

Planning for Lent and Easter in 2022 - a Rotation.org Zoom Coffee Chat

Tuesday, January 25, 2022

Gathering summary, breakout session recaps, Zoom chat comments, and links

After welcome, prayer, and introductions, to start our conversation board president Amy Crane shared her screen for a tour of some of the resources at Rotation.org for Lent and Easter. Some highlights:

Ash Wednesday is in five weeks on March 2, 2022; Easter is April 17.

We started our tour on the home page:

- Everything will look a bit different on mobile, but tablets and smartphones have same highlights and functions that you will see on the desktop tour, just arranged differently.
- The home page highlights our newest items ([Creation Writing Team lesson set](#)) as well as seasonal highlights.
- Our Facebook page is linked from the bottom of our homepage; be sure to follow us on Facebook for the latest news as well as treasures.
- The drop-down menus on the home page take you to the rest of our site. In drop-down menu: select **Teacher and Training Resources – Rotation how-to** and go to **Teachers' Lounge** to ask for help planning lessons or programs. You must be a registered member (free!) or Supporting Member (\$45/year) to post questions.

The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the Rotation.org website. The main navigation items are: Home, Lessons & Resources, Teaching & Training Resources, Rotation How-to, Membership, and About & Help. A search icon, a plus icon, and a gear icon are also present. The user's name, Amy Crane, and a notification badge with the number 124 are displayed on the right side of the navigation bar. A red arrow points from the text 'Click here' to the 'Teaching & Training Resources, Rotation How-to' menu item. Below the navigation bar, a dropdown menu is open for 'Teaching & Training Resources, Rotation How-to'. The dropdown menu contains the following items: 'Teachers Lounge ~ Ask for Lesson Help', 'Teacher Training, Classroom Mgmt, General Teaching Resources', and 'Resources & Help for Teachers, Leaders, Lesson Writers'. A red arrow points from the text 'and then here to post a question' to the 'Teachers Lounge ~ Ask for Lesson Help' item. To the right of the dropdown menu, there is a blue button with the text '» Post a New Topic << Lesson or Resource'.

- “Search” is one of the options on the main menu bar; this really helpful keyword search feature is available to Supporting Members.

Currently there is a seasonal link on the home page directly to **LENT: Bible stories, Lessons, Ideas, Practices, Ash Wednesday**. Take that [link](#) to the Lent forum (note that the Lent forum is in special topics as it does not fit under a particular Bible story).

- [Shrove Tuesday \(Mardi Gras!\) and Ash Wednesday](#) ideas includes children’s sermons, special programs, and lessons.
- The [Lent 2022](#) topic highlights lessons at our site which have been ADAPTED for HOME USE during the pandemic, or for in-church teaching with social distancing in mind. The Lent 2022 topic also has many ideas for celebrating Lent, including Lenten Walks and spiritual practices with social-distancing in mind. And many of these ideas (some from 2020 when we first started distancing) will be appropriate for post-pandemic use, too. (Don’t miss the [Writing Team set on the Lord’s Prayer adapted for at-home use](#); it is ready to be shared with your families as PDFs.)
- The [Recommended Bible Stories](#) for Lent topic includes a list of stories recommended in the Common **Lectionary** with LINKS to their lesson resources at Rotation.org. (Note that some of the stories listed in the Common Lectionary have few if any resources at Rotation.org because the Lectionary recommends lots of Bible passages that, while they might make good pulpit subjects, simply don't belong in a children's curriculum -- not at the expense of kids really learning the major stories. Rotation Modelers, for whom this site was originally created, focus on teaching the MAJOR stories of the Bible to kids -- each over a period of several weeks to really dig into these stories and remember them. Workshop Rotation Model is the opposite of the Lectionary's "one and done" approach that races through the Bible, but our resources can be used for all sorts of teaching methods.)
- [General Lent ideas and lessons](#) includes lessons and activities and more at-home resources.
- Throughout the site you will find topical essays and teaching articles, many by our webmaster (and Workshop Rotation Model innovator) Neil MacQueen, such as [“Should children ‘give up’ something for Lent?”](#) which will help you think about introducing spiritual practices such as fasting, service, and prayer to the young people you work with. Many of the articles include thought-provoking graphics that you can share with your community.
- [Lenten programs and Seders](#). There are some great church-wide intergenerational suggestions here as well as family at-home ideas.

