

70 Church
Year
Lesson
Starters
for Kids
and those
who teach
them

PAT MATHSON



TWENTY-THIRD
PUBLICATIONS

twentythirdpublications.com

Cover illustration: ©iStockphoto.com / pijama61

TWENTY-THIRD PUBLICATIONS
A division of Bayard
One Montauk Avenue, Suite 200
New London, CT 06320
(860) 437-3012 or (800) 321-0411
www.twentythirdpublications.com

Copyright ©2017 Patricia Mathson. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any manner without prior written permission of the publisher. Write to the Permissions Editor.

ISBN 978-1-62785-305-7
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2017942102
Printed in the U.S.A.

Contents

INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER 1

Advent

Season of hope 3

CHAPTER 2

Christmas

Season of joy 17

CHAPTER 3

Lent

Season to walk with Jesus 32

CHAPTER 4

Triduum

Season of faith 47

CHAPTER 5

Easter

Season of new life 61

CHAPTER 6

Ordinary Time

Season to live God's love 77

INTRODUCTION

The learning activities in this book will help catechists, teachers, and families journey through the church year with the children in their lives. The ideas presented offer ways to help children and families connect the church year to their daily lives.

A variety of activities are offered for each season including creative learning, scenarios, craft projects, exploring Scripture, service ideas, games, drawing, sharing questions, small-group suggestions, art, poster ideas, prayer, and many others. The emphasis is on learning activities that speak to the way children learn.

The activities in this book are for children ages 5 to 11, but also work well with other age groups. These ideas are good for faith formation programs, Catholic schools, whole community catechesis, after-school programs, family ministry, parish celebrations, individual families, and wherever children explore the joy of being children of God.

Advent begins our journey through the church year with children and families. It is a season of four weeks during which we open our hearts and our lives to welcome the Christ Child and all people in his name.

Christmas is not just a day, but an entire season. We joyfully celebrate God's love for all people and our love for God and

for one another. We know that the Jesus of the manger is the Christ of the cross.

Lent is a wonderful opportunity to focus on what is really important in our lives. During Lent we turn our hearts and our lives toward the kingdom of God. We encourage our young people to live Lent by their words and their actions each day.

The Triduum is a three-day season when we walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. We remember all that God has done for us through Jesus Christ. We walk with Jesus from his Last Supper through his passion and death to his resurrection.

Easter is a celebration of the new life that Jesus Christ brings to each of us. This fifty-day season calls all of us to live as Easter people each day. We are called to share the good news with others.

Ordinary Time is an opportunity to live the gospels and all that Jesus taught us. We learn about God's word and see the possibilities that each day brings to us. We strive to become all God has created us to be.

As the children and families walk with Jesus through the church year, they learn what it means to live as followers of Jesus Christ in our lives today. The church seasons help us experience God's presence in our lives and bind us together as a community of God's people. Together we explore all that God has done for us and how much our God loves each of us.

CHAPTER 1

Advent

Season of hope

Advent begins our journey through the church year. It is a season of four weeks to help us prepare our hearts and our lives to celebrate the coming of Jesus Christ at Christmas. The word Advent means coming. We wait in hope for the coming of the Christ child in Bethlehem.

During Advent we get ready to welcome not only Jesus Christ, but all people in his name. We are called to see the face of Jesus in other people. Encourage children to focus on what they can do for others during this time.

We are called during Advent to leave behind the darkness and walk toward the light of Christ at Bethlehem. Advent is a journey in faith, hope, and love of God and others. Advent is a time for choices in how we live our lives as people of God.

Following are some activities to walk through Advent with children and families. We are on the way to Bethlehem with hearts filled with hope. Come, Lord Jesus.

Share Advent hope with others

BACKGROUND

During the season of Advent, we gather together as the people of God. One of the readings we hear at Mass proclaims, “Prepare the way of the Lord.” We get ready to celebrate Jesus Christ who is the Savior of the world.

This is a wonderful season to celebrate with children and families because it is about sharing hope. We encourage the children to have hope in God, hope in the future, and hope in other people.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Share with your learners that the word Advent means coming. During Advent we are called to prepare our hearts and our lives to celebrate the coming of Jesus Christ at Christmas. Ask questions to promote discussion in your group about how we live this wonderful season.

Sharing about Advent

- What are we getting ready for during Advent?
- What can we do to live in peace during Advent?
- What are ways to share God’s love with others this season?
- How should Advent make a difference in our lives?
- How can we make time during Advent for what is important?

Remind the children that Advent is a season of hope. We are to share the hope of this season with others. Advent is a time of new beginnings and new hope in Jesus Christ, who is our Lord.

Make good choices during Advent

BACKGROUND

Advent is a time to live our faith in God. Explore the idea with the children that as followers of Jesus Christ we are to make good choices in our lives. We always have a choice about how to act. Our choices will take us closer to Jesus or farther away. Talk with your learners about how we live Advent in the choices we make.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Share with the children in your group that with the help of the Holy Spirit we are able to live out the call to love God and others. We do not rely on our own abilities but have the Holy Spirit to guide us.

Children need practical examples of life lessons. Give children practice in making good choices by talking about scenarios during the season of Advent such as the following.

Advent scenarios

- Your class is collecting money for an Advent service project. You got your allowance today. Do you buy another toy or give some of the money to help provide Christmas gifts for children in need?
- Your mom asks you to take Christmas cookies to an elderly neighbor. Do you go to the neighbor's house or continue to play your video game?
- Your church has an Advent giving tree and your family picked an elderly woman in a nursing home who needs a

sweater. Do you go willingly to shop with your family or do you complain about how long it's taking?

- You are at home and just want to relax and take it easy. Do you help your little brother or sister make a Christmas card for your grandmother, or do you watch another TV show?

After going through the scenarios with the children, talk about recognizing that there are always choices to be made. We are called to live in love for God and others during the four weeks of Advent and always.

Create an Advent wreath poster

BACKGROUND

The four weeks of Advent prepare us to celebrate the coming of Jesus at Christmas. An Advent candle poster is a visual reminder for children of the four weeks of Advent. Children make the poster as a group project.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Explain that Advent lasts for four weeks and ends on Christmas Eve as we celebrate the coming of Jesus Christ. Remind them that we light the candles on our Advent wreath in our homes and at church. Invite them to work together to make an Advent poster that will be displayed in their area throughout Advent.

Ask a child to print out the words “Season of Advent” in large letters on paper.

Ask other children to cut out large rectangles to represent candles. There should be three purple candles and one pink candle for the third week of Advent. Also needed are four yellow paper flames to light the candles. Ask other children to glue everything to the poster except for three flames, which are saved for future weeks.

Display the poster each week of Advent when you gather together. Ask a child to glue a flame onto a candle at the beginning of each session. The “light” of the candles grows brighter as we get closer to Christmas.

Be an Advent blessing

BACKGROUND

Explore with the children that we are called to be a blessing in the lives of others. There are many small things we can do that will bring a smile to the face of another person. This focuses their attention on what they can give to others, rather than what they will get for gifts. Encourage the children to look for opportunities to be a blessing for someone else during the Advent season.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Talk with the children about blessing the lives of others during Advent by their words and actions. Discuss ways they might do this such as:

Ways to be an Advent blessing

- be kind to someone who needs a friend
- play a game with a younger child
- take time to talk to someone who seems sad
- go with your family to visit an elderly neighbor
- notice when another person does something nice for you
- give some of your allowance to a charity
- listen to what someone else has to say
- donate an item to an Advent tree collection
- pray for someone who is struggling

Invite children to suggest ideas. Encourage them to watch for times when they could be a blessing to others during the season of Advent. In this way, we share the hope of Advent with other people.

Live in Advent peace

BACKGROUND

Explore the season of Advent as an opportunity to live in peace and forgiveness. We want the children to remember that Jesus came for all of us. Advent is a time for reconciliation with other people in Jesus' name.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Share with the children that we get ready for the coming of Jesus Christ at Christmas by preparing our hearts and lives. Explain that peace is not just the absence of war; but living the gospel each day. Peace is sharing love and forgiveness with other people. Peace is living as God intended us to live.

Talk with the children about being peacemakers in our families, our communities, and our world during Advent. We can do this by helping people see common interests, not judging others, and realizing that differences among people enrich us.

Forgiveness is part of how we live Advent. We must let go of old hurts in order to make room in our hearts and our lives for hope and for peace. Holding onto grudges only hurts us. Let children ask questions as this may be a new concept for many of them.

Encourage children and families to also pray for peace. During Advent we join our prayers to those of people all over the world who pray for peace in our world. This gives us hope that with God's help there may one day be peace for all people.

Write with Advent prayer starters

BACKGROUND

Prayer starters create prayers that speak to the children's hearts and lives during the season of Advent and beyond.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Share with the children that we are to be people of prayer during Advent. Tell them that one way to write their own prayers is with prayer starters. They begin the prayer with the words given and then complete the prayer in their own words.

Let children choose one of the following Advent prayer starters or one of their own and write it on their paper.

Advent prayer starters

- God, during this season of Advent I give you thanks for...
- Jesus, help me to live Advent by...
- Holy Spirit, may I show love for others during Advent by...
- Lord, during Advent help me to remember to...

Then they finish writing their Advent prayer in their own words. Their prayer can be as long or short as they want to make it. Even one sentence is fine for beginners.

Children may choose to share their prayer with the group. This is also a good activity for a parish family day during Advent or another event during the Advent season.

Ask the children to pray their Advent prayer at home during the season of Advent and share it with their family.

Draw an Advent giving picture

BACKGROUND

Advent offers us an opportunity to reach out and focus on giving instead of getting. Encourage the children to think of creative ways they will help someone during Advent.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Explore with the children that Advent is a time to see how we are able to help other people. Everyone can do something for someone else. We can do good deeds at home and in our community. Talk with the children about possible ideas such as:

Good deeds for Advent

- introduce yourself to a new child in your school and make them feel welcome
- visit someone in a nursing home and bring along a card you made for them
- help with dinner, set the kitchen table, or do another chore that helps your family
- write a thank-you note to someone in your life and leave it as a surprise
- participate in a service project sponsored by your parish or community

Ask the children to think of other ideas too. Then ask the children to each pick out one thing they will do during Advent this year and draw a picture of it on manila paper with brightly colored markers. Each child can share their picture with their families. In this way, they take what they learn out of the classroom and into their lives.

