

Step It Up – Walking to Easter

Children's Session

By Mariette Martineau

Time: 60-90 minutes

Session Objective:

To “step it up” – the living of our faith – during the season of Lent by focusing on a key challenge found in the Gospel readings of each week



Catechism Connections:

- #540
- #1438

Supplies and Preparation:

- Prayer Table - candle, Bible, foot print symbols and/or shoes
- Bible with child-friendly text to read all of the passages needed for each learning activity
- Powerpoint or PDF with feet images for learning activities
- For the first learning activity : work boots, foot print of work boots
- For the second learning activity: slippers, foot print of slippers, and a small cross for each child which can be fastened to shoe laces, or strung with thread to wear as a necklace
- For the third learning activity: hiking boots, pictures of the wonders of the world (either printed or via power point/electronics). It would be helpful if the students were given a bookmark-size printout of one of the wonders to carry with them throughout Lent or to put in a special place (e.g., their prayer corner) to remind them of the majesty of God
- For the fourth learning activity: flip flops or cheap sandals, and a copy of the book *Malala Day is Every Day*, computer/projector for projecting the brief video found in this activity
- For the fifth learning activity: nursing shoes or shoes encased in blue hospital booties, pencils, crayons
- For the sixth learning activity: muddy boots, markers and flip chart paper to make a Life List
- For the seventh learning activity: print of donkey hoof prints



Activity Plan

Welcome and Opening Prayer (10 minutes)

Welcome the children and get them settled. When settled, begin the session with these or similar words:

Do you ever walk through mud or snow or wet sand then look back to see the footprints you left behind? If yes, what do you like about doing that? I like the shapes my shoes and feet make. I like my bare footprints in the sand, the patterns of my snow boots on the snow. And when I move from mud to concrete, I like to see how long I can walk on the sidewalk and still see my footprints before the mud wears off my boots or shoes!

So, what do foot prints have to do with Lent? We are going to be exploring together the season of Lent. Lent is our time as a Church community to prepare for Easter, a time to remember who we are called to be as God's children. This session is called "Step It Up" as we are going to make some connections between footprints and foot wear and the challenges that Jesus calls us to live out each week of Lent. So, let's step it up!

Tell participants:

(Facilitator Note: learners will be taking steps forward and backward, so make sure there is space for this.)

We are going to begin our learning time with a brief prayer. As we are learning about the steps to take during Lent, we are going to pray with our feet today!

We begin our prayer in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

God, you bless us with love for others. We step forward in our journey with you as we support others on their journey!

God, you bless us with eyes to see what others need. We step forward in our journey with you as we serve others!

God, sometimes we make mistakes and make unloving choices. We step backwards in our journey with you when we do not love!

God, you always invite us to forgiveness and reconciliation. We step forward in our journey with you as we are forgiven and we forgive!

God, you give us many gifts to share with others. We step forward in our journey with you as we share our gifts with others.

God, you are always with us. We step together in community as we pray to you in the words that Jesus gave us, Our Father....

We pray this in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Facilitator Notes:

These learning activities may be used as a whole catechetical session for children, or may be better suited as weekly additions to children's catechesis. Each activity fits with a week of Lent. In essence, they may be used as an overview to Lent or as a weekly introduction to Lent as you journey through it with the children.

Choose what you will use for each foot symbol. Actual shoes will make the biggest impression, but the Powerpoint/PDF images or footprints can also be effective.

Ash Wednesday – Humbly We Fast, Pray, and Bring Our Gifts to the World (10 minutes)

Symbol: Work boots, perhaps with a footprint they have made in picture form or one taken directly from the boot onto white paper

Read to the participants the Gospel passage for Ash Wednesday: Mt 6:1-6, 16-18. Before reading it, tell them that you are going to be asking them after the reading is done to make a connection between the work boots and what the passage is challenging us to be and do.

After you have read the passage, ask them:

What do you think this reading is calling us to do? Be?

Why do you think I chose work boots as a tool to help us remember this passage?

After gathering some responses, continue:

I chose work boots because people around us are busy working all the time, doing their jobs as best as they can, doing their work without bringing a lot of attention to themselves. They just do it; they share their gifts to the best of their ability and don't look for a lot of praise or recognition.

That is what we are called to do too as we move through Lent. We are called to "step up" our praying, our sharing, our helping others. We are to do this without bringing attention to ourselves.

