

**FAST, PRAY, GIVE**  
**LEADER GUIDE**

## GUIDELINES FOR SMALL GROUPS

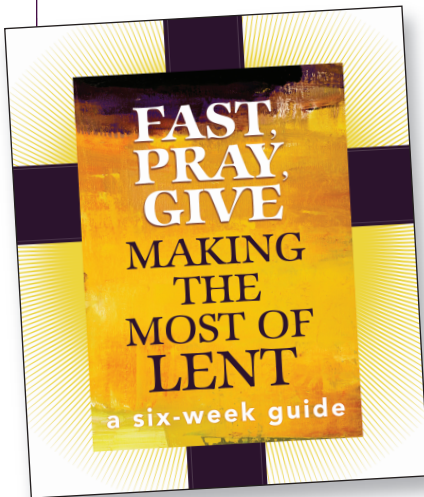
**Review these guidelines periodically, especially when new members join your group.**

1. **Be on time.** Arrive promptly or call the host or facilitator to say you will be late. Try to make the meeting dates a priority in your schedule. Your group counts on you! Begin and end when you say you will.
2. **Be consistent.** Establish a routine for each gathering of the group and adhere to it as best as possible. Start and/or end with prayer. Being consistent allows people to know what to expect.
3. **Be prayerful.** Pray for your group each day.
4. **Be welcoming.** If the group has a new member—even a one-time visitor—it is a new and different group. At the beginning of every session, give each person an opportunity to introduce him- or herself. Help every person—new or not—feel comfortable and at home.
5. **Be sensitive.** Some people in the group may attend because they really need a boost. Begin each session by catching up on what has been going on in one another's lives since the last time the group met. Check in with members that have been absent.
6. **Be yourself.** Be willing to share what you think, believe, and feel. Bring your common sense and your sense of humor to the session.
7. **Be open.** Hearing the stories and opinions of others in the group may bring insights that you could never have reached on your own.
8. **Be respectful.** Even if you disagree with someone, let your care and respect for that person govern whether and how you respond.
9. **Be fair.** Give everyone a chance to talk, but don't force anyone. Participate but don't dominate, and curb the urge to interrupt.
10. **Be trustworthy.** Don't repeat to others outside the group anything that is said within the session. A group such as this is built on trust.
11. **Be flexible.** Discussions may take longer than expected. Outside events may change the focus of the session.
12. **Be aware of the promptings of the Spirit.** Your group may become so large that it needs to split into two, or become so small it needs to mesh with another group (a good group should have six to twelve members). Your group may have reached the point where it is no longer life-giving to its members and should be disbanded. Or perhaps the group senses an urge to be involved in some other outreach together. Take time occasionally to evaluate how you're doing as a group and to discuss new directions in which you may be led.

## A STUDY GUIDE FOR FAST, PRAY, GIVE

### Introduction to the Study Guide

*Fast, Pray, Give: Making the Most of Lent* is a six-week study guide to help Catholic adults and teens learn more about the customs and practices of Lent, as well as the Catholic teaching behind these. It is about growing spiritually during Lent, especially through a renewed understanding of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving.



The key to understanding the meaning of Lent is simple: baptism. Since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has reemphasized the baptismal character of Lent, especially through the restoration of the catechumenate and its Lenten rituals. Each Lent, our challenge is to renew our understanding of this important season of the Church year and see how we can integrate our personal practices into this renewed baptismal perspective.

The book *Fast, Pray, Give* uses as its foundation content from Catholic Update newsletters. These newsletters are available from Liguori Publications ; you can order them to get a more in-depth look at the topics

covered in this six-week study guide. The companion DVD for use with the book offers brief commentaries on the Year A Gospels that will enhance the study of *Fast, Pray, Give*, especially when used in conjunction with the RCIA.

Some tips for using this program for faith formation or small-group study:

- Have quiet music playing as participants arrive.
- Plan to have each session last between an hour and an hour and a half. If you opt for an hour and a half, you may want to give everyone a short break after forty-five minutes or so.
- If you are using two or three of the sessions at a time—say, on a Saturday morning—allow no more than an hour for each session.
- If possible, ask participants to read the particular week's session before each meeting.
- Encourage participants to use the space for journaling provided in the book.
- Make sure everyone in the group who wants to has a chance to speak.

May this six-week study help you appreciate Lent for what it really is: a time to renew and refresh our baptismal call, and become better disciples of Jesus Christ.

## WEEK ONE

# WHAT IS LENT?

### Opening Prayer

Sing a Lenten hymn of your choosing.

Ask someone to read Matthew 4:1–11.

Allow a few minutes for quiet reflection, then close with this prayer:

Jesus, during the time you spent in the desert, you were tempted three times yet persevered. Help us in our weakness this Lent, and may we look to you as our model of strength and perseverance in the temptations we face each day.

