



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

255 - February 2026

A Best Practice: A Mini-Family Retreat

As leaders in faith formation we know that several things are true:

- People are open to learn, pray, and grow during the church's Lenten season
- Faith formation works well within the family setting
- When faith formation happens in the family setting, everyone learns – children and parents
- People learn best when they're doing and when they're enjoying the activities

Many of our parishes plan their faith formation opportunities with these realities in mind. One of them is highlighted in this issue from Mary, Queen of Martyrs Parish, a parish formed with the parishes of St. Peter's and Saint Kateri of Plymouth, MA and our Lady of Lourdes of Carver, MA – one parish with three churches.

Patsy Gillespie, Director of Faith Formation at the parish, shares with us some of the reasons and process of "Little Lenten Journey: A Mini Family Retreat."

The Roots of this Opportunity

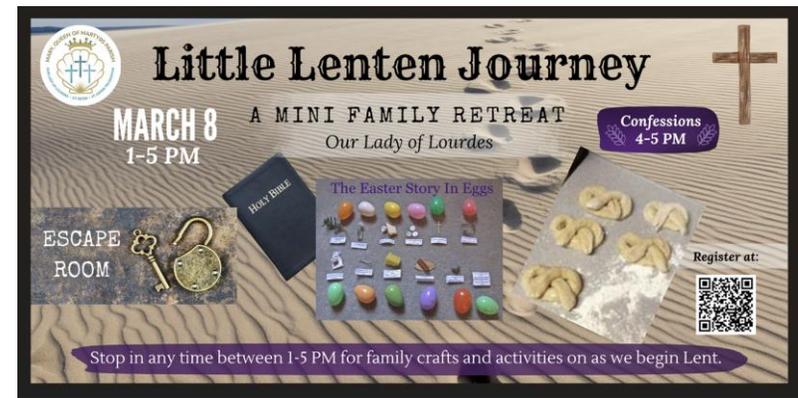
Over the past few years, the parish has offered Advent family gatherings, "Prepare the Way for Advent," featuring the making of candy creches, Advent wreaths, an appearance from St. Nick, and other Advent crafts.

After this Advent gathering two years ago, the pastor, Fr. Joe Raeke encouraged Patsy and the faith formation department to do something similar for Lent. Patsy mentioned, "For Lent, the opportunity is a little more prayerful and family focused; I was also trying to find ideas to get people interested in coming."

Reasons and Hopes

Patsy shares the motives and goals of this event for families: "It is important for families to integrate the faith into the home and daily life. If we are lucky, we see their children for less than 24 hours a year.

For the children to understand the importance of the faith it is essential that the families place an importance on faith outside of classes as well. Several parishes nearby have a family faith model where they meet once a month and have tasks to complete at home, but I have noticed that many times the at-home tasks are not completed. By using crafts and fun activities in the parish, I am hopeful that the children will help their families remember to pray, fast, and give alms."



The Process

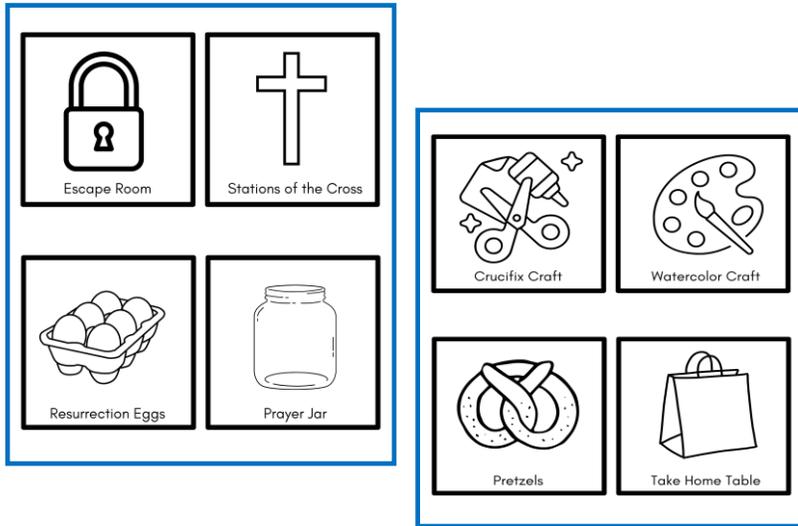
The Lenten Journey was available from 1 – 5 pm. It was not necessary for families to commit to the entire afternoon. They could arrive when their schedule allowed and rotate through the various activities at their own pace. (A few families arrived around 1:30 and stayed the entire time.)

