

For parents –

Children and Fasting

Fasting as an act of compassion and solidarity can be deeply meaningful for adults. But we don't often think of including children in this spiritual discipline. Yet the very concrete nature of fasting makes it uniquely suited to the gifts of faith of children.

The developmental needs of children call for a careful approach to this spiritual discipline. Muslims who fast from food during the month of Ramadan generally exclude children from the requirement of fasting until they are over the age of twelve. An absolute fast from food is probably not appropriate for a child whose body is growing and developing rapidly, just as it is not appropriate for pregnant women, diabetics, or those who have a heart condition. But the spirit and intent of the fast can be embodied in adaptations of the practice that can include children along with older family members. Here are some suggestions:



Talk together about what a fast is. With your child, read over and discuss the information in "Slow Down – and Fast."

Talk about the effects of the food crisis in India. Locate India on a world map. Using the information about India for this month's fast, discuss how the dire situation there is affecting the present and future of the children in India.

Decide together how your child will implement fasting. You might decide to have very simple family meals. Or your child might decide to refrain from eating snack foods or fast foods or from drinking sodas. Discuss the other options in "Slow Down-and Fast". Encourage your child to choose to fast from whatever food or activity will best help him or her to focus on God's intent for a hungry world.

Talk about communion. If you will be breaking your fast with the communion meal in the service of worship, talk with your child on Sunday morning about the meaning of the sacrament. The word "communion" points to the understanding that the whole body of Christ is a community where if one member suffers, all suffer. By breaking the fast with communion, you and your family are witnessing to the suffering of those without enough to eat, as well as to a commitment to give voice to their suffering and to work for justice.

Connect fasting and faith. A number of years ago, a Search Institute study of mainline denominations examined what contributes to a mature faith. One important factor identified in the study was the engaging of family members, adults and children alike, in acts of compassion and justice. But it is not enough to merely participate together as a family. Faith development is best nurtured in children when significant adults in their lives make a connection for them between the act and their faith. Reflect, pray, act-- and talk about it together.

Learn more at www.pcusa.org/foodcrisis and www.pcusa.org/hunger