Lenten Plans for Busy Families

Whole Family Catechesis Session Leader Guide

by Janet Schaeffler, OP

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What Is in This Resource

This resource is designed to help families to reflect on Lent and decide together on what they will do differently to observe this season of the liturgical year. This kit gives you the pieces needed to hold a single session in a parish or school setting, including:

- Instructions for leaders
- Talking points on Lent and the gift of time
- Four activities from which to choose, each with leader instructions, family instructions, and handouts
- Closing prayer

Who Is the Event For

This session will work well with whole families (parents/grandparents and children sitting together), but also can be offered for parents alone (e.g. if their children will be in a separate class). This session should lead to family discussions and decisions about how to spend Lent together.

If offering this session to parents alone, some of the activities can be given to the parents to take home and complete with their children (e.g. Little Lenten Living boxes and "Take Time" game).

Preparations

- Schedule the time and place for this family workshop, reserving the necessary space(s) on the parish calendar.
- Design a flyer/handout to publicize the gathering to all families. Encourage your "regulars" to invite family members, friends, or neighbors. You may want to plan it in place of your regularly scheduled catechetical sessions.
- Promote the gathering on your website, in your parish bulletin, and with weekend announcements. Email your parent contact lists.
- Gather and prepare the materials needed.

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Selecting Activities

This resource includes four activities that you can choose from for your event. The number of activities you choose will depend on the time you have available. You may only be able to offer two or three activities, but also have the option of sending others home.

This kit has a separate file for each activity, which includes the leader instructions, family instructions, and any handouts.

1. "Take Time" Game	15-20 min.	A board game in which a family discusses how they spend their time and the implications for their faith and Lent.
2. Little Lenten Living Boxes	15-20 min.	Families prepare a box filled with slips of paper (describing simple Lenten actions) they can pick from throughout Lent.
3. Our Lenten Calendar	10-15 min.	An activity in which families choose what Lenten activities they will do this year.
4. Almsgiving	10-15 min.	Families learn about Catholic Relief Services Rice Bowls, who they serve, and how to use them.

Sample Schedules

This session is designed for a period of 60 to 90 minutes. Activities could be done all together as a large group or as learning centers with rotation (half the group could do activity 1 while the other does activity 2, then both could switch).

One Possible Whole Family Schedule (75 minutes)

7:00pm – 7:05pm	Refreshments, welcome, and hospitality
7:05pm – 7:20pm	Introduction (Talking Points)
7:20pm – 7:40pm	Activity 1 or 2: "Take Time" Game / Little Lenten Living Boxes
7:40pm – 7:55pm	Activity 3: Our Lenten Calendar
7:55pm – 8:10pm	Activity 4: Almsgiving
8:10pm – 8:15pm	Closing Prayer

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One Possible Parents-only Schedule (60 minutes)

7:00pm – 7:05pm	Refreshments, welcome, and hospitality
7:05pm – 7:20pm	Introduction (Talking Points)
7:20pm – 7:40pm	Activity 3: Our Lenten Calendar
7:40pm – 7:50pm	Activity 4: Almsgiving
7:50pm – 7:55pm	Explain/distribute activities 1 and/or 2 for home use
7:55pm – 8:00pm	Closing Prayer

Room Set-Up

- Tables for families to gather and work, as well as supplies.
- Tables for the activities (if done as learning centers), with all the supplies needed and places for families to talk and work together.
- Table for refreshments: coffee, tea, juice, or snacks.

Staff

A catechetical leader is needed to lead the families through the conversations and activities.

It would be helpful to have catechetical leaders who can help with each activity, answering questions or providing encouragement. The activity files include a short introduction that could be given in smaller groups if the activities are offered as learning centers.

A hospitality team of three or four people can welcome the families, set up and serve refreshments, and clean up.

