

Lent

Christian Simplicity

Protecting God's Creation ■ Promoting Gospel Justice ■ Nurturing Spiritual Fulfillment

Coordinator's Manual

FOR CREATIVELY IMPLEMENTING THIS
7-WEEK FAITH FORMATION PROGRAM
IN YOUR CHURCH

*"The Earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof;
the world, and they that dwell therein." - Psalm 24:1*



Lent 2011

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1 Introductory Information

A Message for the Coordinator

Thank you for taking on the important work of coordinating the implementation of Lent 4.5 in your church. Lent 4.5 is a turn-key program, but it does take some assembly. This manual will guide you, step by step, through the implementation of the various facets of the program. It is designed to help you successfully and creatively organize the program in a way that best serves your congregation.

The manual is divided into five chapters. In this introductory Chapter 1 you will find an overview perspective and information on the background of the program. Chapter 2 presents a detailed explanation of each of the six components of the Lent 4.5 program with guidance on how you can select and easily adapt the components for your church. Chapter 3 lays out the tasks and responsibilities for each week-at-a-glance in a practical how-to manner. Chapter 4 provides your staff

and clergy with a toolkit of usual information aligned to each of the weekly themes of Lent 4.5. Chapter 5 offers a collection of abundant resources with additional information to support your implementation of the program.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us. The staff of the Passionist Earth & Spirit Center is ready to help and support you through this Lenten journey. We want to work with you to answer questions, address concerns, clarify options, and bolster your decisions. You can reach us at:

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Goal of Lent 4.5

The goal of Lent 4.5 is to bring forth a Christian presence on the Earth that is grounded in Gospel justice, sensitive to God's creation, and brimming with spiritual fulfillment by:

- offering new ways of observing the traditional Lenten practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving that can make a difference in the inequities of our world;
- drawing attention to the Gospel value of simplicity as a means of finding greater spiritual fulfillment;
- highlighting the church's teachings on social justice, the dignity of all human beings, and the integrity creation;
- fostering a conversion of heart – *metanoia* – by leading Christians into a deeper baptismal commitment to walk in the footsteps of Jesus by living in right relationship with God, creation, and the entire human family.

The Meaning of 4.5

Through a measuring tool called Global Footprint, we are able to assess the impact of various lifestyles upon the Earth. It is a complex process, but a simple formula. At present, there are approximately 6.5 billion humans alive on the planet. If we were to divide the planet evenly so that each of us receives a fair-share, every person would be entitled to 4.5 acres.

From that 4.5 acres each of us would have to find the wherewithal to cultivate our food, the space and materials to construct our home, the energy to heat and cool it, the water for our lawn and toilets, a place to dispose of our wastes, the timber or plastic to put together our furniture, the fibers to produce our clothes, the metals to manufacture our appliances and cars, the petroleum for our transportation, and anything needed to make our gadgets and “stuff.” 4.5 acres would be each person’s fair-share.

The Global Footprint accounting tool enables us to measure how much the productive land and sea of the planet is used to support the average lifestyle of any country. We can use it to calculate how many acres it takes to support the lifestyle of an individual, an industry or a country. According to 2009 data (www.footprintnetwork.org), countries vary widely. The amount of acreage it takes to support the average lifestyle varies greatly from country to country.

- Tanzania 2.6 acres
- Iraq 3.3 acres
- Saudi Arabia 8.6 acres.
- India 1.9 acres

- Japan 10.2 acres
- France 11.4 acres
- Mexico 8.0 acres
- Canada 14.2 acres
- United States 22.3 acres

Regardless of our personal habits of consumption, anyone who lives in North America benefit from the infrastructures, food choices, travel options, medical advantages and conveniences of a standard of living that demands a lot more than 4.5 acres. If our fair share is 4.5 acres of the planet’s resources that means others must do with less so we can maintain our level of affluence.

For a long time, many people thought that a justice world would be achieved by lifting others up to our standard of living. We now know that is impossible, given the spatial restrictions and limited resources of the Earth. Estimates suggest that it would take four or five planets to accomplish that elevation in lifestyles. But we only have one.

We have a huge global problem. We Christians in affluent countries have a faith problem. Anyone who follows in the footsteps of Jesus Christ cannot remain distant or indifferent to the consumption habits of our country. How can we share our planet with another 6.5 billion human beings in a way that enables all of us to live with dignity? Specifically, how can our observance of Lent 2011 make a direct response to global poverty and restore the integrity of God’s creation. These issues are the heart of Lent 4.5.