Have you ever participated in "Secret Santa"? It is a way during Advent that we do special things for someone without them knowing who is doing it for them. During this Lent, I am inviting us to be "secret servants" – we are going to serve others, pray for others, help others out without bringing attention to ourselves.

Let us brainstorm together about who we could help, and how we could help them. Then as we see each other over Lent, we can share how much fun we are having by being good to others without them knowing who did it!

Alone But Not Lonely: First Sunday of Lent (10 to 15 minutes)

Symbol: Slippers, perhaps with a footprint they have made in picture form or one taken directly from the slipper onto white paper

Read to the participants the Gospel passage for the First Sunday: Mark 1:12-13. Before reading it, tell them that you are going to be asking them after the reading is done to make a connection between the slippers and what the passage is challenging us to be and do.

After you have read the passage, ask them:

This passage tells us that Jesus went into the desert to pray alone for 40 days. What do you think this reading is calling us to do? Be? Are we supposed to go into a desert for 40 days?

Why do you think I chose slippers as a tool to help us remember this passage?

I chose slippers for this week's "shoe" because slippers remind me about being alone. I come home from work, slip on my slippers, and sit in my favorite chair by myself for a few minutes before my family catches up to me. Slippers are safe and comfortable and cozy. That is like when we take time to pray with God – God is always a safe place for us, God always loves us and wraps his love around us, God is always there in our aloneness.

To remind ourselves to take these moments to pray, we are going to either tie a small cross onto our shoe, or we are going to keep the cross in our pocket to remind us to take a few minutes each day to pray and be alone in our slippers with God!

Pass out a small cross to each child and help those who want to fasten it to through their shoelaces. Provide others with cord to wear it as a necklace if that is what they prefer, or have them simply place it in their pocket.

Connected in Wonder: Second Sunday of Lent (10 to 15 minutes)

Symbol: Hiking boots, perhaps with a footprint they have made in picture form or one taken directly from the slipper onto white paper

Read to the participants the Gospel passage for the Second Sunday: Mark 9: 2-10. Before reading it, tell them that you are going to be asking them after the reading is done to make a connection between the hiking boots and what the passage is challenging us to be and do.

After you have read the passage, ask them:

So, what do you think? What is this passage describing to us? Why do you think I chose hiking boots to go with this Gospel story?

I chose hiking boots because, of course, Jesus and the disciples were up on a mountain when they were given this beautiful glimpse of Jesus' power and glory. I think we all get a glimpse of this glory when we stop to pay attention to the beauty around us or go even further to seek out the glory, like on a trip to the Rocky Mountains.

Do you have a favorite place of majestic wonder that reminds you of how amazing God is? (Gather some responses from the students.)

I am going to share with you some pictures of what I think are amazing examples of God's wonder in the world. (Share pictures and invite students to choose one. Or give them a bookmark to take with them to remind them to stand in awe of God's ongoing gifts to us, especially the gift of Jesus.)

Zeal for Justice: Third Sunday of Lent (10 to 15 minutes)

Symbol: a simple shoe like flip flops or cheap sandals, perhaps with a footprint they have made in picture form or one taken directly from the flip flop onto white paper

Read to the participants the Gospel passage for the Third Sunday: John 2: 13-25. Before reading it, tell them that you are going to be asking them after the reading is done to make a connection between the flip flops/sandals and what the passage is challenging us to be and do.

After you have read the passage, ask them:

So, what do you think? What is this passage describing to us? Why do you think I chose flip flops to go with this Gospel story?

I chose flip flops because in this passage Jesus is full of zeal, full of energy to fix something that he thinks is wrong. Yes, he seems mad, but more importantly he is trying to make things right, he is investing himself in making a difference. Flip flops are a simple shoe, and remind us to take care of the poor and lowly around us.

Today I want to share with you a story of someone who at a young age has been full of zeal, who won a Nobel peace prize for her passion to change the world.

Read to the students the book *Every Day is Malala Day*.

(<http://secondstorypress.ca/books/297-every-day-is-malala-day>)

Consider introducing the book with this video:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-aCwkIyvqeo#t=42>

Discuss:

What do you think about this girl who used her voice?

What are some of the things around us that we may be called to use our voice to change?

Stepping into Healing: Fourth Sunday of Lent (10 to 15 minutes)

Symbol: a nurse's shoe, or a shoe covered in a blue hospital booty, perhaps with a footprint they have made in picture form or one taken directly from the shoe onto white paper

Read to the participants the Gospel passage for the Fourth Sunday: John 3: 14-21. Before reading it, tell them that you are going to be asking them after the reading is done to make a connection between the "hospital shoe" and what the passage is challenging us to be and do. I

After you have read the passage, ask them:

So, what do you think? What is this passage telling us? Why do you think I chose a hospital type of shoe?

