

NEW LIFE FOR THE CLASSROOM

As the school year goes by, Sunday school teachers sometimes need a fresh approach to give the class new life. Lent offers an answer. In the Sunday school classroom, just as in worship, the Lenten season can be a time of waiting and preparing.

Mark the Season With Color

Purple is the liturgical color for Lent. Accent the classroom with purple tablecloths, either plastic ones from a party store or fabric lengths. Buy purple tissue paper at a discount store, and cover tables or tuck it into canisters or gift sacks. Use purple candles on the worship table. Drape the classroom doorway. Use purple streamers down the center of tables or hanging from the ceiling. Tape construction paper crosses, one per week onto the streamers.

Other ways to mark the season with purple include:

- † wear purple
- † make purple prayer beads from dough
- † give out purple glass beads (from hobby stores)
- † make paper chain necklaces to wear
- † make paper chains to decorate the room, and print the links with Bible verses or prayers

Make the Sign of the Cross

Make a cross for your classroom. Lash branches together to form a cross, or make a cross "tree." Set a small tree limb in a bucket of gravel. Cut paper crosses, punch holes in them, and thread yarn through the holes. Tie paper crosses on the branches of the "tree."

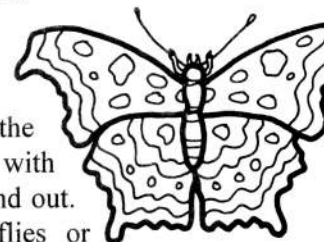


Make a construction paper windsock. Glue a paper cross on it. Attach purple streamers.

Let the children draw a cross outline. On the left of the horizontal bar of the cross, have each child print his or her name. Write "Jesus" down the vertical bar of the cross. On the right side, write "God." Trim around the letters for a lacy effect.

Celebrate the Symbols of Lent

Have young children pretend to be a caterpillar waiting, curled up for God's time. Tell them, "You are waiting for God to make you a butterfly. It is time! Crawl out of the cocoon, becoming free to fly. Fly around the room. How wonderful is our God who makes butterflies change!"



They might also pretend to be a flower bulb waiting through the cold winter, then reaching up with new shoots, and growing up and out. After pretending to be butterflies or bulbs, ask the children, "When do we have to wait?" (in line, for water, for supper, etc.) Tell them, "Next time we wait, remember that sometimes we have to wait for God's time."

Emphasize Prayer

Make praying hands. First, trace each child's hands. Help them cut out the paper hands. Glue them on paper, with the fingertips touching. Say, "The praying hands remind us that during Lent we take extra time to talk to God. We are quiet for some time so we can listen to what God has to say to us." Have the children write on the paper fingers:

- † times and places they will talk to God
- † times and places they can listen to God
- † prayer concerns

Read *Luke 22:39-46*, the story of Jesus' prayer at the Mount of Olives. Say, "In Luke we read of a time that Jesus' prayer was a struggle. It was hard work."

Ask, "When is it hard to pray?" Point out that often people wish God would take away hard situations, but when Jesus faced death, he knew that God's will was the greater good. It took hard prayer to go forward, but Jesus was given strength. In Lent we try to make sure we choose God's will rather than our own will, even if it is a struggle to do God's will. We would be missing God's best blessings if we chose our will rather than God's. Give the children a rock to take home to remember that sometimes hard praying is required.

Have some time in class for silent prayer. Encourage the children to get comfortable. Tell them, "Breathe in, and

breathe out, slowly. In and out. In and out. Keep breathing slowly. Relax your muscles, in your feet, your legs, your stomach, your arms, your neck and head. As you relax and breathe, think of God as near to you as your breath. Ask for God to be with you. God will be with you wherever you go."

Moving from Lent to Easter

When Easter is near, talk about symbols. Show the children a cross, lily, egg, butterfly, and heart (real or pictured). First, hold up a cross. Ask why it is seen in a church (*because Jesus died on a cross*).



Next show an Easter lily. Ask, "Do you know why people bring these flowers at Easter?" (*to remember Jesus was raised from the dead, giving Jesus' followers hope they can live with God forever*). Show how the Easter lily is shaped like a trumpet and is white, which is Easter's liturgical color.

Let the children make a trumpet shape with their hands.

Point to the egg. Say, "Here's the egg you are expecting for Easter. It's not dyed yet, and there's no candy, but any egg can be an Easter egg. The reason we have eggs at Easter is because new babies are born from eggs. Can you name some? (*turtles, ducks, chickens, etc.*) The egg reminds us that God doesn't leave things closed up and empty. God raised Jesus. God surprises us with life. God gives us life!"

