

Great Fast Plans for Busy Families

Whole Family Catechesis Session Leader Guide

by Janet Schaeffler, OP

What Is in This Resource

This resource is designed to help families to reflect on The Great Fast (Lent) and decide together on what they will do differently to observe this time of the liturgical year. This kit gives you the pieces needed to hold a single session in a parish or school setting, including:

- Instructions for leaders
- Talking points on The Great Fast and the gift of time
- Four activities from which to choose, each with leader instructions, family instructions, and handouts
- Closing prayer

Who Is the Event For?

This session will work well with whole families (parents/grandparents and children sitting together), but also can be offered for parents alone (e.g. if their children will be in a separate class). This session should lead to family discussions and decisions about how to spend the Great Fast together.

If offering this session to parents alone, some of the activities can be given to the parents to take home and complete with their children (e.g. Little Lenten Living boxes and “Take Time” game).

Preparations

- Schedule the time and place for this family workshop, reserving the necessary space(s) on the parish calendar.
- Design a flyer/handout to publicize the gathering to all families. Encourage your “regulars” to invite family members, friends, or neighbors. You may want to plan it in place of your regularly scheduled catechetical sessions.
- Promote the gathering on your website, in your parish bulletin, and with weekend announcements. Email your parent contact lists.
- Gather and prepare the materials needed.

Selecting Activities

This resource includes four activities that you can choose from for your event. The number of activities you choose will depend on the time you have available. You may only be able to offer two or three activities, but also have the option of sending others home.

This kit has a separate file for each activity, which includes the leader instructions, family instructions, and any handouts.

1. "Take Time" Game	15-20 min.	A board game in which a family discusses how they spend their time and the implications for their faith and the Great Fast.
2. Little Lenten Living Boxes	15-20 min.	Families prepare a box filled with slips of paper (describing simple Lenten actions) they can pick from throughout the Great Fast.
3. Our Great Fast Calendar	10-15 min.	An activity in which families choose what Lenten activities they will do this year.
4. Almsgiving	10-15 min.	Families learn about Development and Peace.

Sample Schedules

This session is designed for a period of 60 to 90 minutes. Activities could be done all together as a large group or as learning centres with rotation (half the group could do activity 1 while the other does activity 2, then both could switch).

One Possible Whole Family Schedule (75 minutes)

7:00pm – 7:05pm	Refreshments, welcome, and hospitality
7:05pm – 7:20pm	Introduction (Talking Points)
7:20pm – 7:40pm	Activity 1 or 2: "Take Time" Game / Little Lenten Living Boxes
7:40pm – 7:55pm	Activity 3: Our Great Fast Calendar
7:55pm – 8:10pm	Activity 4: Almsgiving
8:10pm – 8:15pm	Closing Prayer

One Possible Parents-only Schedule (60 minutes)

7:00pm – 7:05pm	Refreshments, welcome, and hospitality
7:05pm – 7:20pm	Introduction (Talking Points)
7:20pm – 7:40pm	Activity 3: Our Great Fast Calendar
7:40pm – 7:50pm	Activity 4: Almsgiving
7:50pm – 7:55pm	Explain/distribute activities 1 and/or 2 for home use
7:55pm – 8:00pm	Closing Prayer

Room Set-Up

- Tables for families to gather and work, as well as supplies.
- Tables for the activities (if done as learning centers), with all the supplies needed and places for families to talk and work together.
- Table for refreshments: coffee, tea, juice, or snacks.

Staff

A catechetical leader is needed to lead the families through the conversations and activities.

It would be helpful to have catechetical leaders who can help with each activity, answering questions or providing encouragement. The activity files include a short introduction that could be given in smaller groups if the activities are offered as learning centers.

A hospitality team of three or four people can welcome the families, set up and serve refreshments, and clean up.

Talking Points: Great Fast, A Gift of Growing Time

The Gift of Time

“Time” might be something we often talk about, e.g.: “next **time**,” “when we have **time**,” “an enjoyable **time**,” “how much **time**.” How often do we **take time** to appreciate and reflect on the gift of time?

- There are ordinary **times**.
- Throughout our days we experience unique, exceptional **times**.
- Each and every moment of **time** is a gift.
- All of our **times** help us be a follower of Jesus.

Church Time

We celebrate, remember, and mark **time** in all kinds of ways: the lunar or solar calendar; the fiscal-year calendar; the school-year calendar, etc. As a Ukrainian Catholic family, we also celebrate **time** through our liturgical year calendar. The Ukrainian Catholic Church year begins on Sept. 1 and the centre of the Liturgical Year is the resurrection of Christ - Pascha. It is the Feast of Feasts and therefore we prepare ourselves to celebrate this Feast in various ways throughout the Great Fast.

You might want to use a visual (poster or PowerPoint) to illustrate the liturgical year calendar - included.

Great Fast Time

We are now beginning/in the season of The Great Fast. The Great Fast is a gift of **time** to us. Each year the church invites us to slow down, to take **time** during this season:

- take **time** for a “retreat”
- take **time** to pay attention to how we are growing as followers of Jesus
- take **time** to deepen and intensify our Baptismal promises

During this sacred season of The Great Fast the church invites us to live more deeply three practices which are a part of our lives all the **time**; The Great Fast is a season to especially concentrate upon them and deepen them: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

- **Prayer** keeps our relationship with God alive and vibrant. The Great Fast encourages us to take **time** to pray in new ways, to pray alone and with others, to participate fully in liturgy, to take **time** to listen to God.
- **Fasting**: During the Great Fast we often fast by reducing the amount of food that we eat (and share the money we’ve saved with the needy). We can also fast from other things: criticizing, complaining, anger, self-concern, worry, negativity, etc.
- **Almsgiving**: Often we think of almsgiving as the giving of money to help others. That is important, but we can also give of ourselves, our time, our talents etc.

Sometimes, when The Great Fast begins:

- We decide to do the same thing we’ve done every year (that could be very good)
- Our “resolutions” are ones we do by ourselves (which could be very good)

Perhaps, though, this year we might think of some new things to do. We might think of some things that all of us in the family could do together.

Activities

To really use our **time** well during this Great Fast, it will be helpful to specifically and concretely make plans for these 40 days. We’ll do that with some different activities. Each activity will guide our thoughts, conversations, and definite plans for The Great Fast and give us tangible reminders to take home to remind us of our plans and resolutions.

Link For Catholic Relief Services – Rice Bowl Materials - <http://crsmaterials.crs.org/us-materials/rice-bowl/>

Closing Prayer

When the time for the activities has finished, gather all the families together for a closing prayer and sending forth.

NOTE: *you may need to adapt the prayer below depending on the activities you choose to offer:*

Leader: As we close our time together and go forth to our homes—
unique places of God’s presence with us—
we ask God’s blessings upon us, upon our families,
and upon these days of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

Invite each family to hold their Rice Bowl, calendar, and/or Little Lenten Living box in their hands.

Encouraging God who calls us to growth,
we ask you to continue to bless us.

In these Fast days ahead, help us to be more and more aware of your love.
Nudge us gently each day to live as your followers.

Bless our *The Lenten boxes, calendars, and Rice Bowls* – *(adjust based on activities used)*
symbols of our resolutions,
symbols of our desire to live more deeply our Baptismal promises.

Strengthen us as we take time
as we compassionately live all the moments of our time
as we share our time with each other and with those we need us.

We ask this through our Lord, Jesus Christ,
your Son, who lives and reigns with you and
the Holy Spirit, God forever and ever.

All: Amen.