

5 easy activities for a Lenten retreat for kids

Last year when I was looking through our church's bulletin, I saw that an adult Lenten retreat was being held for most of a Saturday. Then an idea came to my mind about doing a smaller version of a retreat for our family.

I gave it a try in my home for about three hours with eight children. This year, I nearly doubled the participation for about half of the time before our church's Stations of the Cross.

Below you will find the activities we have done and how it worked in the home setting and church setting.

Guide for Lenten retreat for kids

Ice breaker, welcome and opening prayer

I highly recommend enlisting adult helpers. I have an amazing friend who has volunteered to help me on these retreats. She is brilliant with ice breaker activities, which can be found online to suit your group age and size. The ice breaker helps the kids who may not know each other feel comfortable, and it helps to set the mood.

Following the ice breaker, there is a short prayer and a brief explanation of what the retreat is about: growing closer to Jesus by helping others. Parents are welcome to stay and participate in all the activities.

Activity one: Blessing bags

These bags are made to give to those we encounter who are in need. They can be given out locally or even when traveling. When we drive as a family to our vacation destinations, we bring the bags.

Tips and tricks

Set up an assembly line of various snack items (mini bags of goldfish and cookies, granola bars), mini bottled waters, and basic toiletries (travel-size floss, toothpaste, soap, hand sanitizer, toothbrushes). The children go down the line and fill a gallon size storage bag with the items. This year, the children made a small unsigned card of encouragement and love

to include into the bag.

I tell the children that their parents need to be involved in donating the bag especially to someone they may encounter on the street. If there are parents who may be hesitant to give it out, the retreat leader can hold onto the bag, and he or she will take care of later distribution. It is about the children putting something together for someone else in need.

Activity two: Homemade cards

These cards can be created for a pre-determined specific group or the children can decide during the retreat. Last year, some children made them for seminarians who had come through our parish over the previous summer and others made them for a loved one.

My oldest son sent a card to a seminarian who helped him learn how to be an altar server. In reply, the seminarian was kind enough to send my son a postcard from the seminary where he was studying. My son was so excited, he posted it on his prayer board.

This year the cards were created to send to residents of a local nursing home. On Palm Sunday, fellow parishioners will bring flowers and the cards to the nursing home.

Tips and tricks

The craft table is set up with card stock, scissors, glue, markers, colored pencils, and religious-related craft foam and stickers for the children to make the cards.

Activity three: Lenten pretzels

My kids love Lent because that is when we make our Lenten pretzels. We make sure to watch the Holy Heroes video about the connection between Lent and the creation of the pretzel. Making the pretzels is a nice way to add a snack into the retreat.

Tips and tricks

Both years, I have pre-made the pretzel dough, shown the [Holy Heroes](#) video to the kids and then the kids shaped the pretzels.

During the home retreat, I baked the pretzels in my oven while the kids were doing the meditation activity (detailed below). My friend led the meditation while I took care of the pretzels. After the meditation, the children enjoyed the snack. This year because of time and facility constraints,

after the kids shaped their pretzels, I placed them on a plate, covered them, and sent them home with the parents including the instructions for baking.

Activity four: Meditation

As noted above, last year while the pretzels were baking, the kids went to a quieter, darker area of the house that we set up with soft surfaces including pillows and blankets. My friend read a brief meditation to help them imagine being in the presence of Jesus.

The kids enjoyed it so much, it was done again this year. There is a lounge area in our parish center with a soft chair and couch, and I brought some blankets from home. I set up a small altar with a Bible, a crucifix, holy water, statue of the Divine Mercy, and a battery-lit candle. Once the kids were settled, I explained what we were going to do including quieting our bodies and closing our eyes.

Tips and tricks

Prepare for some giggles because this can be kind of awkward for kids who have not done it before. I played some religious instrumental meditation music quietly in the background. I read a meditation based on when Jesus washes his disciples' feet as a way to show them how to serve others.

After the meditation was over, I asked if any of the children wanted to share anything that stuck out to them during the exercise. It's nice to hear how they really are listening. After the meditation, we said a final prayer.

Activity five: Stations of the Cross

This year's retreat preceded the Stations of the Cross done at the church. Last year in my home, we ended our retreat with our own Stations of the Cross. I tried to time the afternoon where we would be doing the Stations around 3 p.m. since that was when Jesus died.

Tips and tricks

I photocopied pictures from our Stations of the Cross coloring book. The children and some of the adults colored them earlier and then I posted them around the house. When it was time, I had the Holy Heroes Stations of the Cross CD playing at each station while each child had a turn to hold a small crucifix in front of the Station. When we were done we said a final prayer and said our goodbyes.