When they arrived, they were met and welcomed, receiving their name tags and a Passport to Jerusalem. The Passport was a way for families to keep track of – and receive stickers for – those stations in which they participated.



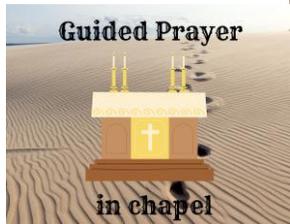
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It was also designed to encourage families to give each station a valiant try. Some stations were fun; others were more prayerful and reflective.



In addition to Patsy and the adult helpers, 12-15 teens were available as helpers to the families (and, of course, learned new things, too).

Helpful signs were positioned throughout the hall and building so that families could easily find the individual stations.



The Stations

As Patsy designed the stations, there were a variety of activities in order to appeal to very young children as well as older children (and the parents).

- Pretzel Making
- Stations of the Cross
- Resurrection Eggs
- Clothespin Crucifix Craft
- Guide to Confession (The Sacrament of Penance was available in church.)
- Lenten Escape Room
- Prayer, Fast, Almsgiving family jar
- Guided Prayer Meditation
- Watercolor Good Friday Craft
- A Take Home Station



A Closer Look at some of the Stations

- **A Prayer, Fast, Alms family jar:** Families decorated jars and then placed within them 40 ideas for prayer, fasting and almsgiving. These ideas were printed on card stock, or they could copy them onto popsicle sticks.



Pray	Fast
Pray a decade of the Rosary	Fast from electronics
Pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet	Fast from sweets
Pray the Angelus at noon	Fast from snacking between meals
Pray on Our Father for your priest	Fast from TV
Pray a Hail Mary for your Mom	Fast from complaining
Pray a Glory Be for your Dad	Do things the first time you are asked
Pray for people who are sick	Fast from music
Pray for those who have died	Eat a simple meal today
Pray for moms expecting babies	Drink only water today
Read a Bible Story	Go last in line
Pray for _____	Fast from _____
Pray for _____	Fast from _____
Pray for _____	Fast from _____
Give	
Choose one toy to donate	Send a card to someone
Choose one clothing item to donate	Let others have their turn first
Choose one book to donate	Let someone borrow a toy/book/game
Collect change to give to a charity	Do an extra chore
Donate extra to your parish this week	Give _____
Donate to a food pantry	Give _____
Write a kind note to someone	Give _____

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- **Resurrection Eggs:** Bible Games Central (<https://biblegamescentral.com/resurrection-eggs/>) gives directions on how to make your own set of resurrection eggs using items that are easy to find. Or you can use their printable Resurrection Eggs Cards which feature images of these items.



- **A Take Home Station.** This station contained several resources that the families could take to continue their prayer and reflection at home during the Lenten season, such as:

- Ideas for praying at home
- 40 days Coloring page
- Stations of the Cross Eggs
- A copy of Magnifikid
- A bag to take home their projects



- **Stations of the Cross:** This station provided several ways for families to explore, learn more about and pray the Stations of the Cross. The pivotal resource was the animated video, *Brother Francis Presents the Stations of the Cross* which can be found at Formed or Amazon.
- **Lenten Escape Room:** This station contained various puzzles used to solve clues to learn more about the teachings of Jesus and various Scripture passages.



Additional activities

Two additional opportunities were available during this afternoon.

- **Lenten Promises:** During their faith formation sessions, the children were given foam crosses and asked to think about the question: "What are you going to do during Lent to be holy? Children drew or wrote their promises on their cross and – during this afternoon – placed them on Lenten Promise Trees which were displayed in the church gathering space during the Lenten season.