Christian Simplicity

A Gospel Value for Our Times

Many of the habitual and daily choices of consumption which we make are damaging God’s creation and producing an unjust world. The modern mindset thinks of the planet as a pre-manufactured resource, not a sacred endowment placed in our stewardship. God’s creation is typically treated as a storehouse for consumption or a dump where we can toss our waste. This mentality drives our economy and influences our purchasing decisions. We are seemingly willing to exhaust the Earth’s resources and deprive future generations in order to satisfy our ravenous desires. In this materialistic culture everything is designed to make us consumers.

The Gospel challenges us to transform the way we understand, use, and consume the resources of the planet. Jesus spoke frequently about the dangers of excessive consumption. He warned of the spiritual peril brought on by too much stuff. Lent 4.5 tries to be honest with what the Gospel says about simplicity. It offers Christians practical ways to be different from our purchase-driven society.

Simplicity does not mean moving to a cave or eating berries. Living simply means setting limits that reflect our faith values by taking only what we need – not hoarding or taking in excess. Good stewardship

of God's creation brings forth a life that is outwardly simple and nurtures a life that is inwardly fulfilling.

Simplicity has long been a noble Christian virtue. The Gospel clearly places a priority on the reign of God and suggests that excessive attachment or hoarding material possessions can undermine the spiritual life (Luke 6:20-25). It abounds with injunctions to resist becoming a slave to belongings (Luke 16:13-15). It suggests that accumulating too many things can result in devastating anxiety (Matthew 6:26-34). The many admonitions which warn against allowing wealth to become a main concern are not legalistic axioms, but guideposts to a life of freedom and spiritual fulfillment (Matthew 19:21-23).

The Lenten Journey

Conversion through Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving

Lent is a major event in the annual life of the Christian community. It is a time when many people want to do something "more" to foster their spiritual life and make the world a better place.

Lent 4.5 honors the good intentions Christians have to do something extra during Lent and directs the focus toward a conversion of heart that is concerned about environmental sustainability, social justice and spiritual fulfillment. Caring for creation and living more simply are an essential part of faith for those who follow in the footsteps of Jesus today.

Traditionally, Lent is a 40-day baptismal retreat during which we prepare ourselves to celebrate the paschal mystery. It is an opportunity for deepening our commitment to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. Like the Biblical disciples, we make an annual journey to Jerusalem – the place of death and resurrection. The essential Christian pattern witnessed in the dying and rising of Jesus, we claim to be our own.

This makes Lent an appropriate time to reflect on how our lifestyle impacts the world and other people with whom we share planet Earth. In what ways do we need to die to our selfish selves so as to put on the mind of Christ? St. Paul advised that we "must never act out of rivalry or conceit; rather, let all parties think humbly of others as superior to themselves, each of you looking to others' interest rather than you own" (Philippians 2:3-5). During Lent we reflect on how our daily and habitual choices affect God's creation and God's creatures, as well as consider what changes are being required of us. Lent 4.5 uses the three foundation practices of Lent – fasting, prayer and almsgiving – to help us bring peace and reconciliation to the Earth and all its inhabitants.

Without simplicity, discipleship and progress in the spiritual life are not possible. Like the rich young man laden with an over-abundance of material possessions, we are inclined to hear the message of Jesus but go away sad, for like him we have many possessions (Mark 10:22).

When viewed through the lens of the Gospel, simplicity becomes liberating for the prosperous and life-affirming for those who are poor. Voluntarily choosing simplicity reorients our hearts toward finding a treasure which will never perish. At the same time, when the value of simplicity influences our personal consumption habits we can bring about a just society and protect God's creation for generations to come. Lent is a great time to start.

PRAYER – Lent is a time of self-denial when Christians traditionally give up things. Lent 4.5 brings contemporary meaning and value into fasting. It suggests practical ways in which we can abstain from habits and choices that harm God's creation. We can do more than give up chocolate for Lent. Why not fast in a way that can actually make a difference in the well-being of our world?

FASTING – The prayers of gratitude, penance and quiet listening are part of Lent's ancient tradition. Lent 4.5 leads us into prayerful gratitude for the gift of life in all its forms. It stirs a spirit of penance for the ways God's planet has been misused. Through quiet listening we can hear the sacred voice of God once again speaking to us through creation.

ALMSGIVING – Almsgiving is a noble Lenten practice based on the values of charity, justice and the common good. Each day we unwittingly make choices that affect people we will never meet – for better or for worse. Lent 4.5 offers suggestions for making small but significant changes to our lifestyle that express care for creation and concern for the common good by not taking more than our fair share of the Earth's resources.

CONVERSION – The ultimate goal of Lent is metanoia – a conversion of heart – leading Christians into a deeper baptismal commitment to walk in the footsteps of Jesus who lived in right relationship with creation, others and God. There is now a growing awareness that God's planet is being damaged and its resources are not fairly shared. Lent 4.5, then, is an opportunity to support caring for creation and living more simply as essential elements of following in the footsteps of Jesus today.