### Optional Activity

If you are using the *Fast, Pray, Give* DVD, show the segment titled “First Sunday in Lent: Temptation,” then discuss these questions:

- What false idols tempt you?
- Is there an area of your life in which you need forgiveness? If so, what might you do to find forgiveness there this Lent?
- How is baptism a form of conversion?

### For Study and Discussion

**Catechism Quote:** Start this session by discussing the Catechism quote found in Week One of the book. What thoughts came up for the group as they read this quote? Discuss their responses to the question that follows the quote.

## Main Topic: What Is Lent?

### Optional Activity

If you are using the *Fast, Pray, Give* DVD, show the segment titled “What Is Lent?” and then continue with the material from the book, as follows:

If participants have not had a chance to read this section at home, let them do so now OR summarize the content using these points:

- During the forty days of Lent, we share with the whole Church an annual “wilderness experience.” In the Bible, the number forty denotes a period of preparation for some special action of the Lord; it is a time of grace.
- The wilderness experience is a kind of retreat, time set apart to focus on, to ask, to consider, to respond to basic questions of the spiritual life.
- In both the Old and New Testaments, the wilderness symbolizes three main themes:
  1. *A place of covenant.* During Lent we examine our lives in the light of our sharing in the covenant of Christ, and are called to a view of reality and a set of values quite different from those of the culture around us.

2. *A place of testing.* As strongly as we may say that we want—and really intend—to follow God, many forces remain, within and without, to pull us away and push us toward idols.

3. *A place of presence.* Even in the wilderness, we are not alone: God is with us. Whatever the future brings, we will make it together and persevere even through death itself.

(For a fuller look at this topic, refer to the Catholic Update *In the Desert with Jesus: Biblical Themes of Lent*, by Michael D. Guinan, OFM.)

### Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Discuss the questions for reflection from the book, as well as other thoughts that might have arisen while participants read “What is Lent?” Here are a few additional questions for consideration:

- What does wilderness mean to you? How do you experience it—if at all?
- How do you understand the word “covenant” in your own life?

### Inspiration From the Saints

Read the section in Week One about Martin de Porres, and discuss the question that follows.

### Closing Prayer

Say together the prayer found in the book at the end of Week One.

## WEEK TWO PRAYER

### Opening Prayer

Sing a Lenten hymn of your choosing.

Ask someone to read Matthew 17:1–9.

Allow a few minutes for quiet reflection, then close with this prayer:

Jesus, you took Peter, James, and John with you up the mountain, where they witnessed your transfiguration. May we too walk with you up the mountain this Lent, as we journey toward the transformation of our lives in you. Amen.

### Optional Activity

If you are using the *Fast, Pray, Give* DVD, show the segment titled “Second Sunday in Lent: Transfiguration,” then discuss these questions:

- What does the “reality of the cross” look like in your life?
- Think of a place or time when you had a “mountaintop” experience of God. How did it change you?
- What is your vision of what the Church should be? The world?

## Study and Discussion

**Catechism Quote:** Start this session by discussing the Catechism quote found in Week Two of the book. What thoughts come up for the group as they read this quote? Discuss their responses to the question that follows the quote.

## Main Topic: What Is Prayer?

If participants have not had a chance to read this section at home, let them do so now OR summarize the content using these points:

- Prayer is communication with God, the way we nurture our relationship with the divine. The ways that we choose to pray depend on our spirituality, the way in which we live out our faith.
- Christian spirituality deals with the whole person—body and soul, thoughts and feelings, emotions and passions, hopes, fears, dreams—as we live in and with the power of the Spirit. All share the same Spirit and are called to one and the same holiness.
- The Examen of Consciousness is a good prayer practice for Lent. With this daily prayer, we are called to look at both the good and not-so-good of our day, discerning God’s presence within its events and occurrences.

(For a fuller look at this topic, refer to the Catholic Updates *Christian Spirituality: Many Styles—One Spirit*, by Michael D. Guinan, OFM, and *A Popular Method of Prayer from St. Ignatius and His Followers*, by Phyllis Zagano.)

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Discuss the questions for reflection from the book, as well as other thoughts that might have arisen while participants read “What Is Prayer?” Here are a few additional questions for consideration:

- When and where do you feel closest to God?
- How can your faults and failings help you to be a better person?

## Inspiration From the Saints

Read the section in Week Two about Elizabeth Ann Seton, and discuss the question that follows.

## Closing Prayer

Say together the prayer found in the book at the end of Week Two.

## WEEK THREE

### FASTING

#### Opening Prayer

Sing a Lenten hymn of your choosing.

Ask someone to read John 4:5–15.