Give warm winter wear during Advent

BACKGROUND

Almost a third of all homeless people are families with children. Sometimes, circumstances leave families with no place to go. Many cities have family shelters that take in homeless families in crisis and provide shelter, food, and services for families at a difficult time in their lives. Plan a service project to bring comfort to children living in shelters during Advent.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Talk about the idea of helping others during Advent with the young people in your group. Explain that some families live in shelters in times of crisis. All of us need help from other people sometimes.

Many shelters need warm winter wear such as hats, scarves, mittens, and gloves for the children they serve. Encourage your children and families to contribute new items for children living in shelters. This is a project that they can understand.

Collecting warm winter wear helps others during the season of Advent and gives children in shelters hope that things will get better because people care.

Be Advent prayer partners

BACKGROUND

Advent is a time of prayer. We are to pray not only for our own needs but also for people in our parishes, our communities, and our world. Jesus calls us to serve others, and part of that is praying for the needs of other people. Doing prayer projects during this season expands children's understanding of what prayer is about.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Encourage children to pray for other people during this season with an Advent prayer partners project. Tell the children that each of them will get the name of another child in the class and pray for that child throughout Advent.

Ask each child in your group to put his or her name on an individual slip of paper and put it in a basket. Then pass the basket and ask each child to draw out a name. The child whose name they draw will be their prayer partner during Advent.

During Advent the children pray for the child whose name they drew. They can pray in any way they choose and any time they want to do so. This is a way for all children in the group to be involved. It reminds them that we are to pray for others.

Each time you gather with the children in the Advent season, remind them to pray for their prayer partners. Encourage them to pray for other people too. In this way, the children take what they learn out into their lives during Advent.

Make Advent psalm posters

BACKGROUND

As a church we pray the beautiful words of the psalms at Mass during Advent. These psalms speak to us of waiting for the Lord and how good God is to us.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Share with the children that the psalms have been used as prayers for thousands of years. The psalms give us words to praise our God and remind us of what we believe. Share the words of some of the Advent psalms with the children.

Talk about what each verse means and encourage children's ideas. Then ask your young people to make posters to display using one of psalm verses below.

Advent psalms

Lord, teach me your paths	Psalm 25:4
Wait for the Lord	Psalm 27:14
Tell God's glory among the nations	Psalm 96:3
Bless the Lord	Psalm 103:1
The Lord has done great things for us	Psalm 126:3
Great is our Lord	Psalm 147:5

Ask the children to each write out the words to one of these psalm verses on card stock or poster board using markers. They may then decorate the letters and the posters in any way and any colors that they choose. When they finish, take the children to display their posters in a hallway or a gathering space. Each time people see the poster, they will be reminded of the Advent season and God's love for us.

Open your heart during Advent

BACKGROUND

During Advent we should open our hearts to the needs of others. Our children need opportunities to do this in their lives. Guide your children to have compassion for refugees who have fled from violence in their own countries.

Learn more about the plight of refugees through the Catholic Charities website. Parish social justice committees often have ongoing projects to help refugees in the local area and welcome assistance from children and families.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Encourage the children to have compassion for others during Advent. Explain the plight of refugee children who have left everything behind. Refugees may have spent months or even years in refugee camps. They have been allowed to come to a new country because they are in fear for their lives.

Refugees need the assistance of other people. They must learn a new way of life and a new language. Encourage children to collect books during the season of Advent for refugee children who are learning English. This will help the refugee children practice their language skills. Ask your children to bring in new books or gently used books as gifts. This is a concrete way for children to help other children. Remind them that Jesus calls us to reach out to people in difficult circumstances, as he did.

Pray together during Advent

BACKGROUND

Praying together as a community is part of Advent. It is how we are called to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. Prayer reminds us of what is important in our lives. All things are possible with our God. The prayer below invites children to pray together during Advent. Make copies before gathering with the children.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Encourage children to make Advent a time of prayer. Remind them that prayer is an important part of our relationship with God. Prayer reminds us who God is and who we are as the people of God. Pray this prayer together as a group whenever you gather during Advent.

Advent Prayer

Lord Jesus,
help us to prepare our hearts and our
lives to celebrate your coming
as a child in a manger at Bethlehem on that first Christmas.
You are the light that shines in the darkness of our lives.
and the light for all people to follow.
Guide us to share the spirit of hope of this beautiful season
with others through our words and our actions each day.
May this Advent season make a difference
in our lives and the lives of others. Amen.

CHAPTER 2

Christmas

Season of joy

We share with children that Christmas is not just a day, but an entire season on the church calendar. The Christmas season only begins on Christmas day. How much we miss if we think that Christmas is only a one-day season.

We greet Christmas with great joy because we know that this is only the beginning. The Jesus of the manger is the Christ of the cross. God fulfills the promise made to the people in a way we could never have imagined.

Christmas should make a difference in our lives and in the lives of others. We cannot put our Christmas spirit away with the Christmas decorations. The joy and love toward others that we share at Christmas must continue throughout the Christmas season and into our lives.

The activities in this chapter will encourage children and families to celebrate who God is in our lives during the season of Christmas. They will explore how much God loves us and how we can share that love with others. This is the message of Christmas that we celebrate with children and one other.

Set up a Christmas manger scene

BACKGROUND

The Christmas story is just the beginning. We celebrate the birth of Christ because we know that the child in the manger grew up to be the Savior of the world. The Christmas story in the Gospel of Luke is the fulfillment of a promise that would forever change the world.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Talk about the story of the first Christmas. Then let the children set up the Christmas manger scene as the story of the nativity is retold. Give out nativity figures and ask children to place individual pieces in the stable as the following narration is read out loud.

The Christmas story

The town of Bethlehem was crowded because people were in town for the census. But it was quiet in the stable where the **ANIMALS** were. **JOSEPH** came into the stable and saw that it was a place to stay since there was no room at the inn.

MARY walked slowly into the stable. She was soon to have a child and was very tired from their journey. That night, the baby Jesus was born and Mary tenderly laid him in a **MANGER**.

In the hills outside Bethlehem shepherds were taking care of the sheep. Suddenly, an **ANGEL** came and told them that a Savior had been born. The **SHEPHERDS** were amazed and hurried to the stable. There they found Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus. Later, the shepherds went back to the hillside praising God. This is the story of the first Christmas.

Play a Christmas word guess game

BACKGROUND

A word guess activity helps children remember the story of the first Christmas. This fun game promotes learning about the Christmas story in the gospel of Luke 2:1–20. Using a whiteboard and marker is the easiest way to do this activity. The children pay attention because they will have a turn to guess.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Announce to the children that they are going to do a game that involves guessing words from the Christmas story in the Gospel of Luke. Start by putting a short line for each letter of the first word on the whiteboard. The first child takes a turn guessing a letter. If that letter is in the word, print the letter on the line. Each child only gets one letter guess per turn, whether or not it is correct. Continue with the children taking turns guessing letters.

Only when a child has guessed a letter correctly, does he or she guess the word. When the word has been guessed correctly, write in all the letters. Remind your children how the word fits into the Christmas story. Here are the words for this activity.

Christmas words

angel • Lord • Bethlehem • manger • child • Mary • glory • Nazareth • inn • flock • people • Joseph • joy • shepherds • fields • Savior

Once a word has been guessed correctly, start again with another word. The child next to the child who guessed the word correctly goes first. Play the game until all the words have been used.

Create family Christmas stars

BACKGROUND

Stars are a beautiful symbol of the Christmas story. The star is a sign of hope in our world. Decorating wooden star ornaments is a great project for children and families.

Use small, pre-cut wood stars available in bulk from a craft store or online. Get the ones that come with a hole for ease of hanging.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Explore the idea with children and families that stars can remind us that Jesus is the light of the world and the light we are to follow in our lives as individuals and as a church community. The star that led the wise men to Jesus is our star too.

Invite children and families to make star decorations for a parish Christmas tree. Each child or family takes home a star to decorate and return, or the stars are decorated as part of a parish family day for Advent.

Children can use markers, paint, sequins, foam shapes, or other materials to decorate their stars. In this way, each star will be unique to each child or family. Provide gold cord to put through the hole in the top to make a hanger for each ornament.

The stars can be hung on a tree in the church when the church is being decorated for Christmas. Remind the families to look for the beautiful tree they helped create when they walk into Christmas Mass. They will be amazed at what we are able to accomplish when we work together.

Write a four-step Christmas prayer

BACKGROUND

Children need to find ways to pray that are meaningful to them. Help them write their own prayers in four simple steps.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Emphasize to the children that they can pray to God in their own words. Let them know that God wants to hear what is in their hearts. Guide the children in writing their own Christmas prayers. Use the four-step process:

1. Call God by name
2. Praise God
3. Ask for what you need
4. Close with Amen

Show the children how this works by first composing a group Christmas prayer. Go step by step and ask the children to suggest ideas as you write them on the board or a piece of poster board. When the prayer is finished, pray it together with the children. A four-step prayer for Christmas might turn out like this.

*God of love, we thank you for the gift of Jesus at Christmas.
Help us to share your love with others in his name. Amen.*

Then encourage children to use this process to write individual Christmas prayers. This is also a good activity for whole community catechesis. Each family works as a group to write their own prayer. Then they take home their prayer to pray together.

Fill Christmas stockings for the elderly

BACKGROUND

We are called to open our hearts to the needs of other people. One great idea for children and families is to fill Christmas stockings for elderly residents in a local care center. Young people learn to make a difference, and elderly people benefit.

Check with the activity director of the care center on specific items needed and any restrictions. Ask the number of residents of one floor or unit so everyone will get a stocking. Find out what date the stockings will be needed.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Explore the idea that we are to share joy and hope with other people at Christmas. Let the children know that they will be filling Christmas stockings for elderly people who live at a local care center. It cheers up the residents to be remembered in this way.

Provide stockings and invite the children and families to bring in items to fill them. Suggest useful items, such as lip balm, body lotion, warm socks, new toothbrush and toothpaste, and large-print puzzle books.

