Dear Pastors,

To complement the great work already happening in your parish, Development and Peace – Caritas Canada is pleased to provide these Family Reflection Tools for the Sundays of Lent. In response to requests we have received from members and parishioners across Canada, these weekly reflections are meant to help bring the discussion of the Gospel and our Lenten mission into the family home after weekly celebrations and to support family reflection and prayer throughout Lent.

These reflections link the Sunday Gospel themes to the themes Development and Peace is exploring this Lent – of solidarity and compassion in action, with a particular focus on women in development. Each reflection also has a link to additional learning through the Solidarity Calendar, videos, and stories Development and Peace has provided to engage families in discussion of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. You can review all of these free resources at devp.org/lent.

Please feel free to share these Family Reflection Tools in whichever way is appropriate in your parish community – through catechism classes, as inserts in the parish bulletins, or by having ushers hand them out to families as they leave after Mass.

Thank you very much for your consideration. Feel free to contact schools@devp.org with any questions or feedback.

Wishing you a blessed Lenten journey!
1st Sunday:

Matthew 4:1-11

“He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.”

Fasting for forty days and forty nights is not easy. But we are called to it every year – giving up the things that distract us from God, dedicating special time to prayer to strengthen our relationship with God, and almsgiving. Almsgiving means giving of our time, talents and possessions to those who are in need in order to help build the kingdom of God.

It is easy to live on auto-pilot and not really think about what we are doing. Sometimes, we need to be reminded to think about why and how we do things. Sometimes, we need to take time away from the norms of daily life to reflect, and sometimes, we need to reconnect with those who are important to us.

Taking on the Lenten challenge to pray, simplify our lives, and share with those around us can help us shake off the auto-pilot and become more aware of our choices. Jesus is here to give us strength when we feel the temptation to give up on our Lenten commitments.

When choosing your Lenten challenge, consider replacing an old habit with a new one, and making your challenge an active commitment to God and those around you. This can have an impact on your life beyond the 40 days of Lent! If you are not used to praying daily, start with five minutes a day as your Lenten prayer commitment. To fast, you could give up a favorite food or make a commitment to switch from disposables to renewables for packing your lunch. For almsgiving, you could share your allowance with people experiencing poverty through Development and Peace or the local St. Vincent de Paul Society.

How does Christ want us to live in the world? How can we follow His example? Seeking to answer these questions is what Lent is about.

Discussion Questions:

- What can we do this Lent together as a family to refocus ourselves on listening to Jesus?

- How can we support each other in our Lenten journey?

Follow your Lenten days with Development and Peace’s Solidarity Calendar. It has a Learn, Pray or Act idea for every day in Lent to help you walk this Lenten journey. Available at devp.org/lentcalendar.
2nd Sunday:

Matthew 17:1-9

“This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!”

Peter wanted to build tents in order to keep the three holy figures of Moses, Elijah and Jesus with him on the mountain because they represented the customs and teachings that were familiar to him. We sometimes like to do this too – only hold on to what is comfortable and familiar in our faith, like attending Mass and praying, without going deeper. But Jesus challenges us to go “down the mountain,” to go forth from Mass and personal prayer to spread His love, live out the teachings of the Gospel and to help build His Kingdom.

The voice from the cloud said to listen to His beloved Son. The call of Jesus is not for the faint of heart: to love our neighbours (all of them), to spend time with the outcast, sick, and imprisoned people of our society, and to be radically inclusive (especially of those who are usually excluded).

Who can we include that we usually leave aside? Whose voices and concerns do we usually tune out? Who can we show the love of God to today, this week?

Sometimes the reason we don’t do these things is that we are shy, or scared of what others might think. Sometimes we are just lazy, or too stuck in our routines to even notice. Lent is about overcoming our bad habits and refocusing on both Jesus’ instructions in our lives and His voice that calls us to something greater. It might be scary, hard, or uncomfortable, but Jesus tells us not to be afraid – that He is with us. He will help us through it.

Discussion Questions:

− What keeps us from including those who are often left out?

− Who can we reach out to this week at school or work, and as a family?

Learn about some courageous female leaders this week by visiting devp.org/lentcalendar.
3rd Sunday:

John: 4:5-42 (5-15, 19-26, 40-42)

The woman said to him, “I know that the Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” Jesus said to her, “I am He, the one who is speaking to you.”

Jews and Samaritans had different ideas about how to pray, different ideas about God. This affected their daily life. They did not interact much, and did not tend to have much respect for one another because of their differences. So the woman at the well is surprised when Jesus, a Jew, asks her, a Samaritan, for a drink.

Jesus recognized the true value and dignity of every person he met – including those people who were vulnerable, poor, or sick. He did not see them the way others saw them, through their sins, or as being separate because of gender or community origin, or anything else. He saw every person through the eyes of love.

The woman’s presence at the well in midday is of particular importance. She is there during the heat of the day, whereas most women would have come at dawn and dusk, when it was cooler to walk and do to the work of raising the water. That she is separate from the others tells us she is an outcast. Jesus doesn’t focus on her sins or her challenges. He treats her with respect and love.

He often affirms the place of women in his stories. Here again, Jesus breaks the social and cultural norms of the time and addresses the woman at the well with dignity, speaking to her honestly, and engaging her in His love and truth. We are called to do the same for the outcast people in our society today.

