

**Dear Parents/Carers,**

As part of our ongoing commitment to support you in the Religious Education and spiritual formation of your children, we will be providing you with detailed background information for the topics covered at school. This will allow you to reinforce their subject knowledge and help them reflect on their faith.

**In RE, from the 10<sup>th</sup> March 2014, your child will be studying:  
Lent/Easter–Giving.**

**Below is a brief outline of what your child’s year group will focus on and some background information on this part of the Liturgical Year:**

<b>Reception</b>	<b>GROWING</b> - Looking forward to Easter
<b>Year 1</b>	<b>CHANGE</b> - Lent: a time for change
<b>Year 2</b>	<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b> - Lent: an opportunity to start anew
<b>Year 3</b>	<b>GIVING ALL</b> - Lent: remembering Jesus’ total giving
<b>Year 4</b>	<b>SELF DISCIPLINE</b> - Celebrating growth to new life
<b>Year 5</b>	<b>SACRIFICE</b> - Lent: a time of aligning with the sacrifice made by Jesus
<b>Year 6</b>	<b>DEATH &amp; NEW LIFE</b> - Celebrating Jesus’ death and resurrection

**Lent – a time for renewing our relationship with God.**

Traditionally Lent is the Liturgical season of 40 days leading up to Easter Sunday that starts with Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday (the day before Easter Sunday). It does not include each Sunday as this day is linked with the resurrection. The number 40 has symbolic significance. It is a traditional number symbolising a lifetime. In the Bible it is used to suggest a generation or a symbolic lifetime...a period of growth and change. Thus Moses stayed on the Mountain of God for forty days (Exodus 24:18 and 34:28), the spies were in the land for forty days (Numbers 13:25), Elijah travelled forty days before he reached the cave where he had his vision (1 Kings 19:8), Nineveh was given forty days to repent (Jonah 3:4), and most importantly, prior to undertaking his ministry, Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness praying and fasting (Matthew 4:2).

The Liturgical Season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and ends with the evening Mass on Holy Thursday. However, the days of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Saturday are also special days of prayer and reflection on the Passion of Jesus (the events leading up to his death). Lent is a time to reflect on our relationship with God in order to see what we need to do in our lives to become the person that God calls us to be. It is a time to seek healing and reconciliation, and a time for renewing and restoring our commitment to God. It is a time for shedding some of the ‘baggage’ of our lives that prevents us from being totally open to God and for modelling our lives on the values that Jesus lived. The season of Lent challenges us to ask the questions: “What is it in my life that is in need of healing?” “What could I change in my life in order to more fully live the Gospel values?” “What could I do to make my relationship with God stronger at this point in time?”

In the Lenten season Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are special days where Catholics are asked to ‘fast’ (only eat what is necessary for good health and go without the ‘luxury’ or extra quantity of foods) and to abstain from eating meat. Many Catholics will eat fish on these days or even have vegetarian meals. The law of fasting only pertains to Catholics between the ages of eighteen and sixty, who are not suffering from any illnesses that would be affected by fasting.

However, many Catholics introduce these customs at a younger age and continue as long as possible.

The season of Lent is marked with a special liturgy on Ash Wednesday during which participants are marked with the sign of the cross traced on their foreheads using ashes. (Your child will receive Ashes in school on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> of March.) Ashes are a symbol of mourning and penance in the Bible (See Esther 4:1 and Job 42:6) and so, drawing on this custom, the early church asked penitents to fast, wear sackcloth, sit in dust and ashes, and put dust and ashes on their heads to show their sorrow and desire to live differently. While we no longer normally wear sackcloth or sit in dust and ashes, the customs of fasting and putting ashes on one's forehead as a sign of mourning and penance have survived to this day. These are two of the key elements of Lent. The ashes also remind us of our own mortality. No matter what we accomplish in this life our bodies will eventually return to dust, but the spirit of the person will come fully into the presence of God. The ashes are made by burning palm fronds which have been saved from the previous year's Palm Sunday. They are then blessed by a priest -- blessed ashes having been used in God's rituals since the time of Moses (Numbers 19:9-10, 17).

Ash Wednesday is the beginning of the Lenten journey. It is a special day on which to reflect and decide upon what special 'promise' to make for the Lenten season. Catholics are asked to make a special 'promise' on Ash Wednesday to commit themselves to something they could do in their lives to help them renew their relationship with God and live the Gospel values more fully.

