

What to do after Church

Many families never discuss what happened at church each Sunday. Send home a family newsletter suggesting that families make the following part of their routines. It will reinforce your Sunday School lessons, provide valuable feed-back to parents as to what their children are learning and where they might be able to help at home, and help parents to get the most out of the Sunday service by reflecting on what they have experienced. As they walk or drive home, family members take turns telling one thing they learned at church that day that they didn't know before, one thing that they really enjoyed or that amused them, one thing that saddened them, one thing they didn't understand (a word, a concept, an idea, an action), and one thing they'd like to learn more about.

A Church Book Club

Book Clubs are very popular these days. Why not consider starting one at church. Participants in the group all read a religious book recommended by one of the members, or your minister if you don't know where to start. Meet once a month and agree to have the book read by that date so you can discuss it. Start with books that are not too difficult a read. 'Religious' can have a wide definition. It might be a biography of someone such as Mother Theresa, or Gladys Aylward (as mentioned in this month's Bulletin Insert.) Or it could be a devotional book, a Christian allegory, a book by a modern religious writer, or a book known to be controversial (in which case you might need to invite your clergyperson to meet with you to answer any questions)

Some suggestions: Any book by Philip Yancey, God Came Near by Max Lucado, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek by Annie Dillard, The Crosswicks Journals by Madeleine L'Engle, Mary Called Magdalene by Margaret George. Some of these books may only be available second hand. Try the Used Book section at Amazon.com.

A Lent Tree

Either set this up in your Sunday School area and use it when the whole group meets together, or, with the consent of your rector, set it up in the church and 'decorate' it on the Sundays of Lent.

Ask for the loan of a small artificial Christmas tree. Set it up for the Sunday before Ash Wednesday and talk about it being an evergreen - a symbol of eternal life since it does not lose its needles in winter.

On the first Sunday of Lent, add purple bows to the tree and drape a purple cloth around its base. Purple is the symbol of royalty and of penitence. Tell children it shows that Jesus is King of all the world and also that, during Lent, we are asked to think about the things we have done wrong and be sorry.

On Lent 2, talk about the money Judas was paid to betray Jesus. To represent the thirty pieces of silver, hang a few nickles or dimes in a small see through bag (net or organza) from the tree.

On Lent 3, talk about the Passover meal Jesus shared with his friends. Hang a 'chalice' from the tree. Make it from a plastic wine goblet covered with tinfoil.

For Lent 4, make a yarn hanger for a traditionally shaped pretzel and hang it from the tree. Explain that the pretzel looks like hands folded in prayer and Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane before his crucifixion.

Lent 5. Make a yarn hanger for a large nail. Talk about how Jesus suffered on the cross.

Lent 6. Put a palm branch made from construction paper or a real palm branch from your Palm Sunday branches on the cloth at the foot of the tree.

Before Easter, have the children make many brightly coloured butterflies. Remove the purple cloth and replace it with white. Take all the Lenten symbols from the tree and transform it by replacing them with all the butterflies.

A Teaching Checklist

Sometimes our teaching gets in a rut. It is so easy to copy a colouring page and hope that, with a story, this will fit the bill. In these rather drab, cold days of winter, we need to keep the excitement going. Test yourself: how many of these activities have you incorporated into your classes since Christmas?

flannelboard	a field trip
drama	a guest speaker
puppets	a hands on craft
debate	painting
movie	music
finger play	games
creative writing of some sort	posters or maps

No one would expect all of them! Such a class would be too busy by far, but using one or two of these will keep your classes lively, appeal to those who learn in a more active way and keep the children coming to see what's next!