries. It was originally made for the middle Sunday of Lent, Laetare Sunday; also known as Refreshment Sunday, Mothering Sunday, Sunday of the Five Loaves, and Simnel Sunday - after the cake. The meaning of the word "simnel" is unclear: there is a 1226 reference to "bread made into a simnel", which is understood to mean the finest white bread, from the Latin *simila* - "fine flour", though John de Garlande felt that the word was equivalent to placenta cake, a cake that was intended to please.

Conventionally eleven, or occasionally twelve, marzipan balls are used to decorate the cake, with a story that the balls represent the twelve apostles, minus Judas or Jesus and the twelve apostles, minus Judas. This tradition developed late in the Victorian era, altering the mid Victorian tradition of decorating the cakes with preserved fruits and flowers.

Recipe for Semnel Cake *(from allrecipes.com)*

Ingredients

Original recipe makes 1 - 8 inch springform pan

- 1 cup margarine, softened
- 1 cup light brown sugar
- 4 eggs
- 1 3/4 cups self-rising flour
- 1 1/3 cups golden raisins
- 1 cup dried currants
- 2/3 cup candied cherries - rinsed, dried and quartered
- 1/4 cup candied mixed fruit peel, chopped
- 2 tablespoons grated lemon zest
- 2 teaspoons mixed spice
- 1 pound almond paste
- 2 tablespoons apricot jam
- 1 egg, beaten



Directions

1. Preheat oven to 300 degrees F (150 degrees C). Grease and flour an 8 inch springform pan. Line the bottom and sides of pan with greased parchment paper.
2. In a large bowl, cream together the margarine and brown sugar until light and fluffy. Beat in the eggs one at a time. Beat in the flour. Stir in the golden raisins, currants, candied cherries, mixed fruit, lemon zest and mixed spice. Pour 1/2 of batter into prepared pan.
3. Divide almond paste into 3 equal portions. Roll out 1/3 of the almond paste to an 8 inch circle. Place the circle of almond paste on the cake batter in pan. Cover with remaining cake batter.
4. Bake in the preheated oven for 2 1/2 hours, or until evenly brown and firm to the touch. If the cake is browning too quickly, cover with foil after an hour of baking. Let cool in pan for 10 minutes, then turn out onto a wire rack and cool completely. Set oven to broil.
5. When the cake has cooled, brush the top with warmed apricot jam. Roll out 1/3 of the almond paste into an 8 inch circle and place on top of cake. Divide the remaining 1/3 of almond paste into 11 pieces and roll into balls. These represent the 11 Apostles (excluding Judas.) Brush the almond paste on top of cake with beaten egg. Arrange the 11 balls around the outside edge on the top of cake. Brush the balls lightly with egg.
6. Place cake under the broiler for 8 to 10 minutes, or until almond paste is golden brown.

Pretzels

Pretzels were made in the fifth century as a Lenten food in Austria, Germany, and Poland. People began to make them on Ash Wednesday, the very first day of Lent. The word "pretzel" is a German word meaning "little arms." The dough was shaped in such a way to look like two arms crossed in prayer.

Pretzels were made to take the place of bread, since milk, eggs, and fats were not used during Lent. On certain days during Lent it was the custom to give pretzels to the townspeople who were poor.

As a family, make some pretzels. Two variations for making pretzels are included at the bottom of this sheet. Enjoy the pretzels and let them remind you that Lent is a time of prayer.

Before you eat the pretzels, say a prayer together:

Dear God, we ask you to bless these pretzels which we are about to eat. Each time we eat them may we be reminded that this is the season of Lent, a time of prayer. Help us to remember to pray for those who need our prayers each day. Keep your loving arms around us, O God, to protect us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Adapted from "Pretzel Prayer," A Time of Hope: Family Celebrations and Activities for Lent and Easter, Morehouse-Barlow Co., Inc., 1979 (out of print).

