



Interim Youth Director, Drew Baker, points out the iconography to our GOYA during a trip to Annapolis, Maryland.

“And then shall they Fast..”

Preparing your family for Great and Holy Lent

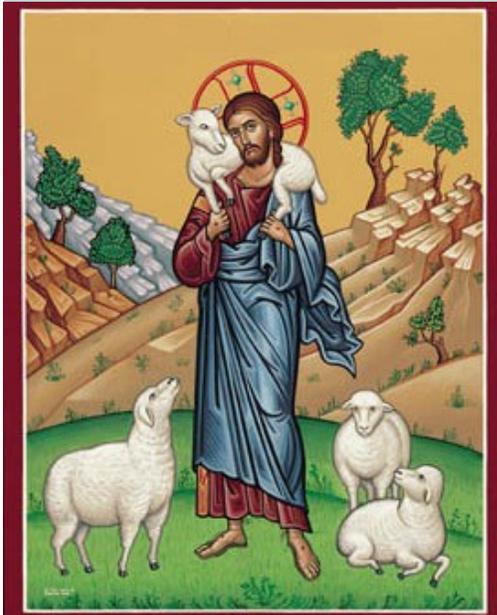
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Sts. Constantine and Helen Richmond, Virginia

Fasting as a Family

Family Fasting Tips

- Meet as a family before Lent and decide together how you will fast using input and suggestions from children.
- Remind them that fasting is not just about diet.
- The primary goal of Great Lent is not “giving up” something.
- What comes out of our mouths should be regulated just as much as what goes into them.
- Make achievable practices that you know you can follow until Pascha.
- Strongly consider picking up a family prayer routine.
- Practicing charity as a family during Lent is very powerful.
- Remember Matthew 6:16-18



In our busy lives it can be a challenge to make Christ the center of our family’s activities. Calendars fill up months in advance with various activities and commitments, and as this happens many of us feel that at times we “drift” away from the Church. This type of lifestyle may seem contrary to problems that were once solved by Holy Traditions, but that notion could not be more wrong. The beauty of our Faith is that it so often provides time-tested solutions that can offer relief from the most modern struggles.

One of the best tools the Church provides for redirecting our lives toward Christ after we “drift” is the practice of fasting. It is with this in mind that your Youth Office provides this quick reference to using the observation of Great Lent as a tool to help you and your family have a meaningful and powerful Lenten Season that brings you closer to God and each other.

One of the most effective ways to creating a meaningful Lenten experience for you and your family is to take this week and guide them in a pre-Lenten talk or meeting in which you discuss the importance of Lent. During this discussion you can work together to create a fasting plan. Parents should discuss ahead

of time what might be the best fit for the family, but having input from the children (especially when it is guided by the parents) makes Lent an empowering process for kids and teens while also modeling the type of spiritual actions we should take as adults.

A traditional fast is often thought of as dietary— many give up meat, fish, dairy and even oils. This may not always be practical for children, and just because a family refrains from certain foods does not necessarily mean it is making a stronger connection with God. Another common approach to Lent is “giving up” things. This practice can also be powerful, but the actions or restraint must focus on a strengthening of the Soul rather than a type of resolution. When your family meets, try to make *goals* rather than just restrictions. Decide upon your plan together, and help each other stick to it. You will be surprised how much fun, rewarding and genuinely good this experience can be for everyone. Our spiritual lives, like American families today, are in constant motion. The beauty of the Lenten tradition is that it helps us monitor and direct that motion toward Christ. On the next page are some suggestions for family goals. Have fun and καλή δύναμη (good strength)!

Matthew 6:16-18

“And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”



Suggestions for family Lenten goals are on page 2

Christ HIMSELF reminds us that fasting is not a sad event. We should show a disciplined joy and strong resolve. It is fine and sometimes helpful for us to talk about our Lenten journey with others, but we should not fall into complaint or judgment about our own fast or the practice of other people.



