

INTERGENERATIONAL MINISTRY TASK FORCE LENTEN RESOURCE



Talking to Kids and Families About Lent

It is probably fair to say that participating in the liturgies and disciplines of the Lenten season have not, historically, been common practice in FMCiC churches. Consequently, for churches looking to engage more fully in this season of the liturgical year, there can be both the joy of introducing something new without preconception, but also the challenge of establishing significance: why does this matter? To be sure, the burden of this work can be intensified when we look to incorporating the often times difficult themes presented by Lenten reflection into ministry with children and families.

Family ministries writer Laura Alary captures this conundrum well:

"Lent is a difficult season, even for adults. During these weeks we are confronted with truths that scare us: the reality of change, the inevitability of loss, and the paradox that life and death are bound together... With its themes of sacrifice and self-emptying, and its inexorable movement towards the cross and suffering and death of Jesus, Lent has the potential to be particularly confusing and frightening for children."

Alary's approach, along with other children's ministry practitioners is to focus with children on Lent as a season for intentionally "making space" in our hearts and lives for Jesus. When Jesus went in to the wilderness for forty days he left behind anything that would distract him from listening to the inner voice of God telling him who He was, and why He was here on earth. As parents and children's ministry leaders we can use these forty days this year to help our kids clarify their identity in Christ, just as Christ used his time in the desert to clarify his identity in the Father.

Many might imagine Lent as a season of darkness, but with children it is always helpful to keep in view that the days are physically growing longer, and that we are spiritually moving towards the great light of the resurrection. It is important to validate our kids laments and to cultivate cultures of openness where they feel safe to acknowledge hard things. We do not want to bypass the difficult conversations surrounding the crucifixion, and more broadly about death and brokenness in humanity and creation, but we want to always hold up the security of God's long-anticipated "Rescue Plan" (this is beautifully unfolded in Sally Lloyd Jones' Jesus Storybook Bible). God is in control. As messy as the journey might seem, we "trust the process."



An appropriate analogy for working with children might be to represent them as a lantern that can shine God's light through the light bulb He implanted in us at birth. We can continue to ask God to shine His light in our hearts and lives, even when our window panes can get clouded with the lies we believe and the wrong actions those lies invite (sins of commission) or the right actions they prevent us from taking (sins of omission). Lent can be a time for children to contemplate the best way to keep their windows clean: which habits do we need to start and which habits do we need to break to be better light-bearers in the world? If you are doing OneWord practice as mentioned in the Bishop's January 1st sermon in your home or Sunday School, you can work these practices of examination into those conversations (ie. if your child's word is responsible, you can ask: how did you 'clean your windows' by being responsible this week?). Another tangible tool might be to employ Scratch Art paper in crafting, reminding kids that Lent is a season where we scratch off our 'gunky bits' so God's bright beauty can shine more fully into our lives.

While Ash Wednesday in particular with its emphasis on mortality might be difficult to engage with children, particularly younger ones, the idea of being taught to "number our days" can be used with children to welcome conversation about how to make the most of the time God has given as a gift. We encourage you to watch the Ash Wednesday service as a family or if you are a ministry leader to encourage your families to do so. There is value to our children participating in the practices of the church, even if they are not yet fully able to intellectually engage with the content. They are learning by observation that these are 'the things we do as the body of Christ'. There is an activity at the end of this document that children can color while being present with their families in this act of worship.

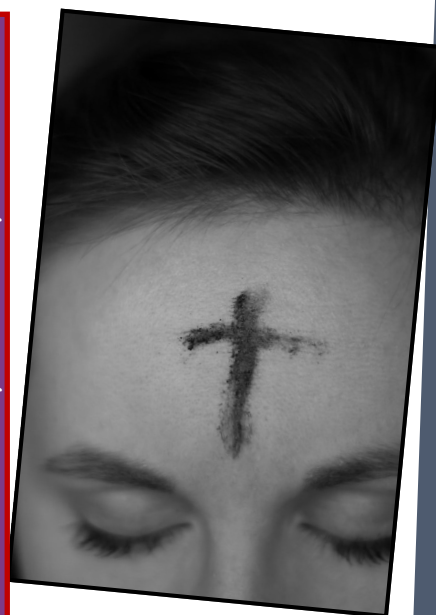
We hope that the activities and resources provided below will be useful tools for families and children's ministry leaders when it comes to instructing and inviting participation from our youngest generation into the still unfolding story of God's work in the world,