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Talking Points: Lent, A Gift of Growing Time

The Gift of Time

"Time" might be something we often talk about, e.g.: "next **time;**" "when we have **time**," "an enjoyable **time**;" "how much **time**." How often do we ***take time*** to appreciate and reflect on the gift of time?

- There are ordinary **times**.
- Throughout our days we experience unique, exceptional **times**.
- Each and every moment of **time** is a gift.
- All of our **times** help us be a follower of Jesus.

Church Time

We celebrate, remember, and mark **time** in all kinds of ways: the lunar or solar calendar; the fiscal-year calendar; the school-year calendar, etc. As a Catholic family, we also celebrate **time** through our liturgical year calendar. The Church year begins each year with Advent, the season of celebrating Christ's coming, and ends with the final Saturday of Ordinary Time (usually the end of November).

Our Church year – our celebration of **time** - consists of six liturgical seasons:

- Advent
- Christmas
- Ordinary Time (after Epiphany)
- Lent
- Easter
- Ordinary Time (after Pentecost)

Throughout these seasons the mystery of Christ is unfolded; as we celebrate each season we are called to live the mystery and wonder of Jesus' life in our own lives.

You might want to use a visual (poster or PowerPoint) to illustrate the liturgical year calendar.

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Lenten Time

We are now beginning/in the season of Lent. Lent is a gift of **time** to us. Each year the church invites us to slow down, to take **time** during this season:

- take **time** for a "retreat"
- take **time** to pay attention to how we are growing as followers of Jesus
- take **time** to deepen and intensify our Baptismal promises

During this sacred season of Lent the church invites us to live more deeply three practices which are a part of our lives all the **time**; Lent is a season to especially concentrate upon them and deepen them: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

- **Prayer** keeps our relationship with God alive and vibrant. Lent encourages us to take **time** to pray in new ways, to pray alone and with others, to participate fully in liturgy, to take **time** to listen to God.
- **Fasting**: During Lent we often fast by reducing the amount of food that we eat (and share the money we've saved with the needy). We can also fast from other things: criticizing, complaining, anger, self-concern, worry, negativity, etc.
- **Almsgiving**: Often we think of almsgiving as the giving of money to help others. That is important, but we can also give ourselves, our time, our talents, etc.

Sometimes, when Lent begins:

- We decide to do the same thing we've done every year (that could be very good)
- Our "resolutions" are ones we do by ourselves (which could be very good)

Perhaps, though, this year we might think of some new things to do. We might think of some things that all of us in the family could do together.

Activities

To really use our **time** well during this Lenten season, it will be helpful to specifically and concretely make plans for these 40 days. We'll do that with some different activities. Each activity will guide our thoughts, conversations, and definite plans for our Lenten season and give us tangible reminders to take home to remind us of our plans and resolutions.

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Closing Prayer

When the time for the activities has finished, gather all the families together for a closing prayer and sending forth.

***NOTE**: you may need to adapt the prayer below depending on the activities you choose to offer:*

Leader: As we close our time together and go forth to our homes—
unique places of God's presence with us—
we ask God's blessings upon us, upon our families,
and upon our Lenten days of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

Invite each family to hold their Rice Bowl, calendar, and/or Little Lenten Living box in their hands.

Encouraging God who calls us to growth,
we ask you to continue to bless us.

In these Lenten days ahead, help us to be more and more aware of your love.
Nudge us gently each day to live as your followers.

Bless our *Lenten boxes, calendars, and Rice Bowls* – *(adjust based on activities used)*
symbols of our resolutions,
symbols of our desire to live more deeply our Baptismal promises.

Strengthen us as we take time
as we compassionately live all the moments of our time
as we share our time with each other and with those we need us.

We ask this through our Lord, Jesus Christ,
your Son, who lives and reigns with you and
the Holy Spirit, God forever and ever.

All: Amen.

