

Feed My Sheep

Support for Formation Ministry in the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh

February 2016 Lent Lisa Brown, Editor (lcbrown@stpaulspgh.org)

Lent in Church and at Home

Many families have a good idea of how to incorporate a daily spiritual practice during Advent—opening Advent calendars, lighting candles, saying prayers. But what about Lent? In this more penitential season, families often struggle to construct a home practice that will bring our youngest members along on the journey to Holy Week and beyond.

Here's an idea for a beautiful Lenten flat "wreath," following the path toward the cross with daily devotions. Each day, families light a candle and place a stone in the wreath, then read a devotion for the day.

Other families might choose to de-clutter as they pass the season. This form of "giving up" something for Lent isn't as much about self-denial as about



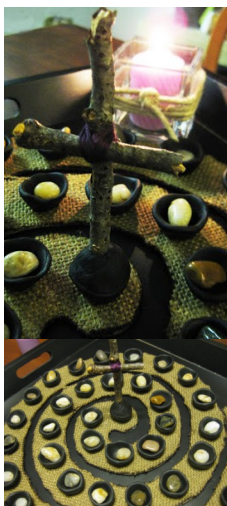
looking at our own abundance and finding ways to share it with others.

You might want to work with your families to assemble "Lent in a Bag" - a simple paper bag

containing items such as sand, a rock, a flower bulb or seed, a shell, a human figure (clothes pin or small doll) and a candle, and instructions on how each of these items can invoke a conversation about Lent. See the Building Faith links for more instructions and a



printable leader booklet! You can invite families to assemble their bags together or you can pre-assemble them and distribute them.



Similarly, a great way to help children more through Holy Week is a little "Holy Week in a box" kit. Containing a wooden peg figure, some paper-cut palm leaves and a bit of white cloth, you can recreate the entire Holy Week story, from Jesus' triumphant arrival in Jerusalem, the Last Supper, the sadness of Good Friday, and finally the empty tomb. So simple, but very illustrative!

What are your great Lenten ideas? Please let us know! Here are the links for the crafts pictured:

www.weelittlemiracles.com/2011/03/idea-for-your-family-this-lent.html

www.buildfaith.org/2013/02/08/lent-in-a-bag/

www.buildfaith.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/LentinaBag-StJohns.pdf

camillebronpowell.wordpress.com/2013/03/18/holy-week-box/



What is happening in YOUR parish for children, youth or families? Share your great ideas and PHOTOS! Please email Lisa Brown (lcbrown@stpaulspgh.org)



Look for more great seasonal ideas on Pinterest ["https://www.pinterest.com/edpchildrensmin/childrens-ministry-lenteaster-edp/"](https://www.pinterest.com/edpchildrensmin/childrens-ministry-lenteaster-edp/)

Philadelphia Forma Conference

In January, five members of the Diocese of Pittsburgh attended the Forma Conference in Philadelphia. Here's what they had to say...

Lisa Brown ...

It's always interesting a month or so after a conference, after the excitement has faded, recalling those ideas that are still vivid. It's curious which conversations really stick, word for word.

For me, the questions posed by the Rev. Broderick Greer are ones that keep replaying in my mind. He offered a workshop in which we considered viewing the world through a sacramental lens. What if we saw the gritty realities of life as sacred as the holy realities we seek in church and responded accordingly? Would our tolerance for suffering, pollution and misery be lessened? Specifically, if we are a people of the holy water of baptism, how can we tolerate the water situation in Flint, MI?

The conversation was fascinating. A young priest with a scientific background explained that there is a finite amount of water on the earth. It's basic elementary school science: water just passes through an endless cycle of evaporation and rain. As such, every time that priest's child keeps the faucet running too long, as a dad and priest, he calls out, "Don't waste that water! You were baptized in that water! Jesus was baptized in that water!"

A young man from Arizona told the story of growing up in Navajo land where there is a large geographic area in which the residents have no access to clean water. Mining has poisoned the rivers; fracking has caused land to shift and wells to dry up. "I understand the need for churches to sponsor well-digging missions in African," he said, "...but people don't realize that there are places in the U.S. facing similar hardships." If all water is sacred, can we allow this to happen?

I have no immediate answers to these questions, but I know that it will be worthwhile to explore them with the young people of my parish.



Representing the diocese at the recent Forma conference in Philadelphia are (l-r) Lisa Brown from St. Paul's, Mt. Lebanon, Susan Roth from Calvary, the Rev. Canon Dr. Jay Geisler, Canon Kim Karashin, and Joyce Donadee from St. Brendan's.

Canon Kim Karashin...

One recurring theme during the conference was the need for us to focus less on how to get people into our churches and more on how to be the Church in the world. Many of us, myself included, have been discouraged by the seeming shift in priorities over the last couple of decades, with Sunday mornings becoming more about soccer and sleeping in than about corporate worship and Christian fellowship.

