

Love and Mercy

Dear Parent(s),

During the Lenten season, we will be focusing on different aspects of Lent: its meaning, its symbols, its customs, and its traditions. Each week, your child will bring home Family Take-Home Pages, which are filled with activities that reinforce what we are discussing and learning in class. These Take-Home Pages are theme based and divided into three sections: Warm-Up Exercises, Getting Started, and Putting It into Practice. The theme for this week of Lent is Love and Mercy. May the activities suggested in these pages provide you with additional tools for nurturing your child's faith.

Warm-Up Exercises...

Gather the family around the Lenten candle. Have one member of the family light the candle and another read from Scripture. Then follow with a family discussion.

A reading from the letter of James 2:14–17

My friends, what good is it to say you have faith, when you don't do anything to show that you really do have faith? Can that kind of faith save you? If you know someone who doesn't have any clothes or food, you shouldn't just say, "I hope all goes well for you. I hope you will be warm and have plenty to eat." What good is it to say this, unless you do something to help? Faith that doesn't lead us to do good deeds is all alone and dead!

After sharing this passage with your family, lead them in a discussion in which everyone can participate. You may want to use the following questions:

What does St. James tell us about faith and good deeds?

How are we living our faith?

How are we helping others in need?

How can simple acts of love and mercy lead others to believe?

Getting Started...

Have another member of the family read this verse from the Gospel of Matthew (25:44–45).

Then the ones who pleased the Lord will ask, "When did we give you something to eat or drink? When did we welcome you as a stranger or give you clothes to wear or visit you while you were sick or in jail?"

The king will answer, "Whenever you did it for any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for me."

Ask your children if they can think of ways that your family can help others in need. Jot down their ideas. Together, look over all the suggestions and then decide what your family could do to bring God's love and mercy to someone in need.

Here are a few ideas to get you started:

1. Start your spring-cleaning early with a special goal in mind.

Have everyone go through their closets and drawers and gather clothing they can pass on to someone at a shelter. These clothes should be in great shape. Place clothes in a gift bag along with a new pair of socks or un-

Family Take-Home Pages

derwear. You might need to do a bit of shopping, but the shopping trip can be a family affair. Let your children help with the selections. You might want to pick up some toiletries, too. In the gift bags for young children, you might want to add some fun items like stickers, crayons, and a coloring book. Make sure you include a note of encouragement. It can be as simple as "From someone who cares."

2. Find an elderly parishioner or neighbor who doesn't have family nearby or someone who doesn't get around easily. Think of things your family could do for him/her. Maybe you could provide transportation to and from church on Sunday mornings. Your children will learn from your example of thoughtful consideration. They'll also have the perfect opportunity to brighten someone's day through conversations while traveling to and from church. Your family might also discover other ways they can help this elderly person from those conversations in the car! Thoughtful gestures such as "spring-cleaning" their lawn or garden, sharing a batch of

fresh-baked cookies, or treating your elderly neighbor or parishioner to lunch are other ways your family can reach out in love and compassion.

