

Helping Children and Youth Participate in Lent

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Which gets more attention—Advent and Christmas or Lent and Easter? The season of Lent is often poorly recognized and even ignored. Lent moves us to the most important celebration of the Christian year—Easter. Here are some simple things you can do to help young people prepare for Easter.

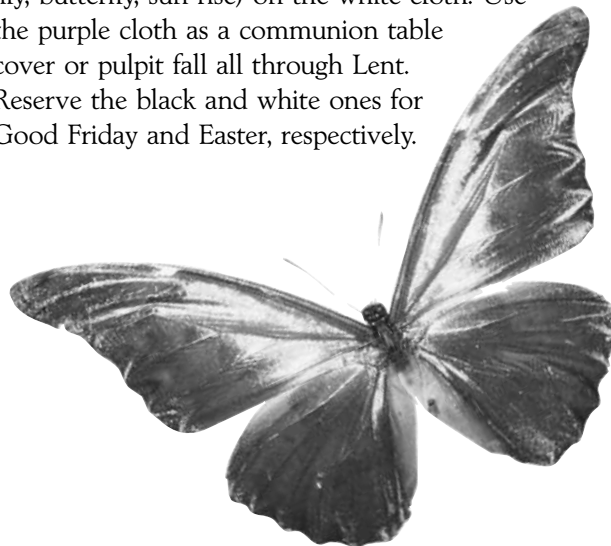
- ❑ Buy and use the book *Things to Make and Do for Lent & Easter*, by Martha Bettis Gee, Bridge Resources, 1988
- ❑ With the youth, set up a “stations of Lent” walk which can be used by the congregation and community guests all through Lent. (Find a plan for doing this at www.presbyterian.ca. Click on “Resources” on the home page and go to “Equip, Feb. 05” and look for the article “Six Things You Can Do For Lent In Your Congregation.”



- ❑ With the children/youth, go shopping for purple, black and white cloth. Sew or glue symbols of Lent (e.g. palm branches, paschal candle) on the purple cloth. Sew or glue symbols of Good Friday (e.g. bag of coins, crown of thorns) on the black cloth. Sew or glue symbols of Easter (e.g. rooster, empty cross, lily, butterfly, sun rise) on the white cloth. Use the purple cloth as a communion table cover or pulpit fall all through Lent. Reserve the black and white ones for Good Friday and Easter, respectively.



- ❑ Set up a spirituality centre. A labyrinth may be borrowed from the national office (800-619-7301).



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- If you have the book *Seasons of God's Love* (Jeanne Fogle, Geneva Press, 1988) in your church library read it to the children. (This book is sadly out of print.) This book tells the story of the Christian year, starting at Advent. This will help children see how and where Lent, Good Friday and Easter "fit" with other seasons and helps them see the bigger picture of God's plan for humankind.
- Be prepared—adults—for children or youth to ask, "Why did Jesus have to die?" How will you answer? This is a tough question and you must decide what words you will choose. Here are some options, all of which I believe are biblical and have a basis in some of the interpretations of atonement found in Christendom.

"Jesus could see a lot of evil and bad things in the world. Even though he lived a life of non-violence, he gave himself up to die on a cross because he believed that it would show people that love will overcome evil."

"Jesus' death on the cross is a powerful expression of God's love for people. This leads us, as Christians, to live with love for others."

"Jesus cared deeply for people and cares deeply for us today. Even though we can be sinful, Jesus died for us so it will be easier for us to connect with God."¹

You may, of course, simply say, "We don't always understand suffering and death, but we do know that Jesus was raised by God from the dead and is with us whenever we call on him."

¹Note from writer: While this "substitution" theory of atonement is biblical and commonly expressed, it is my least favourite way of expressing atonement to children. You may, of course, simply say, "We don't always understand suffering and death, but we do know that Jesus was raised by God from the dead and is with us whenever we call on him."