Sometimes, we blame and shame parents and children because they happen to have other things to do on a Sunday morning. But we need to ask ourselves ... What are we doing spread the gospel to these people? What can we do to make worship, formation, and fellowship more accessible for them? Can we expect folks to show up for us if we don't show up for them (even on the soccer field or at the occasional dance recital)? Are we adequately communicating the value of what the Church offers, and are we delivering that value? How can we meet these people where they are, rather than expecting them to come to us?

Joyce Donadee...

Formation is the core of our ministry and we need to be where people can be found to do it. People of all ages today are forming themselves by using social media, the internet, and other platforms. We do formation by watching/ modeling, connecting, and sharing what we have experienced.

Formation is not about having the right answers or parroting back information. It is how we pass on faith. As we are relational with God, each other and the world, we can create our own way to do formation, which means that each community's formation program will look different. One example of formation can be found at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Arlington, Virginia. Their Sunday school attendance was declining and parents expressed a desire to

spend more time with their children on Sunday mornings. This church community turned their Sunday school model into a hybrid Family Ministry.

Each Sunday many families attend the first part of the Holy Communion service in the chapel where the music, lectionary and sermons use family-friendly language. These families then join the rest of the congregation during the Peace and for Holy Communion.

Joyce Donadee (continued)...

Every six weeks there is a 90 minute intergenerational formation activity after the main service which includes a pot luck lunch. The activities are centered on a topic such as a Bible story, church seasons, prayer or mission. Some of the activities are created for adults and some for children, followed by reflecting together.

The church's website standrewsnet.org has a "FISHING" link for families where each week's summary of the Family service sermon and readings are posted. A summary of the regular sermon is also posted, along with a prayer starter and conversation starters to be used at home. This encourages families to stay connected during the week with their church community and with God.

Susan Roth...

The Forma conference was an invaluable experience for meeting people who are involved with formation ministry, discussing ideas and issues, learning about the future of formation, and getting energized to do this work. It will take time and much conversation to unpack it all, but here are the highlights.

The conference emphasized the importance of some overarching elements of formation ministry:

- Building and being an active participant in a community for resources, ideas, and support
- Prioritizing relationships, even (and especially!) when we are busy
- Being wholly present in the moment
- Honoring the particular traditions and character of our home parishes, while ALSO...
- Looking toward the future, with hope and enthusiasm, welcoming change and transformation.

The vision for the future of formation that this experience left me with is one that:

- Focuses on building up and supporting children and young people through the context of their own lives, rather than attempting to program them further;
- Asks the question, "To whom are we neighbors?" rather than, "Who are our neighbors?";
- Is fully integrated into the life of the church, rather than an add-on or afterthought;
- Strives to recognize and use the context of the culture outside of the church;
- Crosses generational boundaries; and
- Has (or is working toward) a "tolerance for messiness" that reflects our commitment in baptism.

These are huge goals, and all together, they seem overwhelming – especially if you are new, or part-time, or unpaid, or an introvert, or have other things happening in your congregation or personal life (which we all do).

In light of all of this, the most important takeaway is that at the end of the day – or at the start of it – relationships and community are essential for anyone involved in Christian formation. Sharing ideas, asking for and giving support, and simply knowing we are not out here on our own are fundamental to doing this well. There is a great deal that each of us can learn from and offer to one another.

Canon Jay Geisler...

Recently, I attended the Episcopal Forma Conference in Philadelphia in January with parishioners from several parishes. Creative workshops on reaching out into the community, using the visual arts, listening skills and storytelling were utilized to teach us the importance of making disciples of others.

I would like to share the vision and mission of Forma.

The vision of Forma is to bring continuity and quality to lifelong formation ministry within and through institutions of The Episcopal Church and other related Christian communities. Forma is grassroots association of members of The Episcopal Church and kindred individuals and institutions, Forma supports, networks, advocates for, resources, and celebrates Christian formation leaders in their Christian formation ministries.

In His final message before ascending to his Father in Heaven Jesus proclaims: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Matthew 28:19

The key word to me is "make disciples." This word comes from the Latin word "discere" meaning to learn and it is a translation of the Greek term μαθητής (mathētēs) which refers to any "student," "pupil," or "apprentice." At the time of Jesus it is was often associated, with people who were devoted followers of a great religious leader or of a teacher of philosophy.

The point is this: as followers of Jesus we are called to be "lifelong learners." Our education as Christians begins with baptism it does not end with Confirmation or Ordination but rather our education continues until death. Education is more than knowledge, as Christians we are being formed to be more like Christ. In the words of John the Baptist "I must become less so that he may become more." John 3:30 Christian education is knowing Christ and being formed in his image.

As disciple of Jesus, each and every one of us are called to be formed in the image and likeness of Christ. As we begin our Lenten Pilgrimage remember that journey begins and ends in Christ. Let our prayer be, form me God each day to more like Christ....