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Leader Instructions

"Take Time" Family Lenten Game

Materials Needed

- Handout: Game board (print one per family)
- Buttons, tiny toys, or small pieces of construction paper to make a "marker" for each family member
- If using construction paper for markers, pencils or markers are also needed
- One die for each family

Talking Points

It would be helpful for a leader to introduce the activity with these points:

- Let's take a few moments to play a family game which will invite us to share some of the **times** of our everyday lives.
- Pick a token for each family member and then take turns moving through the game board.

Help the group along if they have any questions or get stuck.

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Family Instructions

"Take Time" Family Lenten Game

1 Choose a token for each family member to use on the game board. It could be a colored button, a tiny toy, or a marker made from construction paper (marked with a name or symbol).

2 Roll a die to determine the order of play. The lowest number goes first.

3 Each person—in turn—rolls the die to determine how many spaces to advance.

4 As each member lands on a space, she or he answers the question, completes the sentence, or follows the directions. All other players listen.

5 The game is finished when all players have reached the FINISH square and followed the directions.

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TAKE TIME
A FAMILY LENTEN GAME

START

What times of day do you think about God?

My favorite time of day is _____ because _____.

I think God wants us to spend our time _____.

Go ahead two spaces.

Tell about a time when you helped someone.

Tell about a time when we had fun as a family.

Go back four spaces.

How can our family spend time with God this Lent?

Go ahead three spaces.

Tell how you can use your time this Lent to bring more love to your family.

I wish I had more time to ____.

Tell about a time when you knew God was with you.

Tell about a time when someone helped you.

Go back three spaces.

You're finished! Give everyone the Sign of Peace and a compliment!

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Leader Instructions

Little Lenten Living Boxes

Materials Needed

- Handout: Family instructions (print one per family)
- Handout: Idea slips (2 pages; print one per family; be sure *not* to print double-sided)
- Small white boxes, which can be purchased online or from bakery/candy stores (alternately, have families save and bring used tissue boxes)
- Markers
- Stickers
- Scissors

Talking Points

It would be helpful for a leader to introduce the activity with these points:

- In this activity you will make "Little Lenten Living Boxes" that will contain small, simple actions which you can do on the spur of the moment each day of Lent.

- Some of the ideas are for the whole family to do together. Some ideas are for individuals; with these, everyone in the family can be doing it in their own way, but united because all are doing the same thing.

Help the group along if they have any questions or get stuck.

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Family Instructions

Little Lenten Living Boxes

1 In this activity you will make "Little Lenten Living Boxes" that will contain small, simple actions which you can do on the spur of the moment each day of Lent.

2 On your handout are several ideas of Lenten activities. As you cut them apart, decide together which ones you want to put into your family box to pick from each day during Lent. You could choose to place all of the ideas in your box.

3 Together, decide when will be the best time for your family to pick the activity for the coming day (e.g. first thing in the morning or at dinner time for the next day). Write this below. You might want to set a reminder now on your phone to help you remember. At home, when you choose each day's idea:

- First, spend a few minutes talking about how you remembered and acted on the idea for the current day. What did you do? How did you feel? How were you aware of God in that action?
- If you choose, the slips could be returned to the box to be used multiple times.

4 Together, make two decisions: 1. where you will place the box so that you will see it often (e.g. dining room table), and 2. a prominent place where you will place the slip for each day (e.g. refrigerator door or inside of your front door). Write these in below.

5 Use the markers and stickers to decorate your Little Lenten Living Box. Have the decorations on the box say something about Lent and/or your family.

