

Weekly Faith Formation Update

January 18- 22, 2021

Hard to believe but we are only a couple weeks until the Lenten season will begin. One of the most effective ways I have found to reach kids during this time is to do bags of activities around a particular season. They love getting the attention, the bags, the simplicity of the activities, and family discussions.

[Lent in a Bag: An Activity for Church or Home | Building Faith](#)

“Might there be a stony place in you that needs transforming? Some attitude or habit that, with a little attention, might even become a gift for you and others?”

What is Lent in a Bag?

We have discovered that distributing small bags – cloth, paper, or Ziplock bags – with symbols of the season assists individuals and families in practicing Lent at home. In addition to the items in the bag, we include instructions and reflections (on purple paper of course) to go with each item.



Place the following items in a bag of your choice:

Instruction Sheet

Include a piece of paper with these (or similar) instructions, or attach it to the outside of the bag:

“Here are two suggestions for using the contents of this bag:

1. Choose one night of the week and invite those around your table to pick one of the symbols as a starting point for conversation for the whole group, including children.
2. For your own devotion, daily or weekly, choose one of the symbols for your own reflection as you make your way through the season of Lent.”

Sand

Place a sealable baggie filled with sand. Include the following (or similar) reflection:

“Just between his baptism and the beginning of his adult ministry, Jesus went into the wilderness for 40 days, ‘to be tested’. What constitutes wilderness in your life? What have you learned there? What might you learn there?”

Rock

Place a rock inside the bag. Include the following (or similar) reflection:

“While in the wilderness, Jesus was invited to transform stone into bread. Though he resisted the temptation there and then, he became justly renowned for feeding people who were hungry for food, or for love, or for a word of encouragement, or for simple acceptance. Might there be a stony place in you that needs transforming? Some attitude or habit that, with a little attention, might even become a gift for you and others?”

Human Figure

Use a clothespin or wooden figure. Place inside the bag with the following (or similar) reflection:

“Because Jesus was, as we confess, fully human, he gets us, understands us from inside our skin, and knows from experience that we’re each capable of great things, Godly things. And no matter what we do, he keeps on inviting us to join us in his work which has become our own. As you enter this Lent, what might you plan to do over these 40 days so that come Easter you will more closely reflect the Christ who lives in and through you?”

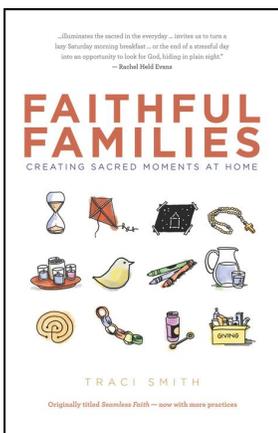
Candle

Place a candle inside the bag. Include the following (or similar) reflection:

“Lent begins in the dimness of late winter and ends with the burst of bright spring. Jesus is, according to John’s gospel, ‘The Light of the World’ and that Light insists: ‘You are the light of the world. Don’t be hiding under some bushel basket.’ So where do you shine? How do you keep your light lit?”

[Faithful Families: Creating Sacred Space at Home by Tracie Smith | Chalice Print](#)

When I was an elementary student, the Challenger space shuttle exploded. In college, the Columbine Massacre happened. Then, soon after graduation, 9/11/2001. Each of these traumatic news stories affected me differently at different stages of my childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. Though there are heartbreaking stories of violence and death in the news every day, there are some that seem to be too much for the soul to bear.



On December 14, 2012, I experienced my first traumatic news event as a mother. It was the day a 21-year-old man went on a shooting spree in a public elementary school, killing 26 people—20 of them children. On that day, and for many days afterward, the only thing I wanted to do was to be with my children and to hug and kiss them and to protect them.

This ceremony brings parents and children together at a time when a traumatic news story has affected the family. The beauty of this activity is that it gives children a space to talk about their feelings if they want to, but it does not demand that they speak at all. It also helps children to feel safe, protected, and sheltered.

