



HOW TO USE THE FAMILY LENT PLANNER

Fasting, almsgiving, and prayer are at the heart of the forty days of Lent. In this **Family Lent Planner**, you'll find resources to help your kids get involved in these traditional penitential practices:

- **Talking points** to help you explain Lenten practices.
- Some **ideas** for how your family can practice prayer, fasting, and giving this Lent.
- A printable **Lent Planner** to help each person in your family record his or her Lenten commitments.

Let's Talk about Lent

Before Lent begins, talk to your kids about what Lent is — especially its connection to baptism:

- The roots of Lent go back to the early Church, when those who wished to become Christians underwent a period of preparation before their baptism. Eventually, the whole Church adopted the practice of renewing one's baptism through a period of penitence and recommitment to the Christian life.
- Today, Lent is a time when we not only turn away from sin, but actively seek the conversion of our hearts and minds in a renewal of our baptisms.
- If you have young children who haven't reached the age of reason (usually sometime around seven years old), keep in mind that the Church teaches they aren't capable of sinning. You might explain Lent to them in this way: "Lent is a time when we practice loving God and other people better. One way we do that is to give up things that get in the way of loving God and other people."
- The traditional practices of Lent are almsgiving (Matthew 6:2-4), prayer (Matthew 6:5-15), and fasting (Matthew 6:16-18).

A word of caution: In their counseling practice, Dr. Greg and Lisa Popcak have found that well-intentioned parents sometimes set expectations for Lenten practices

that are too high for kids. "The fruit of this is often not good for the child's relationship with God," says Lisa Popcak. Making Lent too intense for kids can also harm the parent-child relationship and family closeness.

Instead, gather as a family to pray and discuss what your Lenten practices will be. As your children brainstorm ideas, guide them toward practices that are concrete, achievable, and measurable. Provide guidance, but let your kids choose their Lenten practice. Doing so will make Lent more enjoyable (and fruitful) for everyone.

Fasting

Fasting and abstinence are the practice of giving up something in order to make more room for God. The thing we give up might be a bad habit (complaining, judging, etc.). But it could also be something that isn't necessarily bad in itself (sweets, video games) that we give up in exchange for something better (God).



Only adults (ages 18-59) have to fast (although teens 14 and older are obligated to abstain from meat on Fridays). In addition to this basic obligation, everyone is invited to choose additional things to "give up" during Lent.

Here are a few fasting ideas for kids and teens:

1. **Give up creature comforts.** Give up some of the old standbys: sweets, video games, phones, junk food, social media, and other creature comforts.
2. **Give up noise.** Monks practice silence in order to better hear God. Your family can, too, by turning off radios, phones, screens, and other sources of distracting noise.
3. **Be one with the poor.** The Church tells us that the practice of fasting can unite us with the poor. Your family can practice this solidarity by giving up something that is symbolic of a basic necessity that other people lack. For example, you might sleep on

the floor as a way of being in solidarity with the homeless; drink nothing but water in solidarity with those who don't have clean drinking water; or refrain from buying anything except essentials in solidarity with those who live on less than \$2 a day.

- 4. Go live in the "desert."** Jesus prepared for his public ministry by spending forty days in the desert. Your family can do something similar by decluttering and simplifying your home (or bedroom): get a box and store away all your "extra" stuff during Lent.
- 5. Give up a vice.** Invite your family to consider one or more virtues they might work on strengthening: patience, kindness, humility, generosity, gratitude, self-control, courage, and so on. As you work on strengthening that virtue, they will also be "giving up" its corresponding vice.

Giving

Giving to those in need (often called "almsgiving") unites us with Jesus' gift of himself on the cross and in the Eucharist, especially when we give at a personal sacrifice. What matters is not so much the size of our gift, but the scope of our generosity, as the story of the widow's mite shows (Luke 21:1-4).



Here are a few ideas for giving:

- 1. Make a giving jar.** Make a list of small acts of giving (offering to help clean up, sharing, letting others go first, etc.) and let them deposit a coin or other token in a "giving jar" each time they perform an act of giving on the list. On Good Friday, count up the coins and give them to a charity.
- 2. Random acts of kindness.** Use the [Random Acts of Kindness website](#) as a source of ideas

for performing a random act of kindness every day.

- 3. Give your presence.** Older kids, teens, and parents can practice putting down their phones or other devices when someone is present with them. Practice making eye contact and *really* listening.
- 4. Raise money for a charity.** As a family, choose a favorite cause, then raise as much money as you can for that cause. Money raising ideas include begging from friends and neighbors, putting on a dinner or a show, scouring couch cushions and car seats for change, giving up allowances, or doing extra chores in exchange for cash. If you participate in the annual Rice Bowl campaign, get supporting resources from the [Catholic Relief Services website](#).
- 5. Be extra helpful.** Kids might also consider taking on new responsibilities around the house, such as helping a younger sibling get dressed or taking out the trash for Mom.

Praying

Fasting and giving go hand-in-hand with prayer. Prayer powers the spiritual life and draws us closer to God, which is the purpose of Lent.



Here are some prayer ideas your family might consider:

- 1. Put out holy water.** Underline the connection between Lent and baptism by making holy water available for family members to bless themselves at the beginning of the day, at the end of the day, or when going out.
- 2. Practice the Daily Examen as a family.** The Daily Examen is one of the most powerful practices for spiritual growth. Popularized by St. Ignatius of Loyola,

the Examen involves setting aside fifteen or twenty minutes a day to prayerfully "examine" your day to see where God was present, and to discern how God is calling you to grow. You'll find a family-friendly guide to praying the Examen in the Downloads section of the CatholicHOM app.

- 3. Get to know Jesus better.** Read through one of the Gospels as a family, using a children's Bible or storybook. Supplement your reading with videos depicting the life of Christ. Max McLean's *Gospel of Mark*, for example, is a one-man dramatic retelling of the Gospel available on YouTube.
- 4. Go to confession.** If your family hasn't been to confession this year, calendar it for Lent. If you do celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation regularly, increase your frequency during Lent.
- 5. Pray three times a day.** Did you know that Christians are invited to pray the Liturgy of the Hours throughout the day? While your family may not be able to pray the actual Divine Office, you can strive to pray a simple prayer in the morning, at noon, and in the evening.
- 6. Pray the Stations of the Cross.** Retrace the steps of Jesus during his suffering and death (the Via Dolorosa or "Way of Sorrow") with your kids by praying the Stations of the Cross, either at your local parish or at home. What would it be like to pray the Stations of the Cross every Friday during Lent?
- 7. Keep a spiritual journal.** Parents and teens might try keeping a spiritual journal during Lent. Use it to record your prayer life, to write prayers to God, or to review your day in the light of your baptismal call.



MY LENT PLAN

During Lent, we practice praying, fasting, and giving as a way of turning away from sin and getting closer to God. In the space under each heading, write down how you plan to pray, fast, and give this Lent. Use the calendar below to track your progress toward Easter by marking off each day.

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
	5	6	7	8	9	10
	11	12	13	14	15	16
	17	18	19	20	21	22
	23	24	25	26	27	28
	29	30	31	32	33	34
	35	36	37	38	39	40
E						

PRAYING



FASTING



GIVING