Give children and families the opportunity to work together stuffing the stockings, using the donated items. Filled Christmas stockings are a delightful gift for elderly people.

Make a Christmas nativity craft

BACKGROUND

Children enjoy making a Christmas craft to take home. Before gathering with the children, duplicate the words of the angel's Christmas message from Luke 2:11: "Today in Bethlehem a Savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord." Also gather Christmas stickers for this project.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Talk with the children about the reason we celebrate Christmas. Read the verse from Luke 2:11 out loud and teach them that these words are why we have Christmas. We celebrate at Christmas because a Savior has been born for us. God fulfilled the promise to send us a Savior in a way no one could have imagined. These words remind us of how much God loves us.

Show the children how to make a table tent using a sheet of green card stock. They fold each sheet in half to make a stand-up table tent with the fold at the top. Hand out a copy of the verse to each child to glue to the front of their table tent. Older children can write out the words themselves.

Around the verse, children put Christmas stickers, such as stars and trees. This draws attention to the words and makes a colorful craft.

Share hope with Operation Christmas Card

BACKGROUND

Christmas is a time to reach out to others. Sometimes we overlook people in our own communities. Children can make Christmas cards to give to shut-ins and the homebound. Check first with the parish group that visits elderly and sick people throughout the year. See if this group is able to distribute the Christmas cards.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Remind children that we are called to be a sign of God's love to others. Let them know about homebound people in their community who are isolated due to age or medical conditions.

Operation Christmas Card enables children to reach out to them. Colorful Christmas cards provide a touch of Christmas cheer to their surroundings and lets these individuals know that other people care.

Provide red and green paper or card stock for the cards. Children cut out a Christmas shape, such as a tree, wreath, holly, or star from patterned scrapbook paper. They glue it to the front of the card. Then the children print a Merry Christmas greeting on the inside of the card and sign their first name. Children can choose to make one card or several.

It is also important to pray for people in need and those for whom life is a challenge. Ask the children in your group to pray for the elderly, homebound, and sick people in their community at Christmas.

Explore the words of Christmas carols

BACKGROUND

Music has a way of reaching into a child's heart. Sharing Christmas carols with children is a gift in their lives. Carols carry the message of Christmas to all who sing them and all who hear them. The message of Christmas is taught in the words we sing.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Tell your learners that the words of traditional Christmas carols show us the true message of Christmas. Introduce the carols by explaining to the children what the songs tell us about the story of the birth of Jesus in a stable and the visit of the shepherds.

Talk about the meaning of the words so they understand the songs. Ask questions to allow children to participate. For "Silent Night," ask them why they think the carol says it was a holy night. For "Away in a Manger," ask who knows what a manger is.

Carols help us remember what we really celebrate at Christmas. Sing Christmas carols with the children so they can learn the words. Play Christmas music as they work on a project. Encourage children to sing out Christmas carols at Mass with the rest of the parish community. In this way, we lift up our hearts and voices to the Lord, who is the God of all of us.

Work together on a festive Christmas decoration

BACKGROUND

A paper Christmas chain is fun to make and looks great hung in loops across a bookcase or at the top of a whiteboard in the classroom area. This project shows children that Christmas decorations do not have to be expensive and they can create their own.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Let the children know that they are going to make a colorful Christmas chain to decorate the area where they gather. Provide a variety of materials for the chain, including red and green construction paper plus a few sheets of patterned red and green scrapbook paper for variety.

Show them how to cut strips of paper about an inch wide lengthwise down the page. It is not necessary to measure. Help children who have difficulty, and cut out some strips to let them get started.

Each child makes a circle with one link and tapes the ends together. They put a strip through the circle and secure it with tape. This process is continued over and over again, alternating colors. Each child makes a section of chain. Then the children join their sections together. This project shows what we are able to do when we work together.

Pray a Christmas prayer together

BACKGROUND

At Christmas we celebrate God's love for us. God keeps his promises in ways that we could never imagine. God sent Jesus Christ to us out of love. Jesus came for all people. He shows us the way to the Father. Emphasize that prayer is part of celebrating this season.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Give each child a copy of the Christmas prayer below. Then have the children decorate the prayer using red and green markers. When they finish, ask the children to gather in a circle and pray this prayer together out loud.

Christmas Prayer

God of all people,
we celebrate the awesome gift of Christmas
and give thanks to you for sending Jesus to us
as a baby in a manger and a Savior for the world.
Jesus brought light to a world of darkness
and showed us that with you all things are possible.
May we be witness to your presence in our lives
and in our world by the way we live each day.
We give glory and praise to your holy name. Amen.

Then each child takes their prayer home to pray during the Christmas season and to share with their family.

Celebrate the twelve days of Christmas

BACKGROUND

The twelve days of Christmas are the traditional days of the Christmas season, beginning on Christmas day. We rejoice that God sent Jesus to us as a Savior for all people. Encourage the children and families to look for opportunities to be kind and caring toward others as we begin the Christmas season.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Explore the idea of the twelve days of Christmas with your learners. Carefully explain that these are not the twelve shopping days leading up to Christmas. Rather these are the twelve days beginning on Christmas day, December 25, and ending the night before Epiphany, which is traditionally on January 6.

Share ideas with the children and families for celebrating the real twelve days of Christmas. Invite children to contribute their own ideas. In this way, they learn to share the love and hope of Christmas with others.

Ideas for the twelve days of Christmas

- DAY 1** read the Christmas story together

- DAY 2** do a chore for a family member as a surprise

- DAY 3** thank people who sent you Christmas cards

- DAY 4** let another child play with one of your new toys

- DAY 5** give food items to the local food pantry

- DAY 6** make a “thinking of you” card for someone

- DAY 7** visit a nursing home with your family

- DAY 8** hold the door for a person behind you

- DAY 9** make a birdfeeder and fill it with birdseed

- DAY 10** give coloring books and crayons to a children’s hospital

- DAY 11** thank God for sending us Jesus

- DAY 12** pray for peace in our world

Send home ideas for celebrating beyond Christmas day. One good thing is that during the twelve days of Christmas, many families may have some time off from work and school and there is more time to focus on what Christmas means to us.

Do an action story

BACKGROUND

The coming of the wise men is celebrated on Epiphany. (While January 6 is the traditional date, in our current church calendar in the U.S. and Canada, Epiphany is celebrated on the Sunday that falls between January 2 and January 8.) This beautiful feast reminds us that Jesus came for all people and all nations. We are to follow the example of the magi and search for the star of Jesus in our own lives.

WITH THE CHILDREN

The story of the wise men is an important Christmas story for all ages. Older children can read this story in the Gospel of Matthew 2:1–12. Younger children enjoy retelling the story with actions. This involves children and helps them remember how the wise men followed a star to Jesus. Gather the children and read the words and do the actions. The children do the gestures also.

Story of the magi

A bright star appeared in the sky	(point up)
when Jesus was born.	(rock arms)
The magi followed the star	(walk in place)
looking for Jesus.	(shade eyes)
When they found Jesus	(smile)
they gave him gifts.	(extend arms)
We too must look for Jesus	(nod head)
in our hearts and our lives.	(hands on heart)
Jesus came for all people	(stretch out hands)
because God loves each of us.	(hug self)
We can give God	(arms outstretched)
the gift of our love today	(hands over heart)
by welcoming all people	(shake head yes)
in the name of Jesus.	(rock arms)

This brief retelling of the Epiphany story catches the attention of children. They learn that Jesus came for all people. This is the message of Epiphany. The story of the wise men and the star reminds us year after year to seek Jesus in our lives too.

CHAPTER 3

Lent

Season to walk with Jesus

Each year we walk through the season of Lent with Jesus. This is a wonderful opportunity to focus on what is really important in our lives. Lent is a time to turn our hearts and our lives toward the kingdom of God.

This season challenges us to turn away from selfishness and toward the light of Christ at Easter. Through living Lent, we prepare ourselves to live the new life that Jesus brings to all of us.

We must show young people that Lent is more than just about giving up something; it is about who we are and how we live as followers of Jesus Christ. Lent is a time to reflect on where we are going in our lives and how we follow the example of Jesus.

The following pages offer many ideas for this lenten journey with children and families. We live out this season each day through our words and actions. Lent should make a difference in our lives.

Ask questions about living Lent

BACKGROUND

On Ash Wednesday we are challenged with the words “Turn away from sin and believe in the Gospel,” from the Gospel of Mark (1:15). Lent is a time to turn away from darkness and selfishness and toward the light and love of Jesus Christ at Easter.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Talk with the children about Lent and what it means for our lives. Then ask questions to engage children, provide review for some, and help others catch up. Also provide an opportunity for children to ask their own questions.

Sharing about Lent

- When does Lent begin? (*Ash Wednesday*)
- Why do we get ashes on Ash Wednesday?
(*to turn away from sin and follow Jesus*)
- What do we get ready for during Lent? (*Easter*)
- Why does Lent last for forty days? (*Jesus went out into the desert for forty days to prepare for public ministry.*)
- How can we grow in faith during the Lent season?
(*pray, fast, help others*)
- Why is prayer a priority throughout Lent? (*to help us focus on our relationship with God*)
- How might we help others during Lent? (*collect items for a shelter, visit a nursing home, read to a younger child*)

Talking about Lent helps children try out their ideas and learn from the other young people. We are a community of God’s people, and we can help one another grow in faith.

Do a “Walk with Jesus” poster for Lent

BACKGROUND

Lent is a journey in faith, hope, and love. It mirrors our lifetime faith journey and encourages us to draw closer to God. During Lent we walk with Jesus as he teaches people and shows them how much God loves each of us.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Emphasize with the children that we are called to follow the way of Jesus in our lives today. By his words and actions, he showed us how we are capable of living during Lent.

Have the children work together to make a poster about our lenten journey. On poster board, write: “We will follow Jesus during Lent and always.”

Ask the children to draw around one of their feet on colored paper and to print their name inside the outline. They cut out their foot shape around the outside line. If time is short or the children are young, use precut colorful foot shapes made of craft foam for this project. The children glue their footsteps to the poster as a sign they will follow Jesus.

Display the poster each time the children gather during Lent as a reminder of the season. Let them know that each day we must make choices that lead us to Jesus. We are called to be Jesus’ disciples and witness to who he is by our words and actions. In this way, we get ready to celebrate Easter and the new life Jesus brings to us.