Recipe for Pretzels (from allrecipes.com)

Ingredients

Original recipe makes 1 dozen (big!) pretzels

- 1 (.25 ounce) package active dry yeast
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1 1/8 teaspoons salt
- 1 1/2 cups warm water (110 degrees F/45 degrees C)
- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup bread flour
- 2 cups warm water (110 degrees F/45 degrees C)
- 2 tablespoons baking soda
- 2 tablespoons butter, melted
- 2 tablespoons coarse kosher salt



Directions

1. In a large mixing bowl, dissolve the yeast, brown sugar and salt in 1 1/2 cups warm water. Stir in flour, and knead dough on a floured surface until smooth and elastic, about 8 minutes. Place in a greased bowl, and turn to coat the surface. Cover, and let rise for one hour.
2. Combine 2 cups warm water and baking soda in an 8 inch square pan. Line 6 baking sheets with parchment paper.
3. After dough has risen, cut into 12 pieces. Roll each piece into a 3 foot rope, pencil thin or thinner. Twist into a pretzel shape, and dip into the baking soda solution. Place onto parchment covered baking sheets, and let rise 15 to 20 minutes.
4. Preheat an oven to 450 degrees F (230 degrees C).
5. Bake in the preheated oven for 8 to 10 minutes, or until golden brown. Brush with melted butter, and sprinkle with coarse salt, garlic salt or cinnamon sugar.

Editor's Note: When forming the ropes, roll each one to about half the length you want, then set it aside while you roll the rest. By the time you get back to the first rope, it will have rested enough to roll further.

A 3-foot long rope will make a pretzel approximately 8-inches in diameter. Plan on using one baking sheet for every two pretzels.

More explanation – Prayer and Spiritual Practices

Fasting

“Fasting can make us more aware that we are human, fragile, and utterly dependent upon God. You might try a simple fast with your family or friends, perhaps one day a week during Lent. Decide on a very simple meal: a baked potato, a bowl of rice, or a plate of pasta. No one would need to spend much time preparing or cleaning up after such a meal. You could give the money you save on those meals to a food bank or a homeless shelter. Or you could spend the time you save not cooking and doing dishes working at such a place. But most importantly, you and your table companions could pray for awareness of your neighbors’ needs and the goodness of God. Together you would be saying Yes! To life.

(From Way to Life: Christian Practices for Teens edited by Dorothy C. Bass and Don C. Richter. p.74)

Meditation and Contemplation

There are so many ways to do this. But, basically, what you’re doing is sitting (or standing, or walking) in silence and listening to God. It is prayer, because prayer is a conversation with God, but this is the opposite of how we usually pray, which is to talk to God. In meditation and contemplation, we’re listening.

Daily spiritual reading

There are so many wonderful books for Daily Readings out there. If you look, there will be one that strikes your fancy. There are some online:

<http://www.d365.org/todaysdevotion/>

http://prayer.forwardmovement.org/forward_day_by_day.php?d=15&m=1&y=2013

There are some that you can get especially for Lent:

<http://www.er-d.org/Lent/>

<http://www.livingcompass.org/lent.iml>

And there are some that are available for everyday

<http://www.forwardmovement.org/>

<https://www.churchpublishing.org/>

Journaling

(from My Faith, My Life by Jennifer Gamber)

“As with any kind of prayer, journaling is personal. You can journal in spiral-bound notebooks, on the computer, or in a scrapbook. Begin by inviting God to your journaling. Write what comes to mind. Be honest, even if it’s painful or you think God doesn’t want to hear it. Without honesty you can’t truly face yourself or God. Writing will help you find your true voice. Seeing your thoughts written on paper gives them greater importance. Try it. Also, by writing down your thoughts you can read them again later. You might notice that your thoughts aren’t what you remembered. Reading past thoughts will help you recognize how your thoughts change.

“Try journaling with images. Perhaps journaling with mandalas will help you journey to your inner self. God speaks to us though our lives. Ask yourself where God is in your journal. What is God saying to you? Journaling can help you see your life and offer it to God.”

If you like to draw or paint, try the book Praying in Color by Sybil MacBeth: <http://prayingincolor.com/>.

Pray with Prayer beads

Praying with beads is a practice in many different traditions and religions. For a good website on the background of Anglican Prayer Beads, and instructions and prayers, go here:

<http://www.kingofpeace.org/prayerbeads.htm>