

St Mark's Chaplaincy Newsletter

February 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

I have put together this Newsletter to share with you ideas, thoughts, prayers and resources that can help us on our journey through this difficult period in our lives. I want to share it with you before we start the season of Lent on Ash Wednesday the 17th February 2021.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols has shared with us a way families could celebrate Ash Wednesday:



"Receiving ashes is an outward sign of an inner step, a movement of the heart towards our beloved Lord. This year I invite you to concentrate much more on this inner, spiritual movement than on its outward manifestation in the imposition of ashes."

My suggestion is this: celebrate Ash Wednesday at home, with your family, in the household or 'support bubble' of which you are a part. Gather for a while. Read the prayer which I offer. Bless each other by making the sign of the cross on each other's forehead. Spend some time praying in a way that you know. But please, make this a prayer of your heart for God's mercy upon this world struggling to cope with the terrible pandemic and the devastation it is bringing."

[Ash Wednesday At Home.pdf](#)

Here is a link to a Lenten calendar with an idea for each day.

[Lenten calendar.pdf](#)

In school our theme for Lent 2021 is going to be: **A time to Act**. The season of Lent always focuses our minds on the call to three things: prayer, fasting and alms giving. We are very aware of how much covid has affected our lives - it has been quite like Lent in the sense of all that we have had to give up. As a Catholic community we see Lent as a time for reflection and the Cardinal has inspired us to be like sparks of light in the darkness.

We have taken the theme; **A time to Act** from the observance by Christians of Racial Justice Sunday. This day is being observed by many Christians on Sunday February 14th, the Catholic community marked it at the end of January, however, the message is the same: Action is needed to further the cause of racial justice. Listening to the voice of God and the voice of the Church we learn of equal love for all.

- Voices that discriminate unjustly, attitudes that undermine on the grounds of race must be opposed.
- Voices of those who feel rejected or perpetually in second place must be listened to.
- The dignity of all must be respected and promoted.



A time to Act

We really appreciate how difficult lockdown has been for families. Attached below is a guide for parents, from the Diocese of Westminster, to aid family well-being during this time. Some of the ideas are more suited to those of you with young children, but there are links to other helpful resources.

[Five simple ways for family well-being for parents final.pdf](#)

Throughout 2020 and 2021 the Catholic Church in England and Wales has been celebrating *The God Who Speaks: The Year of the Word*. 2020 was chosen as it was the 10th anniversary of *Verbum Domini* – Pope Benedict XVI's Apostolic Exhortation on 'The Word of the Lord' - and the 1600th anniversary of the death of St Jerome, who translated the Bible into Latin.



Considering the current restrictions on social gathering and school closures, plans for celebrating this special year have had to change. However, there are a number of resources available to help us to encounter the Word of God in new ways.

<https://www.godwhospeaks.uk/the-god-who-speaks/word-at-home/lent-at-home/>

<https://thegodwhospeaks2020.org.uk/>

<https://www.loyolapress.com/3-minute-retreats-daily-online-prayer/>

<https://pray-as-you-go.org/retreat/lent-2021>

<https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/get-involved/the-god-who-speaks-the-bible-for-catholics/>

<https://cafod.org.uk/Pray/Year-of-the-Word>

As a Catholic community we know that prayer can help during this period of lockdown. I would like to share some ideas.

Perhaps you may like to join me in a CORONAVIRUS NOVENA beginning Monday 22th February and finishing Tuesday 2nd March. This is something Catholic primary schools, in the Westminster Diocese, have been doing recently. The word novena means nine and it comes from the Latin word "novem". Novena is an ancient tradition of prayer and meditation for nine days usually to ask God for special prayer requests or petitions.

We will pray for all who are affected by Coronavirus pandemic, for all who are sick and suffering, for all those who work in the medical profession, and for those who have died as well as for their grieving family members.

[Nine Day Novena Coronavirus Prayers.pdf](#)

The 90 SECONDS STILLNESS CHALLENGE is another way we can pray. This idea invites us to spend 90 seconds focusing on a particular image or object- possible examples: a tree, stream, icon, book, flower - and allowing ourselves to find peace in God's presence.

Finally here is a prayer for the beginning of Lent:

God of love, maker of all
Transform our hearts through our Lenten journey of prayer, fasting and almsgiving.
Help us to see the dignity of all our sisters and brothers
Made in your image and likeness.
Inspire us to come to know you better and to reach out in love to others.
Through Christ, Our Lord, Amen.
St Mark, Patron of our School, Pray for us.

If I can support you in any way please do reach out and contact me. My email address is at the bottom of this letter or you can just ring the school and leave a message for Ivan.

We wish all of our students a restful half-term break.

Be assured of my constant prayers for you and your family,

Ivan Cizmarik

School Lay Chaplain

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