Choose peace during Lent

BACKGROUND

One way we live Lent is by choosing to live in peace. This is a challenge. We are called to be peacemakers with one another in our families, in our communities, and in our world. We are a community of God's people. Peace begins one step, one action, one word at a time.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Stress the importance of living in peace in Lent and in our lives. Discuss the following ways to be peacemakers. This encourages children to think about how they can choose to live in peace with others each day.

Live in peace

TURN AWAY FROM ANGER. Try to let some things go without an angry response this Lent. Sometimes people say things to us that hurt, but it is really about their problems and not about us.

Example: Someone calls you stupid on the bus. What should you do? Is it ok to call them names since they started it? Will this solve the situation? Is there a better way to handle this? Why is it a challenge to live in peace?

STAND UP FOR THE RIGHTS OF OTHERS. We are called to make a difference and work for peace for others. We must stand up for what is right. This is the challenge of following Jesus.

Example: Each day when you get to school, you see a student

being picked on by a group of other students. They make fun of the way he talks and dresses. Why not just ignore the situation? Is there a way you can help a student in trouble?

LET GO OF GRUDGES. Sometimes people act toward us in ways that are unfair to us. Grudges only hurt *us*, because the people who hurt us don't really care. Grudges hold us back from being happy.

Example: Some older kids made last year miserable for you. Should you plan ways to make them pay? Is it ok for you to push around a younger child this year? How does holding a grudge hurt you?

HAVE COMPASSION. When you see someone who has been hurt by the actions of others, reach out a helping hand. You can help that person with a kind word or action. We are all responsible for one another.

Example: A girl in your class was not invited to another student's birthday party. The other girl handed out invitations at school and ignored her. How could you be kind to this girl? Could it be as simple as a smile or saying hello? What else could you do?

Create a Lent cross

BACKGROUND

Jesus called his disciples to follow him. An important symbol of our faith is the cross. It is a symbol of God's unending love for us. The cross challenges us to live as disciples of Jesus. Young people can make colorful crosses to remind themselves to follow Jesus during Lent.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Let your learners know that Jesus calls each of us to follow him. Jesus shows us the way to the Father. The cross is a reminder to follow Jesus during the forty days of the season of Lent and beyond. We are to live our faith in Jesus each day through our words and actions. Show children how to create a colorful cross to display at home throughout Lent.

Have the children cut out a cross shape from a half sheet of card stock. Next, they cut small squares from various colors of self-stick craft foam. Children arrange the colorful pieces on the cross, leaving space between each one; then they peel off the backing and attach the pieces. Encourage the children to display their cross at home during Lent to remember that Jesus calls us to follow him.

This multicolored cross is a reminder of how much God loves us. The cross led to the resurrection. Jesus redeemed us and brought new life to all of us. His saving action includes people of all generations.

Live Lent each day

BACKGROUND

Lent is a season to live what we believe. It is a time to live as gospel people. We get ready to live the rest of our lives as the people of God. We must personalize the Lent season for our young people if they are to understand and live this season.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Explore the idea with children that Lent is an opportunity to take steps toward becoming who God created us to be. Help children connect this season and their lives by talking about what kind of things they could do during these forty days. Encourage children to offer ideas too. Here are some to get started.

Lent ideas

- help another child at school
- give up teasing a brother or sister
- thank God for your many blessings
- share a talent you have
- offer each day to God
- let go of a grudge
- visit an elderly relative
- pray for the needs of others

Remind the children that we are called to follow Jesus in what we do and say during this holy season. We are called to live Lent. This season should make a difference in our lives.

Draw a lenten “sharing” picture

BACKGROUND

During Lent (and all year round), we are called to serve others as Jesus did. We must use our resources, our gifts, and our talents to make life better for others. We are all on this faith journey together. Children must learn to live their faith. This means personalizing lessons so that children discover ways they are able to reach out to others.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Explore with the children that Lent is a time to reflect on what is important in life. It is an opportunity to take positive steps forward. We are to live in love as Jesus showed us by his words and his example. We must be people of compassion and mercy.

Encourage children to think about the gifts and abilities God has given them to share with others. They might be good at listening to other people or get along well with younger children. Still others might be good at talking with elderly people or have musical talent to share. Invite children to think of other ideas also.

Ask children to draw a picture of themselves helping someone. This encourages them to personalize the lesson. They must think about what it means for their lives before they translate that to the paper. Then the children share their pictures first with their classmates and then with their families. This project gives them ideas that they are able to take with them out into their lives.

Make children's care kits during Lent

BACKGROUND

Jesus showed us that loving others means reaching out to them. Check on the needs for personal care items for children at your local family shelter. Children like to do projects that benefit other children.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Talk with your group of children about some of the people in our communities who need our help. Let the children in your group know that sometimes children stay in shelters with their families when life is difficult. Let your children know that everyone needs help sometimes.

Tell your children that families only bring a few things with them to the shelter. Children moving into shelters need personal care items, such as shampoo, body wash, a toothbrush, and toothpaste. Also needed are baby wash, baby shampoo, and even bath toys. The individual care kits you'll make will be given to new children who arrive at a shelter.

Explore with your children the idea that each of us can make a difference. Ask your children and families to bring in personal care items especially for children moving into shelters.

Then have your group package the children's items as sets in quart bags with one of each item. Remind your children to pray for families living in shelters, locally and around the world.

This is also a great project to involve an entire program or school. One way to do this is to have each grade level collect a specific item for the care bags. Hopefully, what is done in Lent will lead to an ongoing involvement in helping others.

Write prayers with Lent prayer prompts

BACKGROUND

Prayer is one of the traditional practices for the season of Lent. Through prayer we acknowledge our dependence on God in all things. We ask God to guide our lives in all we say and do. We pray for our needs and the needs of other people.

WITH THE CHILDREN

During Lent encourage the children to pray each day. Explore a variety of ways to pray during this holy season. This expands their idea of what prayer is. One way to pray is in their own words. Using prayer prompts helps them do this.

The children copy a prayer prompt and then finish the prayer in their own words. The prayer may be one sentence or one paragraph, depending on the age of the children. Children may also illustrate their prayer.

Prayer prompts for Lent

- Lord Jesus Christ, may I follow you in Lent by...
- Loving God, during Lent let me see you in others especially...
- God of creation, in this season of Lent I give you thanks for...
- Holy Spirit, guide me to help others during Lent by...
- Lord God, help me to pray during Lent for...

Writing prayers during Lent expands children's understanding of what prayer is. Prayer enables them to connect with our God. Prayer is important during Lent as we walk our faith journey with Jesus Christ to the cross and beyond.

Live the gospels during Lent

BACKGROUND

Lent is a time to turn our hearts and our lives toward the kingdom of God. We can share Scripture with children to help them learn to live as followers of Jesus.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Explore the idea with the children that we are to follow Jesus in our lives during Lent and always. Divide the children into small groups. Guide them to look up some of the gospel verses that speak of what it means to live as followers of Jesus Christ.

Do one verse at a time. Recognize that some children may have difficulty navigating the Bible; quietly assist them. Have one of the children read the verse out loud. Then talk about what it means for us. Invite children to share their own ideas.

Follow Jesus verses

Follow me	<i>Matthew 9:9</i>
Love the Lord your God	<i>Matthew 22:37</i>
Forgive so your Father may also forgive you	<i>Mark 11:25</i>
Pray always	<i>Luke 21:36</i>
I am the light of the world	<i>John 8:12</i>
Love one another	<i>John 15:12</i>

Emphasize that Lent is a time to walk with Jesus Christ. Encourage your learners to write out the verse they like best on a colorful index card and add a cross sticker. Then ask them to take the card home and put it where they will see it. In this way, children learn to live Lent as part of their faith journey.

Make a difference in Lent

BACKGROUND

There are children in our communities who need a helping hand during Lent and at other times. Some of these children are in need of a safe place to stay in an emergency. There may be only minutes for children to gather a few things to take with them. There is a way to make this transition a little easier.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Tell your young people that Lent is a time to reach out to others. Explain that your group will have the opportunity to reach out to children who need a safe place to stay during a difficult time for their family. Be sensitive to the fact that there may be children in your group who are or have been in foster care. Explain that everyone needs help sometimes.

This project involves filling backpacks that the parish outreach committee will deliver to the local department of human services. These backpacks can then be given to children when there is an emergency placement.

Ask a parish group to provide the backpacks. Then ask your young people and their families to bring in items to fill the backpacks. Provide a list of what is needed. Each backpack should have a new stuffed animal, soft fleece blanket, book, coloring book and crayons, a small toy, hairbrush, toothbrush, and toothpaste.

Enlist your children's help in packing the items. Check that each backpack has one of each item, and then pass the filled backpacks along to the parish outreach committee.

Make Lent prayer cards

BACKGROUND

Prayer is part of our relationship with our God, who created us and loves us. Through prayer we remember that with God all things are possible. Praying together is a good way to open our hearts to God during Lent.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Remind children that prayer draws us closer to God and to one another. We pray to the God of all people that we can live as we were created. With God's help all things are possible.

During the season of Lent the following prayer can be part of your group's prayer when they gather together. We pray that God will help us live as followers of Jesus Christ during the season of Lent and beyond. Add a cross to the prayer below and duplicate it on purple paper to make Lent prayer cards. The children pray this prayer in class and then at home with their families.

Prayer for Lent

God of all people,
as we journey through the season of Lent
help us to build your kingdom
and do your will each day.
May we be people of prayer in all things
so that our lives give glory and praise to you.
Guide us to work for justice in our world
and see Jesus Christ in other people
during this holy season. Amen.

Use an echo pantomime for Palm Sunday

BACKGROUND

On Palm Sunday each year, we celebrate the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem. An echo pantomime involves children and makes the gospel story come alive for them. They are with the crowd that hails Jesus as a king and puts palm branches on the road in front of him.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Explore with the children that Palm Sunday is the beginning of the holiest week of the church year. Help children understand the account of Palm Sunday from Mark 11:7–9 with an echo pantomime. The catechist says each line and does the action. The children echo the words and gestures line by line.