We will pick our activity each day at this time:

We will place our box here:

After we pick it each day, we will post our activity slip here:

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Take five minutes of quiet time today to listen to God.	Fast from complaining today.
Pray before meals today.	Fast from criticizing today.
Offer to help a friend or neighbor with a job that they have to do.	In some way today tell other family members that you love them.
Write a letter, text, call, or email a distant friend.	Say a kind word to someone in need of cheering up.
Read a Bible story with your family.	Thank someone today.
Pray for those you know who are suffering.	Give someone a compliment today.
Give something away to someone in need.	Say only nice things to others today.
Do something for someone without them knowing it.	Ask for things in a polite way today.
Help out with a job that isn't usually yours.	Say a family prayer of thanks to God.
Say "I'm sorry" to someone you've hurt.	Pray for all those who are unemployed.
No TV or technology tonight. Have a family night.	Never say "NO" today when someone asks for help.
Share your smile today.	Make a card for someone who needs extra love.
No sweets today. Give the money saved to the poor.	Do something kind for a neighbor.
Perform a loving action. For example, invite someone over, share baked goods, and/or reach out to someone who may be lonely.	
Watch the news for stories about selflessness. Share with your family.	

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Fast from television today. Read instead. Pray for all those who don't have television, the internet…
Write family members' names on slips of paper. Draw names and keep the name you draw a secret. Without being asked – or bragging – do something kind for that person today.
Pray for people who don't have access to electricity and other technologies that makes our lives easier. (1.6 billion people have no access to electricity.)
Remember the Prayer of St. Francis and think of a way your family could be a channel of peace in your little part of the world.
This week use a different prayer each night as a family (e.g. Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be, Act of Contrition, Prayer of St. Francis, The Apostles' Creed, Act of Love, etc.)
Write a letter to the newspaper editor or some other media representative in praise of someone or some action.
At dinner time today, have everyone in the family mention one person or thing for which they are thankful.
Cut out a large paper heart and write, "Love one another as I have loved you" on it. Each person writes the name or initials of at least three people they are going to pray for during the coming week. Display the heart.
Reflect on Act 2:42-47 (holding all things in common) and discuss ways that you can share some of your possessions with others who have need of them.
We have the gift of faith because of faithful people who have gone before us. Think about an older relative or friend, living or dead, who has inspired you/your family. If they're alive, call or write and thank them.
Think of the person who has most hurt you or who most annoys you and spend several minutes each day praying for that person and whatever their needs are.
Is your family recycling everything you can? Refresh your memory today on what items your city or county allows for curbside recycling. Place a recyclable item that you usually don't recycle into your bin.

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Leader Instructions

Our Lenten Calendar

Materials Needed

- Handout: Family instructions
- Handout: Listing and description of local parish Lenten events with a clear and encouraging description of each (e.g. Lenten soup suppers, Lenten fish fries, Stations of the Cross, retreats, Evening Vespers, Reconciliation service). You will need to prepare this handout yourself beforehand.
- Handout: Lenten calendar. You can optionally edit the calendar to list your local events on it.
- Pencils

Talking Points

It would be helpful for a leader to introduce the activity with these points:

- In this Learning Center, we're going to look at **time** for some specific Lenten practices which will:
  - deepen your family life of faith
  - connect you to our parish celebration of Lent
  - connect you to the celebration of Lent throughout our universal church
- With your calendar, the instruction sheet will help you to add some more items for this **time** of Lent:
  - **Times** you can celebrate these Lenten days with our parish family.
  - Other specific things you will decide to do with your **time** as a family during Lent.

Help the group along if they have any questions or get stuck.

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Family Instructions

Our Lenten Calendar

1

Look at the calendar sheet together and find the following:

- The first day of Lent (Ash Wednesday) and the last day of Lent (Holy Saturday).
- Holy Week (it begins on Palm Sunday and ends on Holy Saturday). This is the most solemn week of the Christian year, leading up to Easter, when we particularly remember the last week of Jesus's life.
- The days marked "Abstain." On these days, Catholics (ages 14 and up) abstain from eating meat.
- The days marked "Fast." On these days, Catholics (ages 18-59) eat less food than usual: one full meal, as well as two smaller meals that together are not equal to a full meal.

You may wish to enter these important days on your phone or family calendar now.

2

Look at the list of Lenten events that will happen at our parish. Together as a family decide which ones you would like to participate in, writing them on your calendar.

