



GO AND...

ASH WEDNESDAY WITH KIDS: THOUGHTS & IDEAS FOR ENGAGING SAINTS OF ALL AGES TO “GO AND” HAVE THE CONVERSATION

By Deacon Kristin Johnson

Ash Wednesday is traditionally the day when the Easter season begins. It is set at 40 days before Easter. The idea of Ash Wednesday is to remember our humanness and our mortality, and helps to prepare our hearts for the crucifixion and resurrection. Here are some ways that congregations can encourage families to celebrate Ash Wednesday:

1 – The day before the Ash Wednesday service, families can prepare for this time by celebrating ‘Pancake Day’. Because Ash Wednesday began the period of time when eggs and fats were forbidden, the tradition grew that the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday should be “pancake day”, also known as ‘Fat Tuesday’, or ‘Shrove Tuesday’. Families would have a pancake party to have a last day of celebration (and use up their eggs and fats) before the somberness of Lent began.

Families can celebrate this by having a pancake supper, either in their homes, or at church, all together. Make it a fun celebration by providing the “works” for the pancake toppings (whipped cream, chocolate chips, strawberries, etc.) As part of your evening, you can also share about this tradition and how other countries participate in this tradition too. One delightful tradition is the pancake day race, performed in Olney, England. Locals will don aprons and put pancake batter in hot skillet. They then race down the street, cooking and flipping their pancakes (at least three flips). The winner is the first to reach the end with a cooked pancake.

2 – Ash Wednesday Dinner

Encourage families to make an extra special deal for dinner on Ash Wednesday. Because the liturgical color for Lent is purple, families can dress up the dinner table all in purple. And if they are really daring, they can add purple food coloring to their food that night. This is just another way that helps send the message to the whole family that this is a big day, and important season, and it revolves around Jesus’ sacrifice for us.

3 – Encourage families to attend the Ash Wednesday service together. This is a great way to begin the season of Lent and communicate to their children that this is an important day. What is also beautiful about attending this service is that everyone get ashes, even the babies! It is through the act of having ashes placed upon one's forehead in the shape of a cross, that we are reminded that we are dust, and to dust we shall return. Attending this service also provides a wonderful opportunity to talk with their children about the meaning of Ash Wednesday. Did you know the ashes most church's use on Ash Wednesday are the burned-up palms from last Palm Sunday? Why do we get ashes on our foreheads? As a reminder of our own mortality, that one day everyone will die. But it's also important to remind kids that even though we all will die, that we will be with our Lord in heaven, and will see all our loved ones there too (this can help calm the fears of the littlest of ones who might fear never seeing a loved one again).

4 – After the Ash Wednesday service, encourage families to bury the Alleluia! Did you know that most protestant churches don't say the word "Alleluia" all during Lent? Not again until Easter! So, as a way to help kids understand why, a tradition began of "burying" the Alleluia the night of Ash Wednesday. Families can sing Alleluia songs, clap, dance, make it a big deal, then put it in a box and leave it there until Easter, not saying the word anymore.

It is my hope that through these meaningful, and even some fun, traditions, that it will help families connect to the greater meaning of this important day in the church community.

About the Author: Deacon Kristin Johnson is the Deacon of Faith Formation at First Lutheran church in Fremont, NE. With 23+ years of ministry experience, she has a heart for Youth Ministry and Cross+Generational relationships being at the core of the church. Kristin is married to Bishop Scott Johnson, and they have two teenage daughters: Ainsley and Alanna.