Palm Sunday story

When they drew near to Jerusalem, *(walk in place)*
 Jesus sent two of his disciples, *(hold up two fingers)*
 and said to them, *(hands by mouth)*
 “Go into the village and you will find a colt.*(point straight ahead)*
 Untie it and bring it here. *(beckon with arm)*
 If anyone should say to you, *(hands by mouth)*
 ‘Why are you doing this?’ *(shrug shoulders, palms up)*
 tell them, “The Master has need of it.” *(nod head)*
 So they went off and found a colt. *(walk in place)*
 Some of the bystanders said to them, *(hands by mouth)*
 “What are you doing?” *(shrug shoulders, palms up)*
 They answered as Jesus had told them, *(point to palms)*
 and the people permitted the disciples to do it. *(nod head)*
 So they brought the colt to Jesus *(beckon with arm)*

and Jesus sat on it. *(sitting down motion)*
People spread leafy branches on the road *(sweep arm)*
and kept saying hosanna. *(hands by mouth)*
Blessed is he who comes *(nod head)*
in the name of the Lord *(bow head with hands folded)*
Hosanna in the highest. *(raise arms over head)*

CHAPTER 4

Triduum

Season of faith

The Paschal Triduum is the three-day season between Lent and Easter. Triduum begins the evening of Holy Thursday, continues through Good Friday and the Easter Vigil, and concludes the evening of Easter Sunday. The Triduum is the high point of the church year.

During the Triduum we recall the Last Supper Jesus shared with his disciples, the death of Jesus Christ on a cross, and our celebration of the new life Jesus brings to all of us. Through his life, death, and resurrection Jesus Christ redeems us and brings light to our world and our lives.

The following pages offer activities that help children and families celebrate the three days of the Triduum season. These learning experiences explore the events of this season and what they mean for our lives as followers of Jesus.

Look at Triduum symbols

BACKGROUND

The Triduum is a sacred time for all of us. Journey with children through the Triduum by setting up a station for the days of this season. Make a framed sign for each day: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Vigil. Display items associated with each day to help children learn about this holy season.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Explain to your learners that the Triduum is a three-day season between the Lent and Easter seasons. Walk through the three days and teach the children about the symbols for each one. Stress that the cross was not the end but led to the resurrection of Jesus and new life for all of us.

Walk through the Triduum

HOLY THURSDAY

Show a bowl and pitcher.

Explain how Jesus washed the feet of his disciples on the night before he died. Talk about how Jesus told his followers to serve others as Jesus was the servant of all. Ask the children to name ways they can serve others, such as making get-well cards for people in the hospital or helping with a parish outreach project.

GOOD FRIDAY

Display a cross on a purple cloth along with an open Bible.

Tell the children that this was the day that Jesus died on a cross. Explain that we call this day Good Friday because we know that it leads to the resurrection and Easter Sunday. We

display crosses to remember how much God loves us. Invite the children to tell about any crosses they have at home or have seen elsewhere.

EASTER VIGIL

Put out a white cloth and a bowl of holy water plus a green plant.

Share with your learners that the third day of the Triduum is from the Easter Vigil through Easter day. We celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Explain that people are baptized at Mass at the Easter Vigil and welcomed into the church. Invite the children to make the sign of the cross with holy water as a reminder of their own baptism.

Explore the Holy Thursday gospel

BACKGROUND

The Triduum begins with the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday evening. We walk through the Triduum in the footsteps of Jesus. The gospel proclaimed at this Mass is about Jesus washing the feet of his twelve disciples. It is important to share this gospel with the children so they can hear the call to serve others as Jesus did.

WITH THE CHILDREN

On Holy Thursday we remember how Jesus shared his Last Supper with the apostles. That night, Jesus told his disciples, "I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should do also." Read and discuss the Holy Thursday gospel from John 13:1–17. Ask questions to help your learners understand and remember this gospel:

Gospel questions

- When did this gospel take place? (*the night before Jesus died on the cross*)
- What did Jesus do after supper? (*washed the disciples' feet*)
- Who would betray Jesus? (*Judas*)
- Did Jesus wash the feet of Judas too? (*yes*)
- What did Jesus say after the washing of feet? (*As I have done for you, you should do also*)
- Who are people that need our help? (*sick, elderly, hungry*)
- What are ways we can serve others? (*make get-well cards, donate to food pantry*)

Emphasize that we are to do for other people as Jesus does for us. We are to love and serve others, just as Jesus was the servant of all. Jesus wants us to reach out to others, especially those in need. Through his words and actions Jesus showed us how we are capable of living.

Explain to the children that in some churches there is a washing of the feet of twelve people at Mass on Holy Thursday. After Mass, the people go home in silence to reflect and pray on all that Jesus said and did. Some people stay to pray in front of the tabernacle where the Eucharist is placed until the Good Friday service. We do not celebrate Mass again until the Easter Vigil. What we begin on Holy Thursday continues throughout the rest of the Triduum.

Serve the elderly for Holy Thursday

BACKGROUND

When they are learning about Holy Thursday, offer children the opportunity to serve others in the name of Jesus. In this way, they live the gospel. One idea is to help children make colorful butterflies for elderly people at a care center. In advance, find out how many residents there are on a particular unit or floor so no one will be left out.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Encourage your children to share hope with the elderly. Let them know that some elderly people have healthcare needs and live in assisted living facilities where they can get the care they need. Explain the idea of making butterflies to decorate the residents' dinner trays.

Use precut foam butterfly shapes to make this project simple. Children cut out a strip from green self-stick foam and attach it in the middle to make the butterfly's body. Then they cut self-stick foam into squares and in half again to make triangles. Colors such as green, purple, orange, and blue look great. Then the children place the triangles on the butterflies, leaving space between each one for a stained-glass look.

A butterfly on their dinner tray is a welcome surprise for people in care centers. They take their beautiful spring butterflies back to their rooms. This cheerful project invites children to share God's love with the elderly. It shows children what we can do together to benefit the lives of others.

Pray together for Holy Thursday

BACKGROUND

Jesus was a person of prayer in all things. Encourage children to pray. One way to do this is by providing opportunities for them to pray with others. Use Scripture as a springboard to prayer. Below is a prayer to pray with the children, based on the story of Holy Thursday.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Before beginning the prayer, ask everyone to put aside what they are doing to come together in prayer. This sets the stage for prayer and encourages children to focus on the moment and offer this prayer to Jesus:

Holy Thursday prayer

Lord Jesus,
we will soon celebrate Holy Thursday
and the Last Supper you shared with your disciples.
When you washed the feet of your disciples,
you showed us what it means to serve other people.
Open our hearts and our lives to the needs of others
that we may follow your example of love for all people.
Amen.

After praying together, encourage the children to be people of prayer always. Remind them that prayer is an important part of our relationship with the God who created us and loves us always.

Do a people search for Good Friday

BACKGROUND

Good Friday is a time to walk to the cross with Jesus. We remember how much our God loves us. Involve children in a Scripture search for people associated with the passion of Jesus. Learning about people who were there that day helps enrich the children's understanding of the story of Good Friday. Be sure Bibles are available for this activity.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Divide the children into small groups. Give each group some of the references below. Explain to the children that they are going to do a gospel search to learn about people who were part of the Good Friday story. They will look up people who were witnesses to what happened that day. This way, they'll learn about the events and the people of Good Friday and become more familiar with the story.

Help those who need assistance using the Bible. It is important for children to learn how to look up passages.

People of the passion

Which apostle betrayed Jesus?

MARK 14:43-46 • *Judas*

Who denied Jesus three times?

MARK 14:66-72 • *Peter*

Who questioned Jesus?

MATTHEW 27:11-18 • *Pilate*

Who helped Jesus carry the cross?

MATTHEW 27:32-33 • *Simon of Cyrene*

Who stood by the cross?

JOHN 19:25 • *Mother of Jesus*

Which disciple was at the cross?

JOHN 19:26-27 • *Disciple Jesus loved*

Who said this was the Son of God?

MARK 15:39 • *Centurion*

Who gave his new tomb to Jesus?

LUKE 23:50-53 • *Joseph of Arimathea*

Who helped with Jesus' burial?

JOHN 19:39-40 • *Nicodemus*

Then have the children come back together again and go through each question and answer for the group as a whole. Stress to the students that Good Friday is not the end. We call it *Good Friday* because of the resurrection of Jesus that came next.

Decorate crosses for Good Friday

BACKGROUND

On Good Friday we recall all that Jesus did for us. Through his life, death, and resurrection, he redeemed us. At the Good Friday service, people have the opportunity to come forward and venerate a cross as we remember how much Jesus loves us. The cross led to Easter and a new beginning for all of us.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Let the children decorate a cross for Good Friday as a reminder of God's love for all of us. Cut out crosses from half sheets of purple craft foam. There are many different shapes of crosses that can be used.

Children each decorate their cross with foam stickers. Place a cross sticker in the middle. Then complete the cross with new life stickers, such as butterflies and flowers. This helps children make the connection between the cross on Good Friday and the new life of Easter.

Children enjoy being creative, especially when they get to take the project home. Tell them that when they look at their cross at home, it will be a reminder that each of us is loved by God.

Ask the children to suggest places they will display their crosses, such as in their bedroom, in the living room where everyone will see it, or in the kitchen where the family gathers for meals.

Remember people who carry crosses on Good Friday

BACKGROUND

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to pray for other people. There are many people in need in our world. Their problems can seem overwhelming. As a community of God's people, we pray for those who are struggling.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Explore the idea with the children that on Good Friday and at other times we can pray for people who carry crosses in their lives. Crosses they bear include poverty, hunger, grief, mental illness, health problems, and many others. We must offer prayers to the God of all of us for the needs of other people.

Good Friday Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
as we remember the events of Good Friday
we humbly come before you in prayer.
You redeemed us and brought us
new life by your death and resurrection.
We give you thanks for the gift of your love
which is freely given to each of us.
We pray for those in need in our world
who carry their own crosses this day,
including the crosses of poverty and illness.
May we find a way to bring hope to their lives
through our words and our actions. Amen.

Act out the Easter Vigil gospel

BACKGROUND

At the Easter Vigil we hear the story of the people of God. There are seven readings from the Old Testament, beginning with the creation of the world. We are reminded of how the people of the Old Testament kept faith in God's promise to send a Savior.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Explain to the children that at the Easter Vigil we hear the good news proclaimed that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead to bring hope to all of us. We walk out of the darkness and into the light with Jesus Christ.