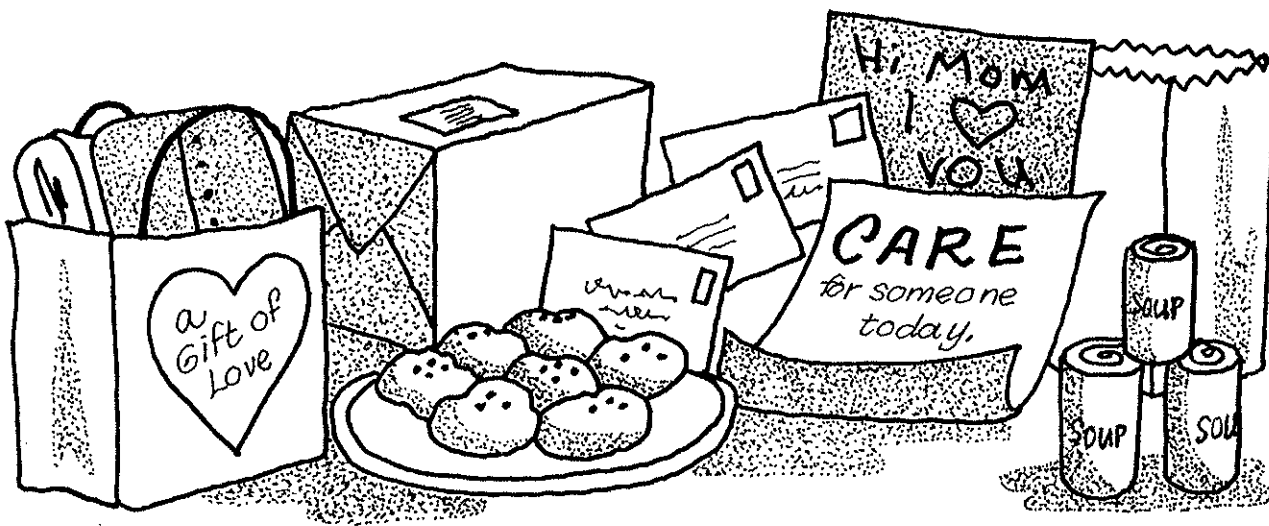
Thoughtful gestures are acts of kindness. Acts of kindness are fruits of love. Add more thoughtful gestures to your day by smiling at someone, greeting those you pass on the sidewalk or in the hallway at school, holding the door for the person behind you, letting someone else have the last seat on the bus. Your family can easily think of dozens more.

Putting It into Practice...

Share this Bible verse with your family.

The Lord God has told us what is right and what he demands: "See that justice is done, let mercy be your first concern, and humbly obey your God" (Micah 6:8).

There's no way around it. In order for faith to be real, it must be coupled with good works and kind deeds. So have your family choose from your "list of suggestions" and turn those "suggestions" into actions, one by one.



Almsgiving During Lent

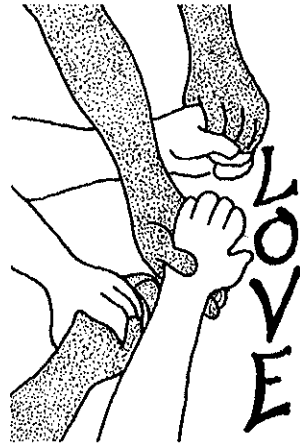
Making an extra-special effort to donate to the missions or to charities during the Lenten season is a tradition held by many families. For many children, receiving the annual “rice bowl” is a sure sign that Lent is here. Many parishes provide these familiar cardboard boxes to families at church or to children in religious education classes or parish schools.

Parents encourage their children to place weekly or even daily donations into these containers. For younger children, the act of placing money into the “rice bowl” (even when a parent gives them the money) reinforces the message that we are all called to love our neighbors, no matter how young we are or if those neighbors live next door or far away. When older children are encouraged to place money of their own into their “rice bowls,” they learn that they also are called to make sacrifices so that others can have what they need to live in dignity: food, shelter, job, education.

It is equally important for children to see that their parents are also placing money into the “rice bowl.” The money collected in these familiar cardboard boxes is donated to the Catholic Relief Fund at the end of the Lenten season.

Some families choose to support other groups or organizations. A designated jar, “kitty,” or piggy bank collects the donations throughout the season. Then, at the end of Lent, the donations go to that particular organization.

You could take the money you’ve collected during Lent and purchase items on an



organization’s “wish list,” and then donate them to that organization. These items might include crayons and coloring books for a crisis center, blankets for a pregnancy center, canned goods for a food bank, or toothbrushes and toothpaste for a homeless shelter.

Regardless of which charities a family chooses to support, gifts of love and compassion help brighten the lives of others and carry Christ’s light into the world.

For additional ideas of charities and organizations you may want to support, check out the following websites:

Catholic Relief Services:
www.catholicrelief.org

Habitat for Humanity: www.habitat.org

Special Olympics: www.specialolympics.org

Care Bags Foundation:
www.carebags4kids.org

Mychal’s Message:
www.mychalsmessage.org

Bread for the World: www.bread.org

Volunteer Match: www.volunteermatch.org

Points of Light Foundation & Volunteer Center National Network: www.pointsoflight.org

Sisters of Life: www.sistersoflife.org