

Almsgiving

40 Days of Giving During Lent

Giving to the poor is a key feature of most of the world's religions. In Christianity, giving is especially important during Lent. Almsgiving is one of the three traditional Lenten "pillars," along with prayer and fasting. This practice is modified for families to be an offering of food, rather than money. Food is a tangible thing for young minds to grasp and it also offers an opportunity to talk about hunger in your community.

Designed for Ages 6+

Materials

1. Large cardboard box
2. Materials for decorating the box: paper, markers, tape, and glue

Time Investment

30 minutes to make the box, 1 minute per day for 40 days, and time to deliver the box to the organization receiving the food.

How To

1. Before the 40-day period of food collecting is to begin, research a food pantry or nonprofit organization that would welcome 40 food items at the end of your collection period. The best match is an organization that accepts a wide variety of food items. One of the goals of the practice is for children to choose items they enjoy and to think about how these items will benefit others. Be sure to check and bring food items that are useful to the organization.
2. On Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, explain to the family that one of the pillars of Lent is to give alms. Alms are a monetary sacrifice to help people in need. Tell your family that your alms will be to give one food item per day from your pantry.

Almsgiving: 40 Days of Giving During Lent

3. Decorate the box and label it “The Giving Box.” As you are decorating, talk about the practice and how it will work: each day one family member will select something from the pantry to put in the box and, at the end of the 40 days, the box of food will be delivered to the organization that has been selected.

4. For each of the 40 days, take turns putting an item in the box. Choose a time of day to do this that fits into your family routine (at the beginning or end of dinner, first thing in the morning, last thing at the end of the day, etc.) Talk about hunger during this time. How do you feel when you are hungry? If you were hungry every day, what would you pray for?

5. Deliver the food as a family after Lent is over.

Notes

- One focus of almsgiving is to give out of our sustenance, not our excess. For this reason I suggest you challenge family members to choose their favorite foods for the box. Try not to “censor” what goes in to the box. If a child chooses a box of cereal that you were planning to use for the weekly breakfasts, challenge yourselves to eat something different for breakfast. If someone chooses a canned good that was needed for supper, go without and talk about how it feels to make changes or sacrifices for others.
- Make sure all food is unopened, unexpired, and is appropriate for the demographic that will receive the food.

Variations

- Find an organization that needs gently used household goods and choose one item from your house per day for 40 days.

- Give money each day for 40 days.
- Take the food weekly instead of storing it up for the entire 40 days.
- Do the activity during any 40-day period of time, not only Lent.
- Try to give one food item per day for an entire year.