If you have any questions at anytime we would love to connect: intergen.fmcic@gmail.com

The Intergenerational Ministry Task Force

Ash Wednesday: Kids Might Ask

If watching the Ash Wednesday service, kids might ask about the ashes. As one of our sons was watching the service being filmed, he was captivated by Bishop Cliff and Pastor Matthew doing the imposition of ashes. The ashes are typically the burned remnants of last year's Palm Sunday branches. The ashes can remind us that we are made from the dust of the earth. Our lives have limits. Sometimes we have limited imaginations. The worshippers on Palm Sunday did not have a full view of just how amazing a King Jesus had come to be for us. He came not to just rule Israel, but all of earth, and all of heaven in a spiritual way that brings eternal life for those of us who call Him our King. He will welcome us as His children to live forever with Him. But in the meantime, we are invited to this earthly journey to grow closer to Him and acknowledge our need for His spirit to fill our lungs until we join Him in eternity.

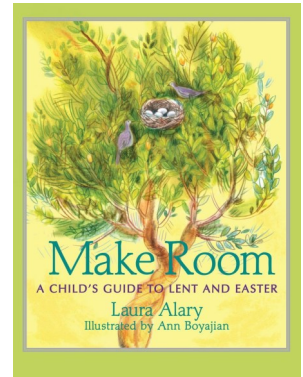


Resource Recommendation:

For further engaging kids on the topic of Lent, here are a few books we recommend for families and/or ministry leaders. These can all be easily ordered online and many have “Read Alouds” available for viewing on YouTube if you search by title.

Make Room: A Child’s Guide to Lent and Easter by Laura Alary

This is a picture book, appropriate for lower primary and in to intermediate grades. It explains Lent through an upward-inward-outward approach of faith formation. It starts with following Jesus by “making time” to meet with God like he did,. It then considers “making space” for the Kingdom of God to expand in our hearts, before moving into “making room” for mission to our world. This book offers many practical ways kids can grow in their faith at this time, in both personal and social holiness.



When God Made Light by Matthew Paul Turner

This is a beautiful, lyrical picture book perfect for younger children. It is not specifically on the topic of Lent, but it introduces the idea of active gratitude for the light God has spoken into the world and our lives while extending the implication that we are to be God’s light in the world.

One Word for Kids by Jon Gordon, Dan Britton, and Jimmy Page

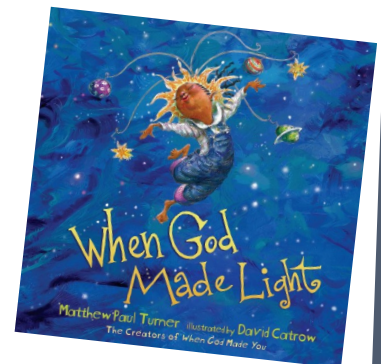
This is a picture book appropriate for primary students. It is not explicitly Christian, but it does a good job of explaining the idea of “One Word” for the year, which parents or ministry leaders can extend into conversations about prayer and discernment with kids. This pairs well with the Bishop’s January 1st message. If children have not picked a word for the year, they could pick a word for the season of Lent.

Family Quest Cards by Scripture Union

From Scripture Union, “**Family Quest** is a family Bible guide that feels like a game. There are 30 Bible readings that take families through the story of the Bible. Each reading offers 6 different ways to engage with the Bible (discussion questions, acting, memorizing a Bible verse, drawing, singing and more). In addition to having a blast together, sparking meaningful conversations and learning more about Jesus - you will also make lasting memories and discover new ways to engage with the Bible!” To order cards visit:
<https://shop.scriptureunion.ca/products/family-quest>.