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- **Coloring Contest.** Pictures of the cross and palms were available for children who wanted to color them. The “winner” was the featured cover of the church bulletin for Palm Sunday.

Resources

Some of the ideas and activities were inspired by and/or used from:

- Joyful Heart Renewal Ministries: <https://www.joyfulheart.com/>
- Cat.Chat Vacation Bible School: <https://catchat.ca/vbs>
- Catholic Inspired: <https://catholicinspired.com/>
- Memory Lane Printables:
https://www.etsy.com/search?q=lent&ref=search_bar&dd_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.etsy.com%2Fshop%2FMemoryLanePrintables
- The Catholic Kid: https://www.thecatholickid.com/#google_vignette
- Catholic Icing: <https://www.catholicicing.com/>
- Project Nazareth:
<https://www.evangelizeboston.com/project-nazareth-free-downloads/>
- Bible Games Central:
<https://biblegamescentral.com/>
- Busted Halo: <https://bustedhalo.com/>



- 40 Lenten Acts of Kindness:
<https://www.wcumc.us/ministries/lenten-acts-of-kindness>
- Lent is for Lovers: <https://brokendoorministries.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/40-Acts-of-Kindness.pdf>

- 40 Acts of Kindness for Kids:
<https://printablecircus.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/40-Lent-Acts-of-Kindness-for-Kids-from-Printable-Circus.pdf>

- 40 Acts of Kindness for Lent:
<https://hodgepodgedays.co.uk/life/40-acts-of-kindness-for-lent/>

- Fasting – for Lent and Our Year Round Christian Life:
https://www.janetschaeffler.com/Fasting_-_for_Lent_and_our_year_round_Christian_Life.pdf

- A Different Kind of Fasting:
https://www.janetschaeffler.com/A_Different_Look_at_Fasting.pdf

- Lenten Guidelines:
https://www.janetschaeffler.com/Lenten_Guidelines.pdf

- Fasting is More than Giving Up Chocolate: Fasting ... From A to Z:
https://www.janetschaeffler.com/Fasting_is_More_than_Giving_up_Chocolate.pdf

- 40 Lenten Ideas for Changing, Growing and Living as Disciples:
https://www.janetschaeffler.com/40_Lenten_Ideas_for_Living_as_Disciples.pdf

- Fifty Ways to Celebrate Easter:
https://www.janetschaeffler.com/50_Ways_to_Celebrate_Easter.pdf

- Lenten Practices: Calls to Growth and Conversion:
https://www.janetschaeffler.com/Lenten_Practices_-_Calls_to_Growth_and_Conversion.pdf



Some Other Possibilities for resources:

- 40 Acts of Kindness: <https://www.stmmts.org/post/40-acts-of-kindness-generosity-for-families-during-lent>

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➤ Forty Lenten Ideas:

https://www.janetschaeffler.com/40_Lenten_Ideas.pdf

➤ A Family Lenten Chain:

https://www.janetschaeffler.com/A_Family_Lenten_Chain.pdf

Other Possible Ideas

You might also be interested in revisiting these past GEMS issues about family events during our liturgical year.

- [Live It Kits](#)
- [Faith Rituals in the Neighborhood](#)
- [Journey to the Nativity](#)
- [Advent Workshop](#) (Part I)
- [Advent Workshop](#) (Part II)
- [Lenten Journals](#)
- [It Happens at Home](#)



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Past issues of **GEMS** are archived at www.janetschaeffler.com

Additional ideas for Adult Faith Formation Planning and Best Practices can be found in:

- *Deepening Faith: Adult Faith Formation in the Parish*
<https://www.litpress.org/Products/4652/Deepening-Faith>
- *Guided by the Directory for Catechesis: Transforming the Vision and Practice of Parish Catechesis*
<https://twentythirdpublications.com/products/guided-by-the-directory-for-catechesis>
- Lifelong Faith Training: <https://www.lifelongfaithtraining.com/>
- Lifelong Faith: <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/>
- Seasons of Adult Faith website: <http://adultfaith.weebly.com/>
- The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation:
https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/seasons_of_aff_-_journal_special_issue.pdf