LENT:
WHAT IS IT REALLY ABOUT
AND HOW CAN MY FAMILY
PARTICIPATE IN THIS SEASON?

For weeks now, the presence of colourful eggs and chocolate bunnies in supermarkets has steadily been increasing. People like to buy them early in preparation for their Easter celebrations. However, for us as Catholics, our preparation for Easter goes much deeper than that.

The Season of Lent is a time in which we reflect on our relationship with God and the way we are living our lives. It is the season in which we prepare for the mystery of Easter with minds and hearts renewed. Through repentance and renewal we can live more fully, our Baptismal call to live as disciples of Jesus.

The following information may help you and your family understand the meaning, customs and traditions of Lent more fully, resulting in a deeper preparation for the coming Easter Season.

Looking at Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving:
How is it relevant to me?

Lent is an annual opportunity to grow in our faith, which means it’s about much more than giving up unhealthy foods or treats, as we may have done when we were children.

It is about abstaining from whatever is unhealthy in our lives—gossip, laziness and lack of social conscience and most importantly, taking concrete steps to do something that has a positive influence on yourself and others.

Instead of chocolate or ice-cream, what if we thought of fasting, prayer and almsgiving in a broader context? What if those disciplines involved practices like:

- reducing our dependence on electronic devices, such as iPads, iPods, TV, Xbox, etc, for 24 hours (fast); which might give us time to and spending the extra time we saved contemplating the 1.6 billion people in the world who have no access to electricity for a few moments (pray); and on personal interaction with someone we love (give).

Or what if we:

- reduced our carbon footprint for a day by using less energy – being more aware of the electricity we waste through lights or TVs being left on (fast); then reflected for two minutes on the magnificent gift of our natural environment – God’s creation (pray); and finally donated some money to be given away to a favourite charity— perhaps one that plants trees (give).

The Lenten practices of Praying, Fasting and Almsgiving have been a part of our Catholic tradition for centuries and they are still very relevant in our faith journey today.
WHAT CAN WE DO AS A FAMILY OR PERSONALLY, TO SHARE IN THIS SEASON OF LENT?

ON-LINE LENTEN CALENDAR – Similar to the traditional Advent Calendar, these online calendars give you prayer, fasting and giving ideas for each day of Lent. [www.caritas.org.au/projectcompassion/lent-calendar](http://www.caritas.org.au/projectcompassion/lent-calendar)

RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS – On slips of paper, have each family member write random acts of kindness, such as give a compliment, make a phone call to an old friend, carry someone’s heavy load, let someone in front of you on the tuckshop line, etc. Present each family member with a slip of paper as he or she leaves in the morning. Invite each family member to perform the kindness without seeking recognition. That evening, talk together about what happened. Try to make a commitment that your kindnesses will be passed on throughout Lent and beyond.

VISIT THE CHURCH – Get to Mass with the family during Lent. Celebrating and receiving the Eucharist is a great way to strengthen your relationship with God... and to show your children how important that relationship is.

PRAYING AT WORK OR HOME DURING YOUR DAY – Take a three minute prayer break! Yes, just three minutes to reflect on God’s presence in your life. Try it! What have you got to lose? [http://www.loyolapress.com/3-minute-retreats-dailyonline-prayer.htm](http://www.loyolapress.com/3-minute-retreats-dailyonline-prayer.htm)

LENT GRATITUDE – Choose a time each day where each family member shares three things for which to be grateful. This could be done at meal-times or before bed. Giving thanks is our response to the goodness of God.

PRAY TOGETHER – Make family prayer a focus during Lent. Read the Sunday Gospel for each week of Lent from a children’s bible, say traditional prayers at bedtime, pray in the car together on the way to school, chat to God in an informal way about the things for which you want to ask or give thanks.

GOOD DEAD BEADS – Make some good deed beads with your child/children. Make a promise to do 10 good deeds each day. Share the good deeds together as a family over dinner each night. [http://thelittleways.com/how-to-make-sacrifice-beads](http://thelittleways.com/how-to-make-sacrifice-beads)

THINKING OF YOU CARDS – Make 'Thinking of You' cards and send them to people you love or people you know who might need a little extra love and care during Lent.

DID YOU KNOW?

- The season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and concludes before the Evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday.
- Lent is a forty-day liturgical season that prepares us for the most sacred part of the Christian year, the Triduum – the days we recall the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ.
- Sundays are not included in the forty-day count because every Sunday is a joyful celebration of our Lord’s Resurrection.
- The name Lent, comes from the Old English word for Spring which was lencten. The Latin word for Lent is quadragesima which means forty days.
- During Lent we renew our hearts and mind through prayer, fasting and almsgiving, in preparation for the joyful mystery of Easter.
- Ash Wednesday is a day of fasting and abstinence. This means we only have one main meal during the day (fasting) and we do not eat meat (abstinence). Abstinence applies to people from the age of 14. Fasting applies to those who have attained their majority, until their 60th year.
- The traditional colour of Lent is purple.