Good Dirt: Lent, Holy Week, and Easter Tide by Lacy Finn Borgo

This book has a brief introduction to the themes/ideas/practice of Lent and how they might be made applicable to family faith formation. Included is short daily devotionals for families for everyday in Lent, including Bible verses and reflection questions.



Lenten Activity Suggestion: Primary/Intermediate

DIY PRAYER JARS



Ages: 8+ (younger with modifications)

Supplies:

- large craft popsicle sticks
- Mason jars or large plastic cups
- Stickers or other adhesive decorations
- Ribbons or yarn (optional)
- Wooden embellishments (optional)
- Writing tools

Location:

This can be done at home or as part of a Sunday School or midweek program.

If we want to teach about Lent as a season to make time, space, and room for God in our hearts and lives, this is a good craft that will give kids the opportunity to each day, take a moment or a few minutes to focus in on God's love at work through offering a prayer or a Scripture written on a randomly selected stick.

Teachers/parents may assist by preparing some of the sticks ahead of time or writing out some suggestions for kids to consider (younger kids might need more assistance). Kids do not need to have a stick to account for each day of Lent but they can be recycled throughout the season. A minimum might be seven— one to represent each day of the week. Some suggestions to write on the sticks include:

- Scripture verses connected to whatever theme/story your kids are working through. For example, you could use verses connected to the fruits of the Spirit or the "I am" statements of Jesus found in the Gospel of John.
- The names of family, friends, or community organizations they would like to pray for. You could write down the names of families from your church directory. Kids could ask for prayer ideas from the congregation, to be submitted the week before the craft.
- Reflections on thanksgiving: This could be an invitation to list persons, places, things they are thankful for or reflection on their 'highlight' of the day.
- If your church is connected to mission agencies or missionaries or service organizations in your community, connect with them ahead of time to ask for prayer requests.

The jars can be prepared according to the kids' ages and available supplies. Glue may be used with older kids, but adhesive backed embellishments and stickers might be best for younger kids.

Inspired by: <https://www.ssw.com/blog/how-to-make-prayer-jars-religious-craft-activity-lesson/>

Lenten Activity Suggestion: Youth / Families

Lent Photo-A-Day Challenge

Many parents of older children and teens are looking for ways to integrate our kids use of social media and personal devices with faithful practice. One Lenten practice includes inviting families to spend 40 days (everyday of Lent, excluding Sundays up until Easter Sunday) focusing their faith life on a different word that can serve as a prayer or Scripture reading prompt.

Your family can use these word prompts in multiple ways: do a family photo challenge with your phones, draw pictures, do a Bible search for verses that include the day's word, write a prayer, song, or psalm together that includes the word. This can be an individual or group activity, but it is good for families to gather together to share their reflections: what does this word mean to me? How does it apply to our journey with Jesus? What can we pray about? What does God want us to do in response to what we have seen?

