

The Gospel for All Ages

This Is the Acceptable Time

A Lenten Soup Supper—Outline and Tips

Your Lent 2009 event could have as its motif and context a soup supper. Many parishes offer simple soup supper during Lent to provide an opportunity for gathering and learning. Your *Gospel for All Ages* soup supper, however, will be intergenerational and will be a celebration of the great opportunity Lent provides for family faith sharing.

Your soup supper should be an upbeat and joyous evening for families with children, singles, young adults, and seniors. It may seem a bit odd to have a Lenten party, but for parishes using the *Pflaum Gospel Weeklies*, *Spirit*, and *Sunday by Sunday*, this Lenten supper is an opportunity to get genuinely excited about the most important season of the Church Year—Lent, the Sacred Triduum, and (of course) Easter. The events celebrated during these exciting and yet solemn days are the events that give shape and meaning to the Christian community. In fact, they are the events of the Christian Passover from slavery to freedom, from sin to grace, and from death to life.

That is reason enough to set about having an enjoyable Lenten gathering. Your supper will set the theme and the atmosphere for the whole parish celebration of the season. Even though Lent can feel like a somber time, it is not a sad time. Seeded through out the Lenten liturgies is the deep joy that comes from facing one's own sins and weaknesses, expressing sincere sorrow, and realizing that through the merits of Jesus Christ salvation and forgiveness are available.

An apt theme for the soup supper could well be taken from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians:

For [the Lord] says: "In an acceptable time I heard you, and on the day of salvation I helped you." Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

2 Corinthians 6:2

You can use the theme in all your promotion for the soup supper. The theme itself displays the urgency and the timeliness of Lent and its celebration of redemption and the promise of everlasting life.

Your parish may already have a soup supper planned for early Lent. If so, you can add your *Gospel for All Ages* event to that existing supper. Your greatest source for ideas, activities, and discussions will be the weekly Gospel periodicals from Pflaum and Good Ground Press. You can use the soup supper as a launch for the Lent and Easter issues of the periodicals. This event does not need to be the biggest event of the parish year. Attendance records are not your goal. Your goal is to offer a seasonal event that engages your parish-wide catechetical participants.

The following tips will help you get ready for your "This is the Acceptable Time" soup supper.

Don't delay. It is important to get a jump start on your planning. Lent starts on February 25 this year, and it will take you at least three weeks to get the word out and get all plans in place.



Future Seasonal Events

Spring/Summer

A Corpus Christi Parish Party

Available April 1





Get on the calendar. The sooner you set the time, the easier your plans will be. Ideally, the soup supper should take place somewhere between Ash Wednesday and the Friday after the First Sunday in Lent.

Gather help. Perhaps by now you have an event team in place. If you put on a fall festival and a Christmas craft fair, you should have a pretty chubby Rolodex of willing workers. Remember that no one should have to get stressed out over this event. Delegate decisions about food and décor and even the program itself.

Spread the word. Here we go again! You have to consider this supper important, communicate its importance to the families, and beat the bushes to ensure that all who can make it will make it. Use email, the phone, the parish bulletin, announcements from the pulpit, and posters in the back of church and in other parish gathering places.

Plan a display. You are at the halfway point of the catechetical year. It may be a good idea to set up a display at the event that showcases the materials you are using in your catechetical program as well as some of the participants and the crafts, activities, and projects that have gone on so far this year. If you have done a good job of promoting the event, you may be able to use the event as a recruiting session for more participants in the program.

About the meal. Plan a very simple supper—soup, salad, bread, dessert, and beverages. The soup should be a hearty “meal-in-a-bowl” kind of soup. If it has plenty of noodles, the younger set will be sure to enjoy it, too. The meal should speak of the simplicity of the season.

A collection is in order. Get the parish to underwrite the soup supper—or get an angel to pick up the tab. As part of the event, invite each family or individual to contribute the cost of one meal. Then, make sure that the money you collect goes to some *direct* aid to those who have little or no food—little or no shelter. (A word to the wise: Announce this collection in all your promotion. It will make the collection a lot more successful than if you spring it on the participants.)

Event materials. You will need a few materials:

Name tags and pens

Simple programs containing the outline of the celebration

A sound system

Music – even though it is Lent, you have to have singing and mood music playing

Art supplies for the craft and sharing period

Food, of course, as it was described above

Baskets, plates, or boxes to collect the funds

Decorations—give the room some atmosphere. You could have a display table for the Scriptures, candles, lights, and other decorations in shades of purple would make the room special.

Appoint a master of ceremonies for the evening. Remember that your emcee has to be part itinerant preacher, part ringmaster, and part Dutch uncle (or aunt).

Set up the room. The most important crew you form will be the people who do the set up for the event. Make sure that everything is ready to go before folks start to arrive. Because this is a meal (and soup at that) it is almost a necessity to have tables. Try to have tables that will accommodate about ten people. This will encourage mixing and mingling.

SAMPLE SCHEDULE FOR THE SOUP SUPPER

The actual event should last no more than two hours—including the meal. The times suppose an early evening event. That does not mean you couldn't hold it late



on a Sunday afternoon. It should, however, encompass the evening meal.