Discussion Questions:

- What opportunities do we have in our daily lives to affirm someone’s dignity?

- Who is a woman who inspires us in her example of following Jesus? How?

Which woman inspires you? Go to devp.org/insp-women and send us a picture with a few words (2-3 sentences) explaining how she inspires you. Your story will be published on our website.
4th Sunday: John 9:1-41 (1, 6-9, 13-17, 34-38)

Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.”

Sometimes, we can be like the Pharisees in today’s Gospel. Sometimes, when we think we know better, we make fun of those who are trying to help solve a problem. We think they are wasting their energy, that they don’t understand, and their invitations for us to get involved with them is a waste of our time. It is easy to become disillusioned, to lose sight of the hope that is in Christ’s message. It is easy to accept poverty, doubt, injustice, and other social evils as ‘normal’ and then forget to respond compassionately.

Jesus shows us that loving is the most important rule. We are called to love our neighbour, even our global ones whom we don’t see every day – but with whom we are connected through how we treat the planet, what we buy, what our government does in the world, as well as news and social media. We are called to love these neighbours by working for global justice even when those around us ignore them.

When we focus on all the obstacles, active love is hard. When we focus on the humanity of the person in front of us or many miles away – on what we have in common, on what we can accomplish together – possibilities appear. We need to listen to other people’s stories, to their voices and ideas, with open hearts, if we want to better understand them.

Accepting new ideas, new ways of working, and new roles can be scary. But again, Jesus is with us on this journey.

Discussion Questions:

- Who are the people in our daily lives to whom we can show the love and compassion of God?

- Which family rules ensure our well-being?

Take time this week to hear someone else’s story. In particular, listen to what the women and girls of Syria are saying in their own words: what they want, what is happening, and what we can do about it. Visit devp.org/testimonials/loubna to hear what Loubna, a Syrian woman who participated in our partner program, has to say.
5th Sunday (Solidarity Sunday):

John 11: 1–45 (3–7, 17, 20–27, 33b–45)

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.”

Today is Solidarity Sunday. It is a day that was set aside by the Canadian Bishops when they created Development and Peace to reflect on how we love our sisters and brothers in this world, and in particular, to share what we can to help those who are most vulnerable.

Jesus was moved by the pain that Mary, Martha, and their friends felt at the loss of Lazarus. He loved them, like his own family. We too, should be moved by compassion for the suffering of those around the world living in poverty, oppression, and exclusion, and treat them as they are – our sisters and brothers.

Acts of love for our sisters and brothers are not about gaining points to earn our way into heaven. They aren’t about showing off. In fact, the way Jesus helps people is usually very humble and quiet. He heals; He teaches; He affirms; He saves people. And He does so without the big shows and elaborate pageantry that the ‘false prophets’ used.

Helping others is not something we do for ourselves; we do it for God. Helping others is not just a good thing, it is a sign of love, of caritas – love received and given. When we see others as God does, as our sisters and brothers, we share with them what we have. We encounter Christ in others, and we are transformed by the relationship – not of a donor and recipient, but as sisters and brothers.

Discussion Questions:

- How have we been changed by helping others?

- What are some concrete ways we can better live in solidarity with our sisters and brothers around the world?

Bring your donations to church today for the Solidarity Sunday Collection, or go online and donate at devp.org/give.
And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.”

Accepting to follow God is not an easy path. Living compassion, praying daily, and protecting the dignity of our sisters and brothers – none are easy tasks.

At the 2016 World Youth Day celebrations in Krakow, Pope Francis told young people:

“My friends, Jesus is the Lord of risk, of the eternal ‘more.’ Jesus is not the Lord of comfort, security and ease. Following Jesus demands a good dose of courage, a readiness to trade in the sofa for a pair of walking shoes and to set out on new and uncharted paths. To blaze trails that open up new horizons capable of spreading joy, the joy that is born of God’s love and wells up in your hearts with every act of mercy. To take the path of the “craziness” of our God, who teaches us to encounter him in the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick, the friend in trouble, the prisoner, the refugee and the migrant, and our neighbours who feel abandoned. To take the path of our God, who encourages us to be politicians, thinkers, social activists. The God who asks us to devise an economy inspired by solidarity. In all the settings in which you find yourselves, God’s love invites you bring the Good News, making of your own lives a gift to him and to others.”

Throughout Lent, Development and Peace has been highlighting women at the heart of change: women who are helping those around them; women who are community leaders in parts of the world where women often don’t have much support. Here at home, women also face challenges – challenges such as being devalued and treated as objects rather humans with an inherent dignity. God is asking us to listen to them and to treat them with the dignity, love and respect they deserve and thus to build His Kingdom here on earth – this week and beyond.

“Are you up to this? What answer will you give, with your hands and with your feet, to the Lord, who is the way, the truth and the life?”

– Pope Francis, WYD Krakow, July 2016

Discuss these questions from Pope Francis with your family.

Continue your journey in Solidarity by becoming members of Development and Peace. This will help you stay connected to social justice issues, learn how to take action, and invite you into a community of like-minded folk in your area. Learn more at devp.org/membership.