

Published on *Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese* (<http://ww1.antiochian.org>)

Simple Tips for Keeping Lent in our Families

by [Virginia Nieuwsma](#) ^[1]

Let's be honest: how do we moms feel when we suddenly realize while we are in Liturgy, that the Gospel reading for the Sunday is the Prodigal Son, which cues us that Lent is around the corner? If you're like me, you start doing a mental checklist of all the meat that needs to be used up in the next few weeks, and what upcoming events are going to conflict with the fast and services. When does Holy Week fall? And whose birthday is getting trumped by Lent? (We have three family birthdays in late February and early March!)

Perhaps some of these collected words of wisdom from other Orthodox mothers will be encouraging.

1. Don't sweat the small stuff. Most parents find it's better to resist the temptation to read labels while shopping in the store, or to try to monitor what our older kids are choosing to eat when they aren't at home. Let's not set up standards of perfection that will quickly succumb to the practical realities of family life. The overall goal is that we and our children will cleanse our souls, simplify our lives, practice a greater degree of love and self sacrifice, and prepare for the Feast of Pascha. Our own father confessors can best guide us as to how to do this without ruining the atmosphere in our homes with Lenten grumpiness.
2. Do create a Lent-friendly kitchen. We can keep our pantries free of dairy-heavy snacks and Beef Jerky. Our food buying can set an example, and so can our choices. But then, we also need to remember that our children are still children! I'll never forget His Grace Bishop Joseph's exhortation when, at a women's retreat, a mother asked him, "How do we handle the fast with our children?" "Your fasting should be more rigorous than your children's fasting," he said. He went on to explain that what we do while they are watching is more important than what we make them do. Also, as the cooks, we can help them along by finding tasty, albeit simple recipes that they enjoy. Try the book *When You Fast: Recipes for Lenten Seasons* ^[2] by Catherine Mandell.
3. Do put thought into managing the family calendar. Life sure doesn't stop during Lent, does it? It relentlessly marches on with baseball playoff games, school plays, non-Orthodox family weddings, and western Easter gatherings. We have to decide at the beginning of each Lenten week what to do, and what to forgo. In this, there are two temptations: to try to make each service and live as if nothing else is happening, or to shrug and give up attempting extra Lenten efforts, since it's just too out of step with the rest of the world. With the former, we get after our kids if they aren't good sports about the fasting and church attendance. With the latter, we mostly ignore the holy season because of our kids' complaints or our own laziness. As always, we need to strive for balance.

Sister Magdalen reminds us in *Children in the Church Today* ^[3], being a wise parent "sometimes involves letting go temporarily of secondary aspects in order to concentrate on central things (faith, love, freedom, truth). We know that 'secondary' things contribute to the essentials, and we try to live in a way that makes this manifest, and to explain it to our young people. However, we may have to wait patiently while our children go through the experience of sorting out the *central* meaning of life for themselves." This good counsel extends to all of the Lenten disciplines. Let's go forward into this journey with enthusiasm, knowing that in due season we will "reap, if we faint not."

Practical suggestions for observing Lent:

1. Do pick one service a week to go to—but work around family member schedules. Sometimes we let one child pick a favorite service and then we attend it with him or her, and enjoy a Lenten restaurant meal together afterwards. The child loves the one-on-one time and it gives us a moment to talk about what we just experienced together in the service.
2. Find a church task during Lent and Holy Week for the kids to help with—prophora baking, egg dyeing, decorating the temple.
3. Talk about it! After dinner, ask, why do we fast? Discuss the Sunday observance that's upcoming.
4. Pick an alms project. Get a [coin box from OCMC](#) ^[4], find out how to help the charity supported by your parish, take up a family collection for the [IOCC](#) ^[5].
5. Put up this good fridge poster: "[My Lenten Journey](#)" ^[6], which tracks the time and suggests one simple way to keep Lent each of the 40 days.
6. Read good books that teach kids and moms about keeping the faith.
7. Listen to the music of the Church: [www.archangelsbooks.com](#) ^[7] or [www.ancientfaithradio.com](#) ^[8].
8. Purchase books about the saints, or this Bible story book: *The Bible For Young People* ^[9].
9. Unplug your life—turn off the TV. Unhook cable. Hide the X-box, get out into God's world by taking nature walks.

The contents of this website are copyright 2000-2014 Self-Ruled Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, an Archdiocese of the [Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East](#).

PRIVACY POLICY TERMS OF USE
ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN
ARCHDIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA

358 Mountain Road, Englewood, New Jersey 07631

archdiocese@antiochian.org | (201) 871-1355

[About](#) | [Clergy Resources](#) | [Contact](#) | [Site FAQ](#) | [Login](#)

© 2020 Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America

Source URL: <http://ww1.antiochian.org/content/simple-tips-keeping-lent-our-families>

Links:

- [1] <http://www.antiochian.org/author/nieuwsma>
- [2] <http://www.archangelsbooks.com/proddetail.asp?prod=SVSMANDE-01>
- [3] http://www.svspress.com/product_info.php?products_id=27&osCsid=cff8df7fd0f987ea5f68636d5d6c6f58
- [4] http://www.ocmc.org/resources/order_coin_boxes.aspx
- [5] <http://www.iocc.org/>
- [6] http://www.light-n-life.com/shopping/order_product.asp?ProductNum=MYLE500
- [7] <http://www.archangelsbooks.com/>
- [8] <http://ancientfaith.com>
- [9] <http://www.conciliarpress.com/books/from-our-bookstore/the-bible-for-young-people.html>