Allow a few minutes for quiet reflection, then close with this prayer:

Jesus, lead us to living water as we travel through the desert this Lent. May we always look for the true source of everlasting life in God, and welcome this gift in humility and love. Amen.

#### Optional Activity

If you are using the *Fast, Pray, Give* DVD, show the segment titled “Third Sunday in Lent: Living Water,” then discuss these questions:

- Where do you look for living water?
- Have you ever felt excluded from a group or community? How did you deal with that experience?
- When you scrutinize your parish or faith community, what do you find?

#### Study and Discussion

**Catechism Quote:** Start this session by discussing the Catechism quote found in Week Three of the book. What thoughts come up for the group as they read this quote? Discuss their responses to the question that follows the quote.

### Main Topic: What Is Fasting?

If participants have not had a chance to read this section at home, let them do so now OR summarize the content using these points:

- The practice of fasting—to make do with less—is one of the most common signs of Lent for Catholics. We are required to fast and abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, and abstain from meat on the Fridays of Lent.
- Fasting is linked to living out our baptismal promises by helping us be aware of the many people throughout the world who lack the basic things of life—food, clothing, and shelter—and should lead us to greater efforts to alleviate that suffering.
- Another way to fast during Lent is by making a conscious attempt to simplify our lives. The call to simplicity, to faithfully live the Gospel, is found throughout the teachings of Jesus, the example of the saints, and the exhortations of the Church.
- We cannot have outer simplicity in our lives without inner simplicity. If we are at peace inside, if we learn to trust God for our needs, our outer lives will reflect that.

(For a fuller look at this topic, refer to the Catholic Update *Faithful Simplicity*, by Susan K. Rowland.)

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Discuss the questions for reflection from the book, as well as other thoughts that might have arisen while participants read “What Is Fasting?” Here are a few additional questions for consideration:

- Identify one action you can take this Lent to simplify your life. How will you start?
- What are you doing to help the poor of the world and in your community?

## Inspiration From the Saints

Read the section in Week Three about Catherine of Siena, and discuss the question that follows.

## Closing Prayer

Say together the prayer found in the book at the end of Week Three.

# WEEK FOUR ALMSGIVING

## Opening Prayer

Sing a Lenten hymn of your choosing.

Ask someone to read John 9:1–11.

Allow a few minutes for quiet reflection, then close with this prayer:

Jesus, open our eyes to see you as the model of love and compassion. Let us not be blinded by laws and practices that seek to oppress and bind, but be guided by the great commandment to love God and neighbor as we love ourselves. Amen.

## Optional Activity

If you are using the *Fast, Pray, Give* DVD, show the segment titled “Fourth Sunday in Lent: Sight,” then discuss these questions:

- What aspect of Jesus’s life most appeals to you—as healer, teacher, faithful son, or some other characteristic of his life and ministry?
- Is there an area of your faith that is being tested at this point in time?
- To whom or what can you bring the light of Christ this Lent?

## Study and Discussion

**Catechism Quote:** Start this session by discussing the Catechism quote found in Week Four of the book. What thoughts come up for the group as they read this quote? Discuss their responses to the question that follows the quote.

## Main Topic: What Is Almsgiving?

If participants have not had a chance to read this section at home, let them do so now OR summarize the content using these points:

- Almsgiving is a natural expression of love extended to our neighbor, an all-encompassing practice that comes from our discipleship. It is part of Christian stewardship, the roots of which are found in Matthew 25:31–46.
- Stewardship means using our gifts of time, talent, and treasure in a responsible and accountable manner, in justice and with love. It affects every part of our life.
- Some common qualities of good stewards are that they:
  1. give until it feels good
  2. don't see obligation, but opportunity
  3. have an attitude of gratitude
  4. realize God will point the way
  5. see stewardship as a spiritual act
- Good stewards share in God's bountiful life by actions that speak to the deepest parts of us.

(For a fuller look at this topic, refer to the Catholic Update *Seven Secrets of Successful Stewards*, by Paul Wilkes.)

### Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Discuss the questions for reflection from the book, as well as other thoughts that might have arisen while participants read "What Is Almsgiving?" Here are a few additional questions for consideration:

- In what ways do you practice charity?
- What do you see as your responsibility to stewardship of the Earth, that is, caring for God's creation?

### Inspiration From the Saints

Read the section in Week Four about Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta, and discuss the question that follows.

### Closing Prayer

Say together the prayer found in the book at the end of Week Four.

## WEEK FIVE

# CONVERSION

### Opening Prayer

Sing a Lenten hymn of your choosing.

Ask someone to read John 11:32–39, 41–44.

Allow a few minutes for quiet reflection, then close with this prayer:

Jesus, unbind us from the sin that keeps us in the darkness of the tomb. With hearts free and open, we approach your altar with the gift of our lives and our continuing conversion toward new life, new faith in you. Amen.