Explain to the students (see the full text in the facilitator background online) the imagery of the serpent from Numbers 21:7-9: "All who look upon the Son who is lifted up are healed in spirit. Faith brings healing of body and soul together. As disciples of Jesus, we are called to heal the physical and spiritual wounds of others and to actively participate in and celebrate our own healing."

Today for our "Step It Up" Lent activity we are going to write and illustrate prayers of healing for the people from our parish who are sick. After we create them, I will give them to Father (name) who will take them with him to visit the sick.

(Facilitator Note: Younger children may need scribing assistance for this activity. It will be easier if you help the children one phrase at a time, using the simple guide provided. A good size for this may be half of an 8.5" x 11" white cardstock that has space in the middle for the students to write and some space around the edges or the back for the students to illustrate a picture.)

Using the following as your guide, move the students through writing their prayer and then decorating/illustrating it:

A Healing Prayer

Loving God, we pray for _____

We know that you _____

Bless them with _____

We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

Getting Muddy: Fifth Sunday of Lent (10 to 15 minutes)

Symbol: muddy boots, perhaps with a footprint they have made in picture form or one taken directly from the boot onto white paper

Read to the participants the Gospel passage for the Fifth Sunday: John 3: 14-21. Before reading it, tell them that you are going to be asking them after the reading is done to make a connection between the “muddy boots” and what the passage is challenging us to be and do.

After you have read the passage, ask them:

So, what do you think? What is this passage telling us? Why do you think I chose muddy boots as the symbol for this?

I chose muddy boots because of the image of wheat and planting. Our boots get muddy when we garden, when we place seeds in the ground so they can be transformed, changed into plants. Our lives get messy too when we have to let go of some things in order to welcome better things.

Let's talk this through. What are some of the things in our lives that we have to let go of, to die to in a manner of speaking, in order to gain something better for us?

One example I can think of for this is having a healthy body. The path to life for a healthy body is to not put into it junk food and candy, and another part of that path is exercising instead of being a couch potato. What other things can you think of that you have to say no to in order to say yes to something more life-giving?

Make a list with the students and title it “Our Life List”. On one side of the chart write “We say no to...” On the other side write “...so we can say yes to:”

Our Life List

We say no to..... So we can say yes to.....

The Humble Victory: Palm Sunday (10 to 15 minutes)

Symbol: a picture of donkey hoof prints

Read to the participants the opening Gospel passage for Palm Sunday: John 3: 14-21. Before reading it, tell them that you are going to be asking them after the reading is done to make a connection between the donkey hoof prints and what the passage is challenging us to be and do.

After you have read the passage, ask them:

So, what do you think? What is this passage telling us? Why do you think I chose donkey hoof prints as the symbol for this?

What would you prefer to ride on, a donkey or a beautiful horse? Which seems more suitable for a king? Remember: Jesus wasn't the usual king of a kingdom... his kingdom was of love and service, not lands and riches.

Facilitator Note (taken from online facilitator background): "Another more subtle and more permanent victory is suggested by Jesus' war horse... it's not a horse at all; rather, it is a colt with no wartime experience. It has never been ridden before. In fact, the clear reference is to Zechariah 9:9 that suggests this colt is actually a young donkey and the king who rides it is called "humble", the perfect Lenten bookend to the humble step of Ash Wednesday! This is hardly the entrance procession of a king intending to conquer with violence!

Disciples of Jesus at the close of Lent are challenged to rethink their notions of victory. What does winning mean to you? How can you win in a way that doesn't produce losers? Your victory step should not be a crushing experience for anyone because the kingdom that Jesus ushers in is one of loving relationships. In this kingdom, we all win!"

This is our last step, one of humble victory as we remember the loving way Jesus serves us and gave his life for us.

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

Invite students to gather in a circle if possible, then share:

We close our learning time about Lent and our call to step it up with a simple prayer of litany. Please respond with, "We will step it up"

God, help us to humbly share our gifts with the world...

God, keep inviting us to spend time in prayer with you and Jesus....

God, help us to see your presence in the wonders of our world....

God, help us to speak up for those who are being wronged....

God, help us to remember to pray for and serve the sick.....

God, give us the courage to say yes to life....

God, give us the courage to bring your victory of love and life to the world....

We ask our prayers in Jesus' name. Amen.