The gospel for the Easter Vigil Mass is one of three, depending on the year: Matthew 28:1–10; Mark 16:1–7; and Luke 24:1–12. These gospels tell the story of the empty tomb. The women went to the tomb of Jesus on the first Easter and encountered angels who told them that Jesus was risen. They ran to share the good news with the disciples.

Involve children in the telling of the Easter story by having them role play one of these gospels as it is read out loud to the group. The number of young people involved in the role play depends on the number of people mentioned in that gospel. Additional children can accompany the primary actors. It is helpful if each lead actor, especially Jesus, wears a large nametag.

Acting out the Easter Vigil gospel encourages children to remember the wonderful story of the resurrection. It enables them to see the joy of those who encountered Jesus. The Easter story is our story too as Jesus brought new life to all of us.

Assemble a butterfly poster for the Easter Vigil

BACKGROUND

The gospel proclaimed at the Easter Vigil tells of the first Easter and the resurrection of Jesus. God has sent us a Savior, who has redeemed us. Jesus came for all people including the people of the past, present, and future.

We often use the butterfly at Easter time as a symbol of new life, since it bursts out of its cocoon transformed into a beautiful butterfly. This enables children to remember the new life that Jesus Christ brings to us by his life, death, and resurrection.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Involve the children in making a butterfly poster to display where you gather. This helps them remember the hope in God that we celebrate at the Easter Vigil and on Easter Sunday.

Write the word “Alleluia” on a sheet of poster board in large letters. We proclaim Alleluia at the Easter Vigil Mass and at all Easter Masses to give praise to God for all that God has done for us.

Ask children to cut out butterflies from brightly colored paper and put their first name in the middle on the body. Then they bend the wings slightly forward to achieve a three-dimensional look. Each child glues their butterfly to the poster. This makes a poster that reminds children that each of us has new life with Jesus Christ.

Pray an alleluia prayer for the Easter Vigil

BACKGROUND

As we celebrate the Easter Vigil as a church, we lift our hearts and voices with prayers of hope. At the Easter Vigil Mass we witness the baptism of new members of our church and renew our own baptismal promises. We proclaim Alleluia as we move on to celebrate the risen Christ on Easter Sunday.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Pray with the children using the words of the following prayer as part of a lesson on the Easter Vigil. Together, we give praise to our awesome God, and we remember those who will be joining our church through the sacrament of baptism. We celebrate the hope that Jesus brings us.

Easter Vigil prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
we lift up our hearts and our voices
to give you praise for all you have done for us.
Help us to know that you are with us
as we get ready to celebrate the Easter Vigil
and the great feast of Easter.
We pray for all those who will be baptized
into the church at the Easter Vigil Mass.
May we live always in hope as your Easter people
and share the good news with others. Alleluia!

CHAPTER 5

Easter

Season of new life

How wonderful it is to share the season of Easter with children and families. We celebrate the new life that Jesus Christ brings to each of us. In sharing our story as a church community, we rejoice in God's unending love for us.

The amazing Easter event echoes down through the ages as generation after generation shares the good news. God has sent us a Savior who is our Lord Jesus Christ. We rejoice in all that God has done for us and continues to do in our lives each day. We are called to live as Easter people.

The Easter season begins on Easter Sunday and continues until we celebrate Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Easter season is a fifty-day celebration of all God has done for us.

On the following pages there are many ideas for celebrating the Easter season with children and families. We have hope in God and hope in the future because of the risen Christ. Hope is one of the most important gifts we can share with the next generation.

Explore Easter symbols in church

BACKGROUND

We are people of the resurrection. Our faith in the risen Christ should make a difference in our lives. We are to live in hope and share that hope with other people. Easter Sunday is only the beginning of our fifty-day celebration.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Take children around the church to find signs and symbols of the Easter season. Make this tour interactive by inviting children to tell what they know about each symbol before giving the explanation. Also invite children to ask questions before moving on.

Signs of Easter in church

The **EASTER (OR PASCHAL) CANDLE** is lit before each Mass of the Easter season until Pentecost. It is as a symbol of the risen Christ present with us. Jesus is the light of the world. It is from this candle that baptismal candles are lit throughout the year.

The **WHITE** altar cloth stands for joy and purity as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ and our new life. The priest's vestments and any banners are also white.

LILIES are a traditional decoration in our churches for Easter. The flower grows from a bulb planted in the earth. It reminds us that Jesus rose from the tomb to new life.

HOLY WATER in the baptismal font reminds us that we have

new life through our baptism. We make the sign of the cross as we enter the church as a sign of our faith in Jesus Christ. We often have the sprinkling rite at Mass each Sunday of the Easter season as a reminder of our baptism.

ALLELUIA is in our song books and in our hearts. We sing out our praise to the God who sent Jesus as a Savior to all of us. We join our voices together because we are a community in Jesus Christ our Lord.

If your parish has special Easter season decorations, be sure to point them out to the children. Visual reminders of the Easter season enrich our celebration and our faith in God.

Decorate an individual Easter banner

BACKGROUND

Easter is the most important feast of the church year. At Easter we celebrate that Jesus brings us new life through his life, death, and resurrection. We help children remember that Jesus brings us hope by inviting them to make individual resurrection banners to display at home.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Share with the children that Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). These words give us hope in Jesus and hope in the future. Ask the children to write out these words using colorful markers, or run off copies of the words on green or blue card stock before gathering with the children.

The children make a border around the edge of the banner using spring stickers such as flowers and butterflies. If stickers are not available, let children draw symbols with markers. Show the children how to punch two holes in the top of the page and use yarn to hang the banner.

Then the children take home the Easter banner to remember that we are all redeemed and loved by Jesus. Through his life, death, and resurrection, we have new life. Encourage children to share the banner with their family and display it at home. In this way, they are reminded to share the good news of Jesus Christ with others.

Play an Easter word guess game

BACKGROUND

Review the story of the resurrection and appearances of Jesus with a word guess game. This game features words from all four gospels. This idea is a learning activity for any time during the season of Easter.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Explain to your young people that the word guess game features words from the readings during the Easter season. Put dashes for each letter of the first word on a whiteboard. Then let children take turns guessing a letter from that word. If that letter is in the word, print it on the board in the right place. Each child only gets one letter guess per turn even if the letter is correct. Give children clues as needed so the game stays fast-moving. Here are some words to use:

Words of the Easter season

**resurrection • stone • Galilee • tomb • amazed • spices
believe • Jesus • Jerusalem • disciples • peace • Emmaus
nations • Lord • gospel • witnesses**

Only when a child has guessed a letter correctly, can he or she then guess the word. When the word has been guessed correctly, write in all the letters. Remind the children how the word is part of the Easter story.

Then start again with another word. The child next to the child who guessed the word correctly goes first.

Look for Easter season blessings

BACKGROUND

The Easter season is filled with God's blessings. It is a time of joy and hope. We can encourage our children to look for the good things that God has done in our lives. We want the next generation to see the positive in our world.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Encourage the children to look for Easter blessings in their lives during this Easter season. Teach them that when we open our hearts and our lives to see God's blessings, we learn how much we are loved by our God. God sends blessings to us each day if we just look around. The more we look for the positive, the more good things we will notice.

Ask the children to thank God each day of the Easter season for a blessing in their lives. Have the children brainstorm some of the blessings we have been given. Here are some ideas to get started.

Easter blessings

**God's love • sunshine • family • new life with Jesus
hope • people who care • flowers • friends
forgiveness • blue skies • laughter • music**

Blessings are everywhere once we start to look for them. This activity invites children to look for blessings in their lives throughout the Easter season. In this way, we learn to be people who live in hope and joy.

Search for Easter people in the gospels

BACKGROUND

Children learn about people in the Easter gospels with a search activity. This also provides practice for the children in looking up gospel verses.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Put the children in small groups so they can help one another find Easter people in the gospels. Each group looks up and reads their own Scripture verse and discusses the questions provided. Then someone from each group reports to the group as a whole.

Easter people in the gospels

ANGEL “HE HAS BEEN RAISED.” MARK 16:6

The angel shared the good news that Jesus had risen at the empty tomb. But the followers of Jesus did not understand until they saw Jesus. He appeared many times to his disciples.

- *How do we share the good news of Easter with others?*

MARY MAGDALENE: “I HAVE SEEN THE LORD.” JOHN 20:18

She was a faithful follower of Jesus who came to the tomb. She saw Jesus in the garden but did not recognize him at first. Then she ran to tell the disciples the good news.

- *What are ways to share the good news about Jesus?*

THOMAS: “MY LORD AND MY GOD.” JOHN 20:28

At first Thomas did not believe that Jesus had risen. He thought it was impossible. But then he believed when he saw the nail holes in Jesus’ hands.

- *How do we live what we believe?*

PETER: “LORD, YOU KNOW THAT I LOVE YOU.” JOHN 21:15

Peter denied Jesus three times before the crucifixion. After the resurrection, Jesus asked Peter three times to feed his sheep, and three times Peter said yes. Jesus does not turn away from us when we fail.

- *What can we do when we make mistakes?*

DISCIPLES AT EMMAUS: “WERE NOT OUR HEARTS BURNING WITHIN US?” LUKE 24:32

The two disciples were walking to the town of Emmaus. They did not recognize Jesus. He explained Scripture to them and broke bread with them, and they knew him.

- *How do we encounter Jesus at Mass?*

JESUS: “I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS.” MATTHEW 28:20

These words of Jesus appear in the very last verse of the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus promised his disciples and us that he will always be with us.

- *How do we recognize Jesus in others?*

Make Easter activity kits for sick children

BACKGROUND

We are called to share the joy and hope of the Easter season with others. One way children are able to help other children is by making spring activity kits for children in the hospital.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Remind your learners that we are to live as Easter people. This means having compassion for others as Jesus did. We can encourage empathy for other children by asking our children to imagine what it might be like if they were in the hospital.

