Make a family plan for Lent

One of the easiest ways for your family to have a fruitful Lent is simply to take the time to plan what you want to do. It's hard to do Lent on the hoof, but taking fifteen minutes to make a plan before Lent begins (oh, okay, you can make a plan anytime during Lent) can make a big difference.

This can be as simple or involved as you like . . . the point is to be intentional, which is why you're going to write it down. Here's what to do:

Print out the Our family plan for Lent and my Lent plan sheets.

- Our Family Plan for Lent: This is a simple table with spots for each family member to put his or her name and how he/she plans to pray, fast, and give this Lent. Use this sheet to write down your Lenten commitments.
- My Lent Plan: In addition, you may also print out one of these sheets for each person for each week of Lent, using it to keep track of how well you keep your commitments.

Brainstorm ideas.

Brainstorm ways that your family can do each of these things. A good place to begin is Fasting, Giving, Praying: 25+ Ideas for What Kids & Teens Can Do for Lent; this article also contains a basic primer on Lent, as well as fasting and abstinence guidelines. This is also a good article to look at if you're used to the idea of "giving up" something for Lent, but haven't usually brought in the practices of giving and praying during Lent. All three are key to renewing our baptism during this penitential season!

In addition, check out these links for a wealth of ideas:

- The USCCB Lent page is loaded with more resources and ideas than you can shake a stick at. These are basic, boots-on-the-ground, spiritually focused ideas.
- The Lenten Season in Our Catholic Home from Shower of Roses contains dozens of ideas for doing Lent, especially with young children. Check out ideas for a crown of thorns, a Jesus tree, coloring pages, and more.
- Lenten Activities for Children, a compilation of ideas and resources from CatholicMom.com.

These three resources contain dozens of ideas . . . if you start to get overwhelmed, remember to focus on picking just a few in the three basic categories.

Brainstorm these ideas together as a family.

Steer kids toward developmentally appropriate, achievable practices. For instance, a six-year-old might simply focus on folding his hands reverently during prayer, while a teen might commit to reading Scripture.

Alternatively, decorate your prayer space with a large, bare branch; as your kids follow through with their commitments, invite them to attach a green leaf (made of paper or fabric) to the branch. By the end of Lent, you should have a beautiful tree representing the new life of Easter.

Bonus: Make a calendar.

The USCCB offers a cool Lenten calendar with a different idea for each day. You can print it out, or adapt the idea by writing down your own “agenda” for each day of Lent. This is a bonus activity for the extra-motivated—remember, keep your focus on the basics!