

LIVING LENT IN FAMILIES

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, March 8th this year. Lent refers to the 40 days plus six Sundays preceding Easter. Lent is a season to prepare our hearts and minds and lives for God's ultimate gift in Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Historically, it has been a time of quiet reflection and self-examination. In this season when we remember Jesus' sacrifice, some Christians give up something that represents a sacrifice for them, in appreciation and thanksgiving for what God has done for them in Jesus Christ.

How can our congregations help families do this?

- Teach about Lent as an opportunity to live heart-to-heart with God, to slow down, to experience a sabbath rest. (Many adults, as well as children and youth, have no idea what Lent is, why it matters, or the incredible opportunity it is to "come and see" Jesus.)
- For next year, begin planning now to lessen the programming, to make time for families to be together and really experience the Lenten journey.
- For next year, locate or create a family-friendly Lenten devotional and get one for every household in your congregation. Invite the congregational elders to contribute to funding this opportunity as a way to support faith formation in families.
- Invite all of the households to a special Sunday school, forum, or event, in which they experience one of the devotions together. Then send the devotional book home for use in the household. Remember - never expect them to do at home what they haven't first experienced in the congregation.
- Consider Lenten worship that is robustly family-friendly, including a simple meal, engaging worship, followed by cross-generational small groups for everyone.

For this year, how might families live this season of Lent? Let me suggest a few ways:

- Find a family Lenten devotional book (or use *Taking Faith Home*) that is appropriate for all of the ages in your family and commit to spending time each day of Lent doing devotions as a family.
- Select a children's Bible or family Bible and read the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection together. Read just a piece of the story each time and wonder, what does this mean and what are we to do as a loving response to what Jesus has done for us?

- Instead of giving up chocolate or desserts this Lent, add a gift of family service once a week. Perhaps you will visit an elderly relative (or someone you don't know who never has visitors) in a nursing home. This might be the time your family writes a letter to or draws a picture for a person serving far away in the armed services. Bring a dinner to a family with a new baby or sick parent. Offer to babysit for a single parent.
- Worship together as a family and enjoy a conversation about what you heard, what you still wonder about, and what it means in your life.
- As a family, learn to say, "I am sorry. Can you forgive me?" when you have done or said something that has hurt another person. Teach the response, which is not "Oh, no problem" or "It doesn't matter", but "I forgive you." In worship, point out the confession of sins and absolution, in which we all confess to the wrong we have done and receive God's forgiveness.
- Read a book, watch a movie, or have a conversation about what happens when we do not forgive one another. Ask, "How does it feel when you hold a grudge or stay angry with someone?" Forgiveness is as liberating for the one who forgives, as it is for the one who is forgiven.
- When your child tells you about someone who is hard to get along with or when you hear or read news of someone who has wronged another, pray for that person.
- Jesus came to reconcile humans to God and humans to one another. In prayer, invite Jesus to do that reconciling work in you, too.
- Eat by candlelight each night of Lent, lighting a candle and saying, "Jesus is the light of the world" or echoing the words of the baptismal service, "Let your light so shine before others that they will see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (May this become your new family ritual.)
- Share a story about a person who has been the light of Christ in your life or a person for whom you have been that light.

May this season of living Lent be a wholly holy one for you and those you love.