### Optional Activity

If you are using the *Fast, Pray, Give* DVD, show the segment titled “Fifth Sunday in Lent: Raised from the Dead,” then discuss these questions:

- How do you experience the “new life” that you were given in baptism? If you will be baptized at the Easter Vigil, what is your hope for “new life” from this sacrament?
- What is the deepest meaning of your life?
- From what sin do you most desire to be unbound this Lent?

### Study and Discussion

**Catechism Quote:** Start this session by discussing the Catechism quote found in Week Five of the book. What thoughts come up for the group as they read this quote? Discuss their responses to the question that follows the quote.

## Main Topic: The Constant Call to Conversion

If participants have not had a chance to read this section at home, let them do so now OR summarize the content using these points:

- Conversion calls us to turn away from sin and turn to the Good News of Jesus Christ. Through our baptism we are born, over and over, again and again.
- For Catholics, conversion is a lifelong process that comes through the Spirit’s more subtle action, enfolded in persons and events of our lives. Jesus reveals this Spirit of God’s love in the events of his life: healing the sick, forgiving sinners, caring for the poor, dying and rising.
- The sacraments and liturgical year help to celebrate and nourish our ongoing conversion.
- In the paschal mystery, we enter into the dying and rising of Jesus. This image is grounded in the RCIA, where the Church offers a vision of conversion not only for new members but for all Catholics.
- Conversion is the ongoing response of our whole person turning in faith in the amazing grace of God’s love, our response to love in prayer and moral action, celebrating that love in liturgy, and witnessing to that love in our world.

(For a fuller look at this topic, refer to the Catholic Update *Conversion: Being Born Again and Again and Again*, by Rev. James B. Dunning.)

### Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Discuss the questions for reflection from the book, as well as other thoughts that might have arisen while participants read “The Constant Call to Conversion.” Here are a few additional questions for consideration:

- How does attending Mass help in your journey of turning away from sin toward the Good News?
- If you are a convert to Catholicism from another faith, share something of what that process has meant in your life.

### Inspiration From the Saints

Read the section in Week Five about Francis of Assisi, and discuss the question that follows.

### Closing Prayer

Say together the prayer found in the book at the end of Week Five.

## WEEK SIX DISCIPLESHIP

### Opening Prayer

Sing a Lenten hymn of your choosing.

Ask someone to read Matthew 28:14–20.

Allow a few minutes for quiet reflection, then close with this prayer:

Jesus, you have walked with us through Lent, as our guide and inspiration. Watch over us as we take what we have learned in these six weeks and use it to bring the good news to all whom we meet, in every moment of our lives. Amen.

### Optional Activity

If you are using the *Fast, Pray, Give* DVD, show the segment titled “Passion Sunday: Ongoing Conversion,” then discuss these questions:

- Where or how have you seen God’s love at work today?
- What are some of the choices you have made this Lent? How have they helped you grow in faith?
- What do you most look forward to in the coming celebration of Easter?

## Study and Discussion

**Catechism Quote:** Start this session by discussing the Catechism quote found in Week Six of the book. What thoughts come up for the group as they read this quote? Discuss their responses to the question that follows the quote.

## Main Topic: What Is Discipleship?

- The heart of Christian faith is not the Bible, nor the sacraments, nor the creeds, nor the Church but “a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, the only Son of the Father” (CCC, 426).
- By baptism, the fundamental and common vocation of all Christians is to become disciples of Jesus Christ—people who follow “the way” that he modeled and made possible by his living, dying, and rising.
- In revisiting the deep roots of our faith, we can find the beautiful truths, moral convictions, and spiritual treasury that constitute Catholicism. The Church offers some distinctive ways to embrace our call to discipleship and bring him to all in our world, such as:
  1. a positive understanding of the whole person
  2. a commitment to community
  3. a sacramental outlook
  4. a commitment to justice
  5. devotion to Mary

(For a fuller look at this topic, refer to the Catholic Update *Nine Things That Make Us Catholic*, by Thomas H. Groome.)

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Discuss the questions for reflection from the book, as well as other thoughts that might have arisen while participants read “What Is Discipleship?” Here are a few additional questions for consideration:

- What do you find most challenging about being a disciple?
- What are some of the ways you share your faith with the world?

## Optional Activity

If you are using the *Fast, Pray, Give* DVD, show the segment titled “Summary and Review.” Allow time for participants to discuss what they have learned during these six weeks of Lenten study and what questions they might have going forward.

## Inspiration From the Saints

Read the section in Week Six about Pope John XXIII, and discuss the question that follows.

## Closing Prayer

Say together the prayer found in the book at the end of Week Six.