The Passionist Earth & Spirit Center

The Earth & Spirit Center is a JPIC organization (Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation) established by the Passionist Community of Holy Cross Province (Chicago, IL) with the conviction that the Earth and all of its inhabitants are sacred. Its vision is to cultivate a place and promote an ethics of life which acknowledges the Earth to be a single sacred community.

The mission of the Earth & Spirit Center is to motivate, educate and enable religious institutions and people of faith to assume an active role in building a just and sustainable society.

More information is available online at www.earthandspiritcenter.org.

Staff of the Passionist Earth & Spirit Center

- Fr. Joe Mitchell, CP – Director
- Mary Mattingly – National Coordinator of Lent 4.5
- Tim Darst
- Phyllis Fitzgerald
- Beth Zangari

2 Components of the Program

Overview

Lent 4.5 is a turn-key program which can be adapted for the needs of your church. It has six components from which you can select and shape a meaningful Lenten experience for your congregation.

Each participating church receives a Coordinator's Manual which will guide you step-by-step through implementation of the various facets of the program. The manual includes: background information and supportive documentation on the program; a thorough explanation of all the components with helpful hints; a week-at-a-glance summary of actions and responsibilities; and a toolkit which features quotations, quick facts, and additional resources for each weekly theme.

Two Basic Components

1. Bulletin Inserts – Take-Home Materials

Becoming Informed and Taking Action

The nine bulletin inserts distributed throughout the Lenten season are the foundation of the program. Each week the insert focuses on a particular area of consumption. The inserts are structured in four sections: a brief essay explaining the issue; a summary of what the church is saying about the topic; a menu of possible actions steps which can be taken to lower personal consumption in that area; and guidance on how to find additional information and resources. They are designed to raise awareness, stimulate reflection, and motivate action within members of your congregation.

2. Online Resources and Blog

Going Deeper and Exploring Options

The content of the bulletin inserts along with an abundant collection of additional resources are available online at www.lent45.org. When your church registers for the program, members of your congregation will have access to this electronic version which includes hyperlinks. With a simple click of the mouse, they will be directed to videos, essays, and websites which offer support and practical guidance for their observance of Lent 4.5 and living Christian simplicity.

The Lent 4.5 blog connects Christians throughout the United States and Canada who are participating in Lent 4.5. It provides a forum for members of your church to share their experiences, reflections and the personal steps they have taken to simplify their lives, lower their consumption, and protect God's creation. Sharing creative alternatives is a way we can support each other's faith commitment to bring forth a more just and sustainable world.

Four Optional Components

3. Faith Sharing and Study Groups

Discussion Courses

Christian Simplicity: A Gospel Value for Our Time is a seven-week discussion course available for those who want to go deeper. Each participant receives a course book – a collection of articles, book excerpts, and essays organized according to the seven weekly themes of Lent 4.5. It is designed for groups of 8-12 people who meet weekly to reflect prayerfully on God's word, share their reactions to the readings, and support each other in making personal changes. (Course books for each participant can be ordered in bulk or purchased separately.)

4. Large Group Activities

Prayer, Videos and Speakers

Each week of Lent 4.5 offers an opportunity for your congregation to come together for prayer and learning. The Coordinator's Manual provides suggestions on how to make use of videos or bring in speakers to create an experience of transformative learning. Prayer, reflection, presentations, and discussions can create a lively evening of community involvement.

5. Activities for Children

School Resource Book

Lent 4.5 can be integrated into the curriculum of a parochial school, Sunday school or religious education program for grades K-8. The Lent 4.5 School Resource Book addresses the weekly themes through age-appropriate curriculum resources. Grounded in the rich Biblical heritage of Christian simplicity, it is designed to help teachers explain to young people the pressing issues of justice and sustainability facing our human family and how they can make a difference. (The school resource book can be purchased separately.)

6. Guidance for Church Leadership

Evaluating Policies and Structures

The goal of Lent 4.5 is to educate and inspire people of faith to make personal choices which can bring about a more just and sustainable world. Churches themselves have a role to play – and a responsibility. Participation in Lent 4.5 can be used as an opportunity for church leadership (parish councils, school boards, parish staffs) to examine the impact of their decisions and policies. Areas of focus include: auditing energy efficiency of buildings; purchasing or using sustainable and fair trade products at church events; providing options for recycling; switching to non-toxic cleaning products; and examining wasteful habits of consumption within the organization. The Coordinator's Manual offers guidance on how to engage the issues with those responsible. It also offers suggestions on where to find help in making the necessary changes.