Explain that they can make individual spring activity kits for children in the hospital. These contain supplies for a sick child to do a craft project in bed or in the hospital playroom. Activities that work well in kits include:

Spring activity kits

- Colored card stock and markers to create Easter cards to give visitors
- Butterfly shapes and foam stickers to make room decorations
- Drawing paper and markers to create a colorful picture
- Paper strips in pastel colors and tape to make a chain for their room
- Spring coloring books and crayons for younger children

Ahead of time, print out simple directions for the craft kits, and make copies. Show your group how to prepare items, such as folding the Easter cards and cutting the paper strips.

“Acts of kindness” Easter gift cards

BACKGROUND

Encourage the children to do good deeds for someone in their family to celebrate the Easter season. They can make gift cards that list an act of kindness they will do for that person. This is one way children can learn to help others, as Jesus calls us to do.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Ask the children to think of something nice they could do for a parent, sibling, or extended family member during the Easter season.

Ideas to get started include: set the table, read a book to a younger child, sweep the porch, feed the dog, make someone’s bed, do a shoulder massage, pick up the entryway, and help make dinner. Ask children to contribute their own ideas for the gift cards. Children learn from the ideas of other children, and this multiplies the opportunities for learning.

Children then write out a form titled “Easter Gift Card.” They put the person’s name on it and also list the action they will do. Then they sign their name. Spring stickers can be added too. The gift card is redeemed by the person receiving it whenever they choose.

Work together on an Easter chain

BACKGROUND

In Easter we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus and the new life he brings to all of us. Show children how to make a spring paper chain to decorate the area where they meet together. Green, blue, pink, yellow, and purple make a colorful Easter chain.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Show the children how to cut out strips of colored paper, or do it for young children before you gather. Older children can print Alleluia on some of the chain links. This chain is a good project to involve all the children in creating something together. It reminds them that Easter is to be celebrated in our churches, in our classrooms, and in our lives.

To begin, each child makes a circle with one link and secures the ends with tape. They put another strip of paper through that circle and tape the ends. This process is continued over and over. Each child makes a section of chain.

Children enjoy doing this project because it comes together quickly and they can see the progress they are making. Also, they can make as many links as they like. Show the children how to join their sections together. The chain looks festive when looped across a whiteboard or bookshelf in the area where the children meet during the Easter season.

Write an Easter prayer to pray at home

BACKGROUND

Prayer is part of our relationship with God, who loves us and redeemed us. Through prayer we celebrate who God is for us and who we are as God's creation. As part of celebrating the Easter season, encourage each child to write their own Easter prayer. This activity can also be done as a family prayer at an intergenerational event for the Easter season.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Explore with the young people the idea of writing their own unique Easter prayer. Take them through the simple process below and have them compose each line of their prayer as you explain. Encourage questions and suggestions as you go along.

First, we call on God by name. Use titles for God such as "God of love," "Awesome God," and others. Then, praise or thank God for something in your life. We should always thank God for the blessings in our lives before we ask for what we need. Next, ask God for help. End with Amen. A child's Easter prayer may turn out something like this:

*God of all people,
thank you for the new life Jesus brings us at Easter.
Help us to live in your love and follow Jesus always.
Amen.*

The prayer can be short or long depending on the age level of the child. A prayer composed in this way speaks to the heart and life of the child who writes it. Encourage children to pray their prayer throughout the Easter season.

Walk the stations of light for Easter

BACKGROUND

The stations of light help us walk through the events the Easter season to Pentecost. This devotion is similar to the Stations of the Cross, but these stations celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ and his appearances to his disciples. A variety of Easter stories are used for the stations of light.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Explain to the children that walking the stations of light helps us remember that Jesus' death on the cross was not an end but the beginning of new life for all of us. Jesus is the light of our lives and the light of the world.

Assign children to make a poster representing each of the stations of light. Review the stories with the children so they can decide what to draw. Then they should write the name of the station and the number at the bottom of each poster.

Easter stations of light

STATION 1	Women find the empty tomb	Mark 16:1-2, 5-6
STATION 2	Disciples at the tomb	John 20:3-8
STATION 3	Mary Magdalene	John 20:15-16
STATION 4	Jesus Appears to the Disciples	John 20:19-20
STATION 5	Thomas believes in Jesus	John 20:26-28
STATION 6	Journey to Emmaus	Luke 24:29-30
STATION 7	Proclaim the gospel	Matthew 28:16-20
STATION 8	Jesus on the shore	John 21:4-8
STATION 9	Ascension of Jesus	Luke 24:50-53
STATION 10	Jesus sends the Holy Spirit	Acts 2:2-4

Then put up the stations of light in order in a hallway or gathering area. Let children know that they will walk from station to station. Ask older children to volunteer to read each of the ten Scripture passages. Catechists can read a shorter version for young children. At each station announce the name of the station before the Scripture is read. Then everyone prays the response together out loud. Copies of the response can be made for the children:

Risen Lord, help us to live in hope
and walk in love each day. Alleluia!

This wonderful devotion enables the children to focus on Jesus and the events that took place after his resurrection. This project can also be done with an older group of students helping a younger group. The stations of light are a wonderful devotion to do as part of a family session as they walk through the Easter season together.

Offer each day to God during the Easter season

BACKGROUND

As Easter people, we are called to be people of prayer. Jesus showed us by his words and example that prayer is important. We should offer each day to our God. Encourage the children and families to start each day with prayer during the Easter season. This can be a prayer in their own words or another prayer.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Teach the children that it is good to begin our day with praise to the God who created us and loves us. By offering our day to God, we remember to walk with God each day. God is with us always. Hopefully, what we begin in the Easter season will carry over into our lives beyond Easter. Here is an Easter prayer to pray together as we lift up our hearts and lives to Jesus during the glorious season of Easter:

Easter season prayer

God of hope,
thank you for the gift of a new day
with the blessings and opportunities it brings
in this wonderful season of Easter.
Guide us to give glory to your name
in what we say and do today.
May we live as Jesus showed us
and share your love for all people
during the Easter season.
Alleluia. Alleluia.

Celebrate with a Pentecost prayer poster

BACKGROUND

Pentecost is the end of the Easter season, but also the beginning of a Spirit-filled life for all of us. We see the Holy Spirit at work in our lives and in our world when good things happen. Where people come forward to help others in time of need, the Holy Spirit is there. Where people live as peacemakers with one another, the Holy Spirit is there. Through the Holy Spirit, we are able to become all that God created us to be.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Explore with the children that Pentecost is the birthday of the church. It is a birthday that we all celebrate. As we get ready for this birthday, we should ask ourselves how we will live as Spirit-filled people in our communities and in our world. We pray that the Holy Spirit will give us the courage to live as God intended us to live—with love for one another.

The psalm verse for Mass on Pentecost is “Lord, send out your spirit and renew the face of the earth” from Psalm 104:30. Together, we lift up our voices and sing out the words of this verse to our God.

Ask children to write out the words to this beautiful psalm verse on paper with a red marker. They cut out the verse and glue to a sheet of red paper. Dove stickers can be added, or the children can draw a fancy frame around the edge. They take home their Pentecost prayer poster. Encourage children to pray this verse and remember that the Holy Spirit guides our hearts and our lives.

CHAPTER 6

Ordinary Time

Season to live God's love

During the season of Ordinary Time, we are called to live out all that Jesus taught us. This season offers us the opportunity to see the endless possibilities that each day brings to us.

Stress to children and families that Ordinary Time refers to counted time, such as the Third Sunday of Ordinary Time, and so on. In this season we listen as Jesus speaks to the people of his time and to us today. The words of Scripture are handed on from generation to generation in the church.

The season of Ordinary Time is in two parts during the church year. The first part is from the end of the Christmas season until the beginning of the Lent season. The longer part is from the end of the Easter season to the beginning of the Advent season.

Following are some activities to share with children and families to help them live their faith during Ordinary Time. We remember that God is with us always and loves us with an unending love. That is something to celebrate as individuals, as families, and as a church community.

Live God's Word in Ordinary Time

BACKGROUND

We are called to witness to the word of God in our lives and share that message with the next generation. We hear many wonderful gospel stories about Jesus proclaimed at Mass during Ordinary Time.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Share some of the gospels of Ordinary Time. Discuss how we have the opportunity to live the message of the gospels in our lives today.

Some of the gospels of Ordinary Time

Jesus calls his apostles	<i>Matthew 4:18–22</i>
Rich man	<i>Matthew 19:16–22</i>
Greatest commandment	<i>Matthew 22:37–40</i>
Jesus and the children	<i>Mark 10:13–15</i>
Jesus cures a blind man	<i>Mark 10:46–52</i>
Good Samaritan	<i>Luke 10:25–37</i>
Prodigal son	<i>Luke 15:11–31</i>
Jesus cures the lepers	<i>Luke 17:11–19</i>
Zacchaeus	<i>Luke 19:1–10</i>

There are many active ways to share these gospel stories with children, including role play, drawing a picture, showing a video, singing a song, reading in parts, creating a craft, or doing a service project. These ideas help gospel stories come alive.

Choose ways that fit the gospel story and appeal to your group of learners.

Echo a gospel story during Ordinary Time

BACKGROUND

The story of Jesus and the rich man from Matthew 19:16–22 teaches us to put people before possessions. The rich young man asked Jesus to tell him how to get to heaven. But when Jesus explained that he must share what he had with the poor, the young man couldn't do it and walked away. This story has a lesson for all of us.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Remind the children that we are called to share what we have with others during the season of Ordinary Time and beyond. Explore the idea that God has given us the resources of our world to be shared by all people.

Tell the gospel story of the rich man with an echo pantomime. Say the words and do the gestures line by line to retell this story. Children echo the words and action.

Story of the rich man

One day a rich man walked up to Jesus.	<i>(walk in place)</i>
The man then said to Jesus,	<i>(hands by mouth)</i>
“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”	<i>(shrug shoulders, palms up)</i>
Jesus said, “Keep the commandments.”	<i>(hold up ten fingers)</i>
The man replied, “I have done this.”	<i>(nod head)</i>
Jesus looked at him and said,	<i>(hands by mouth)</i>
“You are lacking one thing.	<i>(hold up one finger)</i>
“Go, sell what you have”	<i>(nod head)</i>
and give to people who are poor.	<i>(arms outstretched)</i>
Then come, follow me.”	<i>(hands on heart)</i>
At that the man went away sad	<i>(walk in place)</i>

because he did not want to share with others. (*shake head no*)
Jesus calls us to love others (*nod head*)
and share what we have been given. (*arms outstretched*)

Remind the children that Jesus came for all people. We are to share what we have so that others have what they need to live. We must be committed to following Jesus' way of love.