#### **Criteria for Lenten promises:**

- ***Will living out this 'promise' help me live the Gospel values?*** It is important to understand why we choose to do something, and to choose something that will fit into the spirit of Lent. Sometimes people choose to "give something up" and while this can be appropriate, it needs to be something that helps us focus on the meaning of Lent. For example, it would not be appropriate to "give up" food items that were essential for health, but it might be appropriate to "give up" eating excess food or unhealthy food and contribute the money saved towards Project Compassion to go to people who are struggling to find enough food to keep their families alive.
- ***Will this be manageable and practical?*** Avoid vague Lenten promises and things that cannot be sustained for the forty day Lenten journey. For example, it could be easy for students to say, "I'm going to be a person like Jesus every day during Lent" but what does this mean in reality? Make the Lenten promise specific and achievable for a period of six weeks.
- ***Will this be challenging so that it will help me grow as a person?*** The season of Lent is about growing closer to God and being people who really live the Gospel values, so Lenten promises need to reflect this aim. Whatever we promise needs to push us that bit further out of our comfort zones, and not just be a convenience that doesn't allow us to really enter into the season of Lent. For example, eating fish and chips on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday would not be challenging at all for many people. Eating a simple meal of tinned fish, rice and peas might be healthier and help remind us that not all people have access to whatever food they would like. The money saved from buying fish and chips could be given to Project Compassion.

## What Lenten 'promises' could be made for different days of the Lenten journey?

Possibilities include:

- Take some extra time for prayer each day or each week
- Give someone in need a helping hand and a little bit of time
- Do an extra chore around the house without being asked
- Pray for a person / country / situation in need of justice
- Fast and donate the savings to Project Compassion
- Forgive someone for something that has been eating away at you for some time
- Speak to all people with respect
- Reflect on your talents and how you could use them more effectively
- Befriend a person who has been left out or marginalised
- Give a family member some quality and quantity time
- Be appreciative of other people's gifts and don't put anyone down
- Take time to thank God for people who love and care for you
- Pray for members of your family
- Put all rubbish in the bin and do not do anything to harm the environment
- Thank at least three people every day to affirm others and show they are appreciated
- Each week give 50% of your pocket money to Project Compassion each week
- Imagine Jesus was with you for the day, in person. Ask him one key thing that he would like you to change or to do, to become a better person.

Lent is about revising our values and training our attitudes. It is a bit like 'spring cleaning' our lives so we can throw out habits that hinder our relationship with God, and we can build new habits that strengthen our relationship with God. Lent is an opportunity for growth.

### Suggested Activities – Lenten journey

As we prepare for Easter during this Lenten season we are reminded of the three disciplines commonly practised during this time: fasting, praying and giving.

Below are some activities you may wish to do at home or at school which reinforce these three practises.

- Make an alms / collection box at home. Decorate it with symbols expressing the value and joy of sharing or use **the Catholic Children's Society or Missio Collection Box provided by the school.** Collect money from saving through not having other things. **We will collect them in on the first day of the Summer Term Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> April.**
- As a family think of someone within your community who you could help during this Lenten time.
- Make a cross out of cardboard and divide it into six sections – for the five weeks of Lent and Holy Week. Decide on a sign of love / peace to perform each week (helping another person, giving something up, making someone smile). Colour after each week until you have a cross of coloured mosaic.

- Create a Prayer area within your home (on the kitchen table, the fridge, window sill) where you can display a small cross, some pictures and flowers. Try to use it as a family each day and night.
- Research the 'Stations of the Cross'. Print a set from the internet (devotionsandprayers.com.uk) and add descriptions. Some may be able to design and make their own using paint, pencils, pastels, clay and other materials.
- Choose a Lenten hymn (lyrics available online) and try to draw / paint one or more of the verses.
- Take time to research and explore the websites of both *Cafod* and *Missio*. These provide some good material for children to access.
- Take time to reflect Daily, on the 'Walk with Me' Lenten Calendar and on a Wednesday to read the 'Wednesday Word'.
- Make a cross of paper and attach to the wall. Trace the outline of the hand of each family member. Then each member writes something special they plan to do on their paper hand and attaches it to the cross as a reminder.  
Paper flowers could be added on Holy Saturday to express the blossoming of these actions.

### **Further Help and Guidance**

Please find below further explanation of some of the terms, colours and symbols used during Lent and Holy Week. We hope that both you and your child / children find these useful.

**Lent:** Preparation - through prayer, fasting and alms giving - for Holy Week and the celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus. Begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Thursday in the evening – approximately 6 weeks.

**Liturgical colours:** Different colours are used throughout the Church's year. During Lent purple is used to represent penance. Whilst during Holy Thursday and throughout the Easter season white and gold are used to symbolise triumph and joy.

**Passion Sunday:** Sometimes called Palm Sunday because we bless palms and hear the reading of the passion of Jesus. Christians celebrate Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem to face his suffering and death.

**The Paschal or Easter Triduum:** Begins on Holy Thursday in the evening and ends on Easter Sunday in the evening.

*Paschal Triduum* means the *Three Days of Passover*. For the Jewish people, Passover celebrates the great event when God delivered the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt to freedom. On the night between Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday, we keep the Easter Vigil. We prepare for this Vigil in the washing of feet on Holy Thursday and in the veneration of the cross on Good Friday. We also prepare by fasting.

**The Stations of the Cross:** They are a devotion which commemorates the Passion and death of Jesus. There are 14 in total and they each represent an event which occurred at Calvary on Good Friday.

**The Last Supper:** Through the Last Supper Jesus established the Eucharist or Mass as a way in which he could remain always with his followers.

Thank you for your continued support,  
K Knipe  
RE Leader