

# Activity: Understanding the Fast

(40 minutes)

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FACE THE FAST

## Objectives

Through this activity participants will:

- define fasting;
- understand the role of fasting in Scripture and Church tradition; and
- reflect on our call to meet the physical and spiritual needs of our brothers and sisters around the world.

## Activity Summary

This activity begins with a discussion of the meaning of fasting, participants' motives for taking part in Food Fast, and their previous experience with fasting. Small groups then discuss Scripture passages related to fasting and enumerate possible benefits of the practice.

Finally, each group will be instructed to choose a Scriptural passage that demonstrates God's call to His people to answer the needs of the poor. The passage that each group adopts will be their "theme" for the duration of the Food Fast. Participants will design a poster that best represents and reflects the message of their passage.

## Materials Needed

- flipchart paper
- markers
- tape
- copy of *Scriptural Passages*
- pens/pencils
- poster board (1 piece per small group)
- art supplies

## Procedure

Begin this activity by discussing the following questions with the group. Record the responses from the group on the flipchart paper.

- What does it mean to fast?
- Why did you choose to participate in Food Fast?
- What do you hope to learn from your experience of fasting?

Talk about the group's past experience of fasting in their lives (for i.e., fasting during the season of Lent).

- How is a Lenten fast defined? When and why do we fast during Lent?

(Catholics are obliged to abstain from the eating of meat on Ash Wednesday and on all Fridays during the season of Lent. They are also obliged to fast on Ash Wednesday and on Good Friday. Self-imposed observance of fasting on all weekdays of Lent is strongly recommended. *Canons 1249-1253, Code of Canon Law.*)

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(40 minutes)

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# FACE THE FAST

Share the following information with the group:

Fasting has been practiced for thousands of years. Scripture reveals its use as a means of penance and calling people back to God, in dedicating our lives to God. Fasting is still observed today by people of many different faith traditions. Invite the group to discuss the benefits of fasting. Make a list of their ideas. Be sure to include the following insights and invite their reflection on the bolded phrases before commenting further.

- **Fasting can help us feel compassion for others.** Feeling the hunger brought on by fasting enables us to experience hunger, similar to the hunger felt every day by those who do not fast by choice, and do not have enough food to eat.
- **Fasting can prepare one to meet a challenge in one's life.** Fasting in combination with prayer is a way to prepare for important events. Fasting can help us focus on specific issues, and clear our minds to be more responsive to God's message.
- **Fasting can benefit others.** You can donate the money you saved by abstaining from a meal or eating simply to benefit our brothers and sisters who are hungry. Catholic Relief Services works on our behalf around the world to assist people who struggle with hunger and poverty, and depends on the support of the Catholic community in the United States.
- **Fasting reminds us that we do not live by bread alone.** Fasting is a way of reminding us that we have spiritual as well as physical needs, and that only God can satisfy our spiritual hunger.
- **Fasting can help make us aware of the difference between wants and needs.** Fasting helps us realize all of the blessings and privileges that we enjoy. When we experience a prayerful fast, we can begin to see that many things in our lives are non-essential luxuries.

### Food Fast Theme Posters

After considering the benefits of prayerful fasting, divide participants into small groups and assign each group a *Scriptural Passage*. Each passage addresses physical and spiritual hunger and the ways in which we, as a Christian people, are called to answer the needs of our brothers and sisters around the world. Tell participants that this passage will become their "theme" for the duration of the Food Fast.

Distribute poster board, markers and other art supplies to each group. Invite each group to write their passage in the center of a poster and then surround it with a design that reflects/represents the scriptural message.

Ask each group to share their poster with the large group. To make a connection to the parish or school community, display the posters in a prominent place as a testament to what your group experienced through this Food Fast.

# Activity: Understanding the Fast

## Handout

FACE THE FAST

### Scriptural Passages

#### Matthew 5:6

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.

#### Matthew 25:35-36

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.

#### Matthew 26:11

The poor you will always have with you; but you will not always have me.

#### Luke 9:16-17

Then taking the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing over them, broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd.

They all ate and were satisfied. And when the leftover fragments were picked up, they filled twelve wicker baskets.

#### John 6:35

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.

#### Isaiah 58:10

If you bestow your bread on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted; Then light shall rise for you in the darkness, and the gloom shall become for you like midday.

#### James 2:15-17

If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well," but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

#### Deuteronomy 15:11

The needy will never be lacking in the land; that is why I command you to open your hand to your poor and needy kinsman in your country.

#### Micah 6:8

You have been told, O man, what is good, and what the LORD requires of you: Only to do the right and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God.