Be peacemakers in Ordinary Time

BACKGROUND

Jesus shows us that we are to be people of forgiveness and love toward others. Children need the opportunity to practice making choices to live in peace.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Explore the idea that peace is not just the absence of war and violence. A peaceful world would be one in which we live the gospel each day. Brainstorm ideas for the situations below:

Peacemaker scenarios

- Someone lied and blamed you for something you did not do. *Do you try to get even? Why not?*
- Another person said they would help you with a school project, but then they didn't do that. *Do you slam doors and let it ruin your day? What can you do instead?*
- Your younger sister accidentally ruined the poster you made for a school project. *Do you have to forgive her? Why is this important?*
- You try to help someone, but they end up yelling at you. Then you get angry at them. *What should you do in this situation?*
- You are upset you will miss a fun activity because your parents won't let you go. *Do you complain endlessly about it? What is an alternative?*
- A kid at school shoves you in the hallway when you stop to get a drink of water. *Should you shove him back? Why or why not?*

Make a “Kids of the Kingdom” poster for Ordinary Time

BACKGROUND

Jesus proclaims to the people that the kingdom of God is at hand through him. We are to keep our hearts and our lives focused on the kingdom.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Stress to the children that we are to be joyful followers of Jesus Christ and to live as he did—with love for all people. Jesus shows us how to build the kingdom by our words and actions.

Ask the children to imagine what the world might look like if we lived as God intended. Talk to them about being children of the kingdom who work to bring about the kingdom of God on earth. Everyone can do something. Brainstorm ideas such as the following:

Live as kids of the kingdom

- pray and worship God
- share gifts and talents
- help the poor and others in need
- work for justice
- live in peace with one another
- tell others about God’s love

Ask the children to make a “Kids of the Kingdom” poster together. Provide a colorful sheet of poster board with words “Kids of the Kingdom” printed in the center. Ask each child to use markers to draw a stick figure of themselves on the poster and print their first name. Display the poster as a reminder to live always as kids of the kingdom of God.

Love God and others craft for Ordinary Time

BACKGROUND

In Ordinary Time we hear stories at Mass of Jesus teaching people about God's love and sharing that love with others. The greatest commandment that Jesus teaches us shows us how to live as we were created. We are to share the love that God has for us with other people.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Explore the season of Ordinary Time with the children as a time to follow Jesus Christ. Emphasize that we are to live the greatest commandment as Jesus taught us in Matthew 22:37-40. We are to love God and love other people in God's name.

Do a heart craft to help children remember the greatest commandment. Ask them to print the words "Love God and love others" with a red marker on white paper. Then they cut out the section of the paper with the words and glue it to a half sheet of red paper. They make a decorative frame around the edge with colorful foam sticker hearts.

Children take home their finished craft. When they share the craft with family members, the children will be reminded that all of us are called to live in love. This is what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

Give caring coupons in Ordinary Time

BACKGROUND

Ordinary Time offers us the opportunity to live what we believe. God calls us to reach out to others in our families, in our communities, and in our world. It is important to personalize for the children the idea of helping other people. Young children can begin with their own family.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Explore the idea that Jesus calls us to help other people. Ask the children to make a caring coupon for a family member. The coupon is for one good deed and can be redeemed by the recipient when they choose. Talk about possible ideas such as:

Caring coupon ideas

- I will do a chore for you this week
- I will not complain about anything all day
- You can choose the car radio station today
- I will play a game of your choice with you
- I will clear the table after dinner tonight
- I will take the garbage out
- You can decide what TV show we watch
- I will help make dinner tonight

This activity shows children practical ways to be kind to others. Encourage your learners to think of how pleased members of their families will be to get these caring coupons. Let children make as many as they choose.

Involve children in a creation scavenger hunt in Ordinary Time

BACKGROUND

The World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation is held during Ordinary Time. It was begun by Pope Francis and is held each September 1. This special day reminds us that God created our world to be shared by all people. As individuals and as a community of God's people, we are called to care for the environment and all of creation.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Talk with the children about the amazing world God created out of love for us. Encourage children to give praise to God for our world and all its wonders. Stress that we are to care for the earth God has given us.

Do a creation scavenger hunt to remind children of God's many gifts to us. This activity gets children out of doors to enjoy creation. Give each child a list of some of the things God made and take them outside to find the items on the list. They check off the items they see.

Creation scavenger hunt

**tree • bird • cloud • pinecone • rock • acorn • sky
squirrel • flower • person**

After the children come back inside, ask them to name other wonders of our world, such as mountains, waterfalls, and animals of all kinds. Stress that God's creation is to be used for the benefit of all people. Explore the idea that we are to protect the resources of our world for future generations.

Create a “helping hands” wreath in Ordinary Time

BACKGROUND

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are to reach out to others in his name. Working on a “helping hands” wreath reminds children that each of us is called to help others during Ordinary Time.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Encourage children to think of ways to reach out a helping hand such as the following:

Ways to reach out a helping hand

- make a get-well card
- donate items to the food pantry
- welcome a new child
- listen when someone wants to talk
- help a younger child
- give money to feed orphans
- pray for victims of war

Then help your learners assemble a helping hands wreath to remember this lesson. Use precut foam hand shapes in blue, purple, pink, and yellow or have the children draw around their own hand on colored paper.

Show children how to arrange their colorful hand shapes into a circle by overlapping the fingers of each hand onto the palm of the next hand. Staple each hand shape to the next one. Display this colorful helping hands wreath where the children will see it and remember to reach out a helping hand to others in Jesus’ name.

Share examples of faith in Ordinary Time

BACKGROUND

Our faith in Jesus Christ should lead us to reach out to other people as Jesus did. He shows us how human beings are capable of living. We were created to live as Jesus did—with compassion and love for all people. Take the opportunity during Ordinary Time to talk about people who are examples of faith for us.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Share with the young people that we are called to put our faith into action. We are to live as Jesus taught us by his words and actions. Reinforce the idea that Jesus is an example for our lives. Again and again he reached out to people who were in need of a helping hand. He made time for those who needed him. We are able to make a difference in the lives of others, one person at a time, with the help of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Let them know that there are people in our communities and our world who live the gospels by doing good works for others. Give them examples, such as people who welcome refugees, volunteers who reach out in times of natural disasters, medical personnel who use their vacation time to help people in other countries, and people of all ages who give of their time at care centers for the elderly.

Ask children if they know other examples of people who live what they believe. Remind them that all of us are called to do good works. God created us to live in a community and care about others.

Participate in a hospital service project for Ordinary Time

BACKGROUND

Children need opportunities to serve others during Ordinary Time. They must understand that we are to think of other people all through the year. Service projects show children and families ways to reach out to others in our communities and our world.

One service idea is collecting individual snacks for a hospital family room. This is an area set aside for family members of children in the hospital. It is an area where family members are able to rest for a while, get something to eat, and update other family members by phone or e-mail.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Explain to the children about the need for a hospital family room. Let them know that there is an ongoing need for supplies, such as snacks. Family members spend hours or even days at the hospital and get hungry. Encourage children and families to bring in individually packaged items such as pretzels, crackers, trail mix, almonds, raisins, cookies, and granola bars.

Put the items in a large basket or box and deliver them to the hospital. The basket will be placed in the family room and used by grateful families at a difficult time in their lives. This is a practical and easy-to-do activity that benefits others in the local community.

Search for Bible verses about hope in Ordinary Time

BACKGROUND

Hope is one of the greatest gifts we can share. Children need to have hope in God, hope in one another, and hope in the future.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Share with the children the idea of having hope in God. Help the children look up some Bible verses about hope. Talk about what these words say about God and about us.

Scripture verses about hope

May your kindness, Lord, be upon us;
we have put our hope in you. **PSALM 33:22**

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord,
plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future
with hope. **JEREMIAH 29:11**

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace.
ROMANS 15:13

We have set our hope on the living God who is the Savior of all.
1 TIMOTHY 4:10

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By
his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope
through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. **1 PETER 1:3**

Emphasize to the children the importance of having hope in
God in our lives and sharing hope with other people.

Pray throughout Ordinary Time

BACKGROUND

During the season of Ordinary Time we live in hope as Jesus taught us. Help children explore different types of prayer throughout this season. Make copies of the prayer below before gathering with the children.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Explore the idea that prayer is an important part of our relationship with God. We should pray at all times and seasons of our lives. Give out copies of the prayer to the children. Pray it together. Then ask them to take the prayer home to share with their families.

Prayer for Ordinary Time

Lord, Jesus Christ,
we thank you for being with us in all times
and places of our lives.

May we give praise to you by the way we live
our lives each day.

Guide us to live your way of love and to be gospel people.

Help us to reach out and share the good news of your love
with others so they can have hope in you
and hope in the future.

You are the light of the world and the light we are to follow
during the season of Ordinary Time and always. Amen.

Show children ways to live in prayer during Ordinary Time. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are to be people of prayer as he showed us by his example. When we pray, we follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ during Ordinary Time and beyond.

Of Related Interest



Called to Be a Catechist

INSPIRATION AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

The *Called to Be a Catechist* series provides information, guidance, and inspiration to catechists—whether seasoned or rookies—that will help them be more capable and confident in their responsibility of developing the faith in new generations.

Now Available

The Role of the Catechist

9781627851558

The Vocation of the Catechist

9781627852876

Communicating the Faith

9781627852883

Breaking Open the Scriptures

9781627852890

Coming in December 2017

Celebrating the Sacraments

9781627852920

Fostering Spirituality

9781627852906

Pondering the Parables

9781627852913

Coming in August 2018

Discovering Discipleship

9781627852937

Abiding in Prayer

9781627852944

Practicing the Beatitudes

9781627852951

TO ORDER CALL 1-800-321-0411

OR VISIT WWW.TWENTYTHIRDPUBLICATIONS.COM



**TWENTY-THIRD
PUBLICATIONS**

A division of Bayard, Inc.