3

What else might you do as a family throughout Lent—a resolution that will deepen your family faith life, your relationships with one another, your commitment to God, and/or your caring for others?

Talk about this together, looking at the examples at the bottom of the page. Check off one or more items and/or write in your own in the blank spots provided.

- ☐ We will have dinner together at least three times a week.
- ☐ On Fridays, we will have simpler suppers and spend time together (e.g. playing board games rather than TV or tech devices).
- ☐ We will pray together as a family each night before bedtime.
- ☐ We will try to give up all complaining.
- ☐ We will take time for prayer—prayers of thanks and prayers of petition—each night at dinner time.
- ☐ We will give two compliments each day—one to someone in our family, one to someone we meet during the day.
- ☐ _____
  _____
- ☐ _____
  _____
- ☐ _____
  _____

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Our Lenten Calendar

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			MARCH 1 Ash Wednesday	2	3 Abstain	4
5	6	7	8	9	10 Abstain	11
12	13	14	15	16	17 Abstain	18
19	20	21	22	23	24 Abstain	25
26	27	28	29	30	31 Abstain	**APRIL 1**
2	3	4	5	6	7 Abstain	8
9 Palm Sunday	10	11	12	13 Holy Thursday	14 Good Friday Fast & Abstain	15 Holy Saturday/ Easter Vigil
16 Easter Sunday						

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Leader Instructions

Almsgiving

Note: You can adapt and/or replace this learning center with information about local service opportunities in your parish.

Materials Needed

- Handout: Family instructions
- Order free Rice Bowls for each family: http://crsmaterials.crs.org/us-materials/rice-bowl/
- Print these Lenten Family Kits for each family: http://www.crsricebowl.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Online-Calendar_WEB_US15133-A_FINAL-PRODUCT.pdf
- Optionally, you can print out other resources from the first Rice Bowl link above.
- Pencils

Talking Points

It would be helpful for a leader to introduce the activity with these points:

- Review with the families that Lent is a time of encounter.
  - Through prayer we *encounter* Christ, present in every member of the human family.
  - Through fasting we *encounter* the obstacles that prevent us from loving God and others.
  - Through almsgiving, we *encounter* our brothers and sisters around the world as we share what we have with them.
- As we talked about before, fasting can include many things. Often during Lent, we fast from meat, large meals, candy, snacks, etc. In our tradition, fasting and almsgiving have always been closely linked. We fast/give something up in order to have more money to share with others who are needy.
- During Lent throughout the United States, Catholics use the CRS (Catholic Relief Services) Rice Bowl to collect Lenten alms for our sisters and brothers who suffer in poverty.
- During this activity, you have:
  - time to assemble your Rice Bowl
  - time to talk together about what you enjoy that you might put aside to make more room for Jesus and others in your life
  - time to make specific plans for fasting and almsgiving as a family

Help the group along if they have any questions or get stuck.

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Family Instructions

Almsgiving

1 Using the Lenten Kit on the table, read one of the stories of someone who has been helped by money collected through Catholic Relief Services Rice Bowls. Do you have stories of others who have been helped because of your almsgiving?

2 Talk together as a family about things you enjoy that you could give up during these 40 days of Lent so that you will then have more money to share with others. Everyone in the family might decide to give up the same thing, or each of you might decide upon something individually.

3 On the first page of your kit, write what you will give up, and an estimate of how much you will donate to others at the end of the Lenten season via the Rice Bowl.

4 Spend a few minutes looking at the calendar at the end of the kit, which gives ideas for other donations you can make to the Rice Bowl. Which three or four can you commit to right now? Draw a circle around them.

5 Take time to assemble your Rice Bowl so that it will be ready to use as soon as you get home.

6 You may wish to add the CRS Rice Bowl app to your phones (http://www.crsricebowl.org and scroll to bottom). This will give you daily reflections, meatless meal recipes, a way to track your Lenten sacrifices, and more.

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