Ideas for a Family Approach to Great Lent

Fasting Ideas— *Your fast does not need to only focus on diet or giving up something. Here are some other ideas for making a family's fast meaningful. Pick from a few of these suggestions this year, or come up with your own. Just make sure you stick with them. Starting and completing a goal is one of the best skills we can model for our children. Also, resist the temptation to use the Lenten period as a time to discipline kids or tell them what they need to change about themselves (ie- "Your language is bad. You should give up cursing for Lent."). These might all be good things, but either try to steer your kids towards choosing those goals themselves, or pick things as a family that everyone can work on together.*

- **Daily Prayers**— A family prayer routine is a great practice for us all to observe during Lent, and hopefully continuing on after Pascha. The Orthodox Study Bible contains Morning and Afternoon prayers (located toward the back of the book). Other prayers can be found here http://www.goarch.org/chapel/liturgical_texts/daily_prayers . the reading of sections as a family, and make it part of your daily routine. Each set takes no more than 6-7 minutes.
- **Create a Prayer List**— Before Lent begins, or during the first week, have each family member write down people to include on the family's prayer list. Keep the list and pray for everyone by name each night. Include family, friends, neighbors, and even encourage children to pray for people who may not be their closest of friends. A family can read 50-100 names in a minute or two with a prayer before or after.
- **Bible Verses**— Read a bible passage each night as a family. This could be done at meals, before bed or in the morning. Many Smart Phones have a "Daily Readings" application available. Our Archdiocesan website updates them everyday, and you can even receive them by e-mail (great for Teens with accounts) at <http://www.goarch.org/chapel> .
- **Charity**— Working together as a family to help charitable and community groups shows children and teens that we are called to actively help our fellow man. Combine your prayer life and scriptural readings with active experiences like volunteering to help the needy or cleaning up the community. Richmond residents can visit sites like <http://www.handsonva.org/>. With internet resources, it does not take much to find a group that could use your help, and charities are usually good at providing jobs for volunteers of all ages.
- **Eliminating Gossip**— A great rule to teach children is *we watch what comes out of our mouth during the fast, not just what we put into it*. Keep each other accountable, and help one another speak positively about family, friends, and events. This can quickly turn into a very healthy habit in just a few weeks that will bring the whole group closer together in Christ's image.
- **Limiting TV/Internet/Social Media**— Children might come up with this on their own. A lot of teens give up Facebook, Twitter or other outlets during Lent. Parents can join in on this, or also promote a cut down of time spent watching TV. Try to replace the time with family activities. As it gets warmer it is easier to go play outside as a family or even enjoy a walk.
- **Attending Services/Going to Services Earlier**— This can be a great time to change attendance habits for Holy Services. Try making concrete goals like attending a certain number of liturgies and pre-sanctified services over Lent. Check the Church calendar for services, and put them on your family calendar. Families can also work together to get to the Services earlier. Set a specific goal for each Sunday that is reasonable and achievable like trying to get to Liturgy for the Doxology or before the Epistle Reading.
- **Holy Confession**— Confession is one of the best tools we have in reconnecting with Christ and helping ourselves grow. Contact Father Nicholas or your Spiritual Father as soon as you can if you would like to partake in the sacrament of Holy Confession during the Lenten season. If scheduling is difficult, even making the appointment to visit with a priest after Pascha can be part of your Lenten goals.
- **Follow our Lenten Blog!**— Our Youth Office has created a Lenten Blog at GreatLent.wordpress.org. Each day we will post a challenge for children and teens. They will be small daily challenges and short video clips, but they will be updated each day. It is a great way to keep the fast in the forefront of your mind leading up to Pascha.



Our Lenten Blog! <http://GreatLent.wordpress.com>

We have created a Lenten Blog from the Youth Office at Sts. Constantine and Helen. Please follow along each day and comment. Feel free to share via twitter or facebook! Each day will have a new challenge, and various spiritual leaders in the Orthodox world have been asked to make custom "Video Messages" that we will post from time to time. The site is managed and updated by Drew Baker and Nick Junes, If you have any ideas for Lenten challenges, feel free to talk to us at church or e-mail us at youth@vagocathedral.org

I would like to personally wish you all καλή δύναμη (good strength) during Great Lent in 2013. Please include our Youth and Young Adult Ministries on your prayer list, and know you are all on ours. Thank you again to all of the incredible parishioners in Richmond for your help and support. See you all on the other side of the desert (metaphorically speaking)...

- **Drew Baker Interim Youth Director**