Next show the butterfly. Say, "The butterfly is our reminder that God brings new life. The cocoon looks dead and empty, but a butterfly comes out!" Ask the children, "Why do you think we have a heart symbol for this season?" (*to stand for God's love, which Jesus came to show us*)

Let the children trace or cut symbols to decorate individual or class banners. Add the symbols to other decorations made earlier: the cross, mobile, or cross "tree."

Have the children replace the purple cloths and streamers with white ones. Celebrate that the waiting time of Lent is over, bringing an Easter season of rejoicing.

HELPING KIDS FEEL VALUED

1. **Spotlight kids.** Ask parents to give at least 10 pictures of their children. Make color photocopies of the photos and create a special poster for each "spotlight kid." Display posters in the church entryway for everyone to enjoy.
2. **Use the mail.** Send birthday cards, "We missed you" cards, a flier of upcoming activities, a thank-you postcard for singing in the Junior choir.
3. **Dial 'em up.** Set up a phone chain and give each child the list. Activate the phone chain weekly by calling the first person. Give kids a short affirming message to pass on.
4. **Listen.** Talk with kids and listen to them. Value their answers.
5. **Maintain eye contact.** Get on their level when talking with them. Look 'em in the eye.
6. **Bulletin board highlights.** Use the bulletin board to highlight kids' birthdays. Also use the bulletin board to display kids' work. Or, display their work on an art table in the church foyer.
7. **Make an encouragement box.** Decorate a large box and place it by the church entrance or coffee pot. Have church members regularly put small gifts or cards for children into the box. Gifts can include bookmarks, gum, pens or pencils, or homemade cookies.
8. **Host a children's day.** On a regular basis, have children participate in the Liturgy as greeters, readers, or choir members, etc.
9. **Designate adult greeters.** Have the adults welcome each child at the main doors of your church and in the Sunday school area.



10. **Allow talk time.** Give kids frequent opportunities to talk about themselves.
11. **Give meaningful and accurate affirmation.** Affirmation is much more meaningful when it's for something the child has control over (for example, praise for character qualities rather than looks).
12. **Make and use the "Kindness Worm."** Affirm kids for making others feel valued. Use an old tube sock to make a worm puppet. Cut a hole in a basket. Attach the worm to the basket. The worm appears whenever someone does or says something nice to someone else.
13. **Celebrate special events.** Make kids feel valued when they experience special events such as birthdays, the arrival of new baby sisters or brothers, personal achievements, moving to a new address, etc. Have the honoree stand and all others clap and cheer for him or her. Record the applause and give the child the cassette.

TIMESAIVING TIPS TO DOUBLE YOUR IMPACT

1. **Preview.** After you finish teaching a lesson, take 15 minutes to preview the next week's lesson or agenda. Note the supplies to gather and think about during the week.
2. **Use bedside preparation.** Break an upcoming lesson into pieces. Put your lesson beside your bed. Each night spend five minutes reading a lesson section. Jot notes about supplies to gather.
3. **Simplify your life.** Analyze what tasks you're doing that you can delegate to someone else. Then delegate and don't feel guilty.



4. **Clear away clutter.** Clear away clutter in your home, office, and schedule. A clutter-free environment is a calming one.
5. **Set and keep priorities.** Know your priorities for your personal health and growth, your job, your friendships, home, lifestyle, and finances. Say no to anything that comes along that doesn't fit within your priorities.
6. **Get organized.** Stay away from jotting notes and meeting times and to-do lists on napkins or paper scraps. Arrange and prioritize your daily schedule by using a system, such as Daytimer or Franklin. Then be sure and keep the organizer with you and use it.
7. **Treat yourself.** Block off a time to treat yourself during the week—take a walk, see a movie, read a good book.
8. **Take a break.** When you get teacher's block or the blahs, rather than spinning your wheels with frustration, take a break. Come back to the task refreshed.
9. **Delegate.** In the classroom, use student one-minute managers. Have one child be the offering-getter, another the attendance-taker, and so on. In job responsibilities, think about what is truly necessary for you to do yourself, then delegate other responsibilities.
10. **Get on local mailing lists.** When you receive mailings from local libraries, museums, and theatres, you can stay current with what's happening in your community and you can have resources at your fingertips when planning outings.
11. **Make clean-up a team sport.** Play lively music and time yourselves to see how long it takes to get the room back into its pre-event condition. Have fun doing the task together.
12. **Listen to books on tape.** Keep books (including the books of the Bible) that are recorded on audio cassettes in your car. Plug in one and listen as you run errands and go to and from work.
13. **Take time to be alone.** Find time to be alone. Time alone can become time with God.