“[God] will cover you with [God’s] feathers, and under [God’s] wings you can hide.” (Psalm 91:4a, NCV)

Supplies: Paper, Scissors, Pen/pencil/crayons, Faux feathers, and glue (optional)

Instructions:

1. Draw several large birds on writing or construction paper. Use the template provided here or create your own.
2. Invite children to the table for a special activity.
3. Say, “Today you may have heard a little about [X event].” Describe the event that has happened in bare terms, using age-appropriate language.
4. Say, “I want you to know that you are safe and protected. Sometimes I want to snuggle you up like a [Mommy/Daddy] bird! There is a verse in the Bible that says: [God] will cover you with [God’s] feathers, and under [God’s] wings you can hide. - Ps. 91:4a
Today we can remember that God wants to snuggle and protect us just like your parents snuggle and protect you.”
5. Hand out the bird outlines and say, “This is your bird to decorate. I have these materials (crayons, feathers and glue, markers, etc.) for you to use to decorate it.”
6. While each child is decorating a bird, talk a little about what has happened.
7. At the end of the activity, write the Bible verse under each bird and hang them up somewhere in the house as a reminder to the children that they are safe.
8. Give the children hugs and snuggles and say, “You are like my baby birds and I will always do everything I can to make sure you are safe. I love you.”

Notes:

- How you describe the event will depend on the children's ages and what they have already heard. A good guideline is to start out with less information and then encourage questions/elaboration from the children. Use your instincts about what is necessary to share and err on the side of sharing less if you are unsure.
- During the discussion time, it is important to be truthful, but not volunteer extra information if it is not necessary. Be sure to reassure children that they are safe. Ask if the children have questions and encourage them to ask as many questions as they would like.
- While it is good for parents to be able to express emotion in their children's presence, ask for help from another adult (spouse, friend, etc.) if you don't feel you can remain calm and offer a sense of safety to the children during this activity.
- Children respond to these types of events in quite different ways depending on age. Preschool children might mix up what is real and what is pretend. Pre-teens and teens might have much more complex and detailed understandings of the implications of traumatic events.
- If the event is catastrophic and likely to linger in the news for days or weeks, help children focus on good and positive things to do.

Variations:

- If there is a large difference in age in your children, do this activity one-on-one to allow for age-appropriate discussion, or involve teens in helping younger children with the activity. Have a follow-up discussion with the teens.
- For young children, play "parent bird, baby bird." Drape a blanket over your arms, as your "wings" allow children to run and hide under them. Scoop them up and give them hugs. Let the children be the mama or daddy bird.

After a Natural Disaster: Butterfly Hug

The butterfly hug is a calming technique created by therapist Luciana Artigas after Hurricane Pauline struck Mexico in 1997. It's a simple technique that can help children (and adults) relax and find peace. I learned about it when I was struggling to manage my own anxiety and panic attacks and have found it to be a useful tool for my children to find focus and rest. In researching this technique, I learned that Ms. Artigas developed this technique after one of the young children she was counseling asked, "Who will embrace me after you are gone?" Determined to come up with a way for children to feel accompanied in their trauma, Ms. Artigas and her husband developed the butterfly hug. The butterfly hug is a great reminder to children that there is nowhere we can go God is not with us. With practice, children can learn to practice the butterfly hug without the aid of a parent or guide.

Instructions:

1. Say, "The psalmist says this about God, 'Suppose I had wings like the dawning day and flew across the ocean. Even then God's powerful arm would guide and protect me. Or suppose I said, 'I'll hide in the dark until night comes to cover me over.'" But you see in the dark because daylight and dark are all the same to you.'- Psalm 139:9-12 This passage reminds us that God is always with us, in darkness and in light. Let's ask God to be near to us and to help us find calm and focus."
2. Sit or lie in a relaxed position.
3. Take a couple of deep breaths to begin to calm down and relax.

4. Cross your arms across your chest so that your fingertips rest just under your collar bone. Fingers should point more toward the top of the head, rather than the side of the body. Thumbs can interlock, or not, depending on what is most comfortable.
5. Gently close eyes, or softly focus ahead.
6. Alternate tapping fingers left and right, at whatever speed feels most comfortable.
7. Continue to breathe deeply while tapping, left and right. Keep tapping for at least three minutes.
8. Either end the butterfly hug naturally (when the children feel calm and ready) or by saying "Thank you, God, for peace. Help us to feel peace whenever we feel worried or unsafe."

Notes:

- Though this practice is listed as a ceremony for after a natural disaster, it can also be used as a spiritual practice for children who struggle with rest and worry. Remember that it takes patience and practice.
- Also, this practice works well with bedtime. Practice the butterfly hug for a few minutes, and then say a blessing for children.