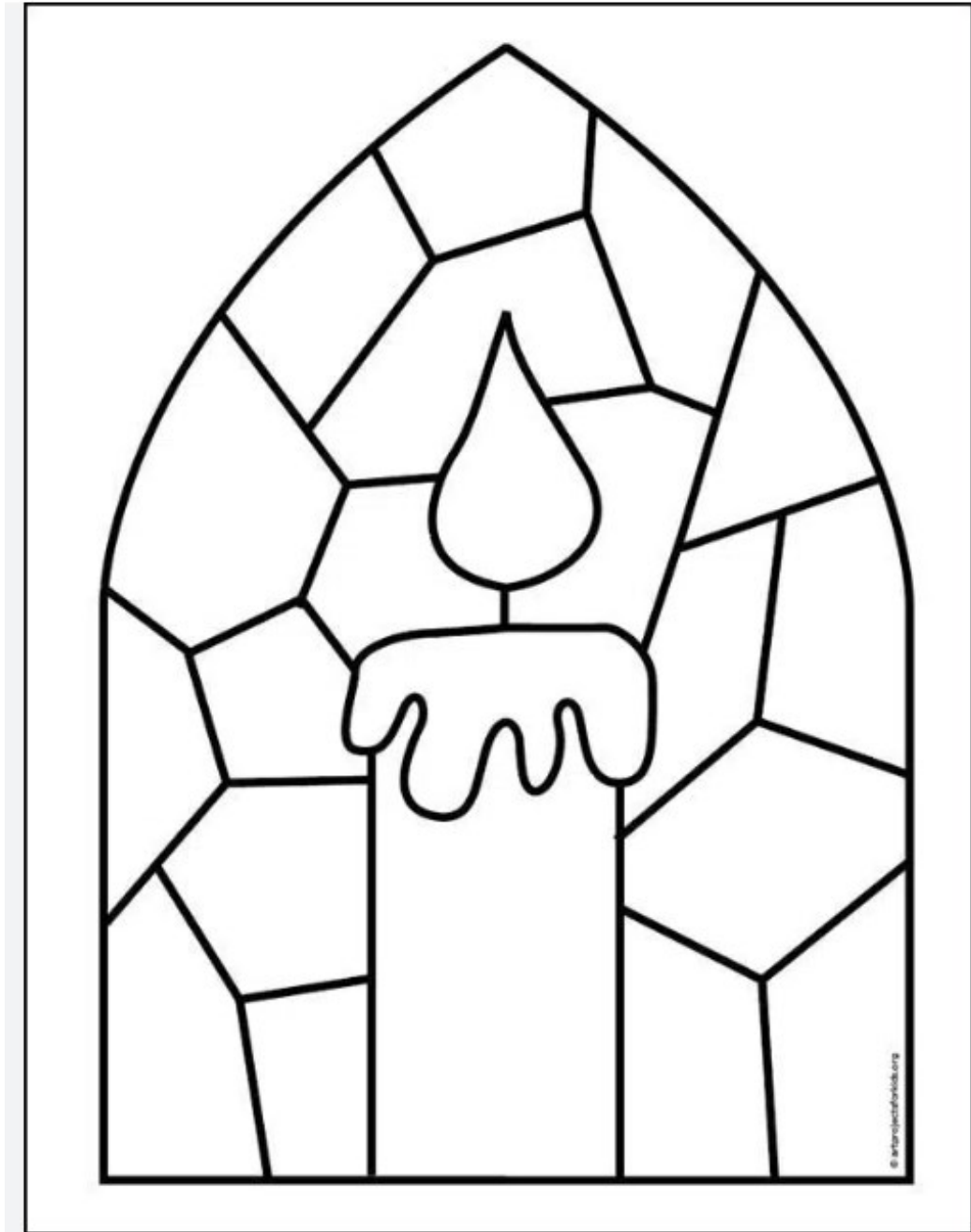
This activity can also be used by youth groups, and they can share their photos and thoughts on Instagram or other social media. It can be an intergenerational activity in the life of the church as well, if the church has space on Sunday morning for mutual encouragement of each other as God has spoken into hearts about certain words or themes. Is practice can also be used at Advent when word lists can also be found online.

2/22	Reflect	3/6	Justice	3/17	Disciple	3/29	Study
2/23	Search	3/7	Light	3/18	Valley	3/30	Freedom
2/24	Serve	3/8	Confess	3/20	Purpose	3/31	Guide
2/25	Pray	3/9	Water	3/21	Friend	4/1	Push
2/27	Dust	3/10	Invite	3/22	Rise	4/3	Dark
2/28	Lead	3/11	Bloom	3/23	Give	4/4	Embrace
3/1	Peace	3/13	Direct	3/24	Sabbath	4/5	Be
3/2	Waste	3/14	Beauty	3/25	Joy	4/6	Forgive
3/3	Bread	3/15	Grow	3/27	Hope	4/7	Quiet
3/4	Journey	3/16	Word	3/28	Broken	4/8	Rejoice

This list adapted from: <https://umhef.org/reflection-free-2022-lenten-activity/>

Ash Wednesday Activity for Kids

What are you thankful for? How do you know and feel God's love? Who can you show that love to this week? How can you be like Jesus? What are you worried about? Can you pray about it? Write some of these thoughts in the panes of this 'window' while colouring the picture, thanking God for the days He has given us to give and experience the light of His love.



PDF of this image: <https://artprojectsforkids.org/how-to-draw-a-candle/>