6:30 Welcome and Gathering

6:40 A Brief Presentation that focuses on the purpose and the theme of the soup supper.

6:55 A Time for Responses, Comments, Testimony, or Questions

7:10 The Meal

7:40 Learning Activities—Crafts, Discussions, Games

8:10 Summary Time, Prayer, and Song (This is a very brief prayer service.)

8:15 Collection, Dessert, and Fellowship

IDEAS FOR THE EVENING'S EVENTS

Welcome and Gathering: Be sure to have some music playing when people arrive. Have greeters to help with getting the participants signed in. People can stay in family groups or split up—however they are most comfortable. When everyone is settled at the tables, have the pastor, the deacon, or the catechetical leader greet the group and announce the theme of the evening.

A Brief Presentation: This presentation can take many formats. It can be a straight-up talk, a slide show, even a PowerPoint presentation. It should center on the value of Lent and Easter to this parish community. It should point out all the opportunities for learning and growth that will be offered over the weeks as the parish celebrates the most important feasts of the year. It should include the proclamation of the Gospel, and two gospel questions—simplified for the group. Here is the example from the First Sunday of Lent, March 1:

Gospel - Mark 1:9-15

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Spend a few moments talking about the Gospel itself—about what it meant to be called God's beloved Son. Share, too, how Jesus proclaimed the good news and the reign of God.

Then go to the questions—for example:

How are you going to spend your forty days?

How is your family going to show the reign of God to the world?

Allow a few moments for responses, commentary, testimony, or questions.

The Meal: You can serve the meal family style or buffet style—that is not important. But which ever you choose, encourage the group to mix and mingle at the tables. Don't press parents with younger children to split up from their youngsters. Have music playing during the meal. Keep the eating to a half an hour.

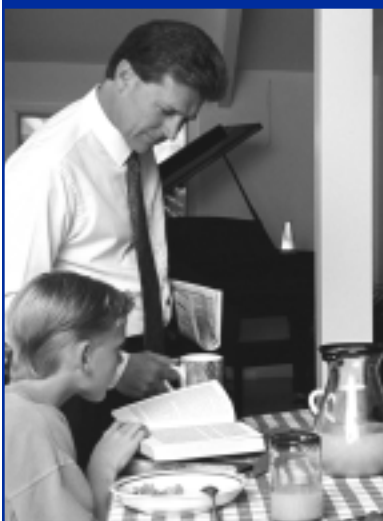
Learning Activities: You can handle these activities any way you like. It would be



good if the activities were culled from the *Pflaum Gospel Weeklies*, *Spirit*, or *Sunday by Sunday*. The only caveat would be to make sure that the activities and discussions will reach across the generations. One suggestion would be that if you prepare one activity for each table. A volunteer from the catechetical program can bring the activity to each table and act as facilitator. The activities, discussions, or projects should not be overly heavy—this should be a pleasant and enjoyable time.

Summary Time: By the clock or when the table activities start to wind down, the pastor, deacon, or catechetical leader should take a few moments to tie the evening together, to thank people for coming, and to promote participation in the parish-wide program—*The Gospel for All Ages*. This can be followed by a very brief prayer service or litany. It might be good, too, if the pastor would give a blessing.

Collection, Dessert, and Fellowship: Immediately after the Summary Time, announce the collection. Have volunteers move through the participants with baskets, boxes, or plates to collect the money. Then, announce a light dessert and coffee and juice that can be shared standing as people mingle and talk about what they have just experienced. At this time, those who wish are free to leave.



PROMOTIONAL PLAN

One of the most important tips for a successful *The Gospel for All Ages* event is to get an early start on the planning and promotion. Spare no effort to get the word out that your parish is doing some parish-wide catechesis and that you have an event coming. This list will help you marshal a plan that will get some buzz going throughout the parish about “This Is the Acceptable Time” soup supper.

Posters and Signs: Remember that people are visual. Get some signs posted all around the parish facilities. Use your theme as the main focus of the poster.

Parish Bulletin: Get publicity in the very next bulletin. You will need to move quickly.

The Mail: If your parish has mailings, put a little flyer in the mailing that promotes parish-wide catechesis and your Lenten soup supper.

Get the Phones Ringing: Get your guardian angels to call and invite people to participate—and don’t forget the seniors and the singles!

The Pulpit: Make sure that there is an announcement about *The Gospel for All Ages* at all the Masses on Sunday—and especially the soup supper.

Notes Home: Keep the buzz for the event going at the meetings of the catechetical program and within the classes at school. Have the catechists and teachers send notes home about *The Gospel for All Ages* and the soup supper.

The Grapevine: Every parish has an active grapevine—tap into it. Make sure that word of mouth is at work—it is often the very best promotion.

The Pastor: Make sure the pastor and the parish staff are promoting both *The Gospel for All Ages* and your next event.

Remember that you are building a tradition of these events. It would be great if each seasonal event was more fun, more exciting, more inspirational, and better attended than the one just before. Most of all make sure that “This Is the Acceptable Time” soup supper is the talk of the parish.