Now go back to the menu bar and hover over “Lessons & Resources” and select “View all lesson & resource forums” from the drop-down menu. You will see a number of choices, including lessons

organized by book of the Bible or aspect of Jesus' life. Select "[LESSONS: JESUS from PALM SUNDAY TO EASTER MORNING](#)" for Easter/Holy Week lessons, resources, and ideas.

- Note that there are five Holy Week/Easter Writing Team (WT) lesson sets, so that you can teach a different aspect of the Easter story every year in a five year scope and sequence before you have to repeat lessons.
- We toured one WT set: [Mary Magdalene ~ Meeting Jesus at the Empty Tomb](#). While the lessons are only available to our Supporting Members, the Bible backgrounds and lesson summaries are open to all, so you can preview what sorts of lessons you would get with a Supporting Membership. PDFs and MP4 files and links to videos are included in WT sets to make preparing to teach easy. And we love when users return and share pictures and videos and adaptations to help others teach these lessons.
- In addition to the Supporting Member only Writing Team lesson sets, we have plenty of lessons and resource forums that are open to all; they are also subdivided into different parts of the Holy Week narrative. And within each Bible story, lessons and ideas are further subdivided by teaching method and medium (which we call "workshops"). For some stories, you will also find entire lesson sets that churches have written and shared. We love our sharing community!
- There is an entire forum dedicated to [Celebrating Holy Week during the Pandemic: Lessons and Ideas for At-Home Use](#).
- You will find suggestions for Palm Sunday and Good Friday as well as Easter egg hunts in "[Misc Non-Lesson Ideas for teaching/celebrating Holy Week & Easter](#)."



Don't miss the [Annie Vallotton Bible Illustrations Collection](#), a gift to the Rotation.org community from Christian educators Don and Pat Griggs. There are many wonderful illustrations from Jesus' life that can be used in many ways; check out the [articles](#) for more info. Full-sized jpegs are available to our Supporting Members; all can access smaller versions which are great for illustration handouts. (These illustrations may seem familiar to you as Annie Vallotton was the artist for the Good News

Bible's illustrations.) Of relevance for today's conversation is the collection of [Jesus' Last Week illustrations](#) which can be used for slides projected during worship, newsletters, games, drama workshops, and in many other ways.

If you are not already a Supporting Member, take a look at the other benefits of membership [here](#). Supporting Memberships make our site and special resources possible. We are 100% funded by churches and people like you who appreciate our extensive resources, share our vision for creative and engaging teaching in Sunday school, and appreciate having a place to ask for lesson and program help. As a 501(c)3 non-profit, we depend on Supporting Memberships to keep us online, expanding, and innovating.

We then spent some time in breakout rooms, discussing ideas inspired by Amy's presentation as well as participants' meaningful program ideas and insights. Participants shared quick notes in chat about some of the highlights of their breakout conversations, which are here below (with a few links added):

Kathy Roberts: we alternate years between Mardi Gras and Shrove Tuesday pancakes; we're in Atlanta.

Carol Hulbert: A quick link to all of the Writing Team lesson sets having to do with Lent/Easter stories: <https://www.rotation.org/topic/nt-lesson-sets-wt/#LENT>

Catherine Curtis: Great [ideas for Easter egg hunts](#) to make them more meaningful!

Donna Foster: *Faithful Families for Lent, Easter and Resurrection* by Traci Smith

Chris Epstein: This is a link to the resource that Donna shared: https://smile.amazon.com/Faithful-Families-Lent-Easter-Resurrection/dp/0827211414/ref=sr_1_1?crid=YOY6AHYZB80A&keywords=faitful+families+for+lent+and+easter&qid=1643140168&srefix=Faithful+Families%2Caps%2C57&sr=8-1

Amy Wheatley: Traci's book (Faithful Families...) is also available through Chalice Press, Presbyterians can receive a discount, I believe!

Debbie Fisher: Michelle in St. Louis - I may incorporate your Church Chat idea into a 50 Days of Easter family fellowship program. Okay for me to use "Church Chat"?

Debbie Reiniche: Any information on a source for the large blow up photos would be helpful

Ian Grimm: I'd encourage churches to use Lent and Easter as a starting line for a season and not the culmination. We focus from Easter to Mother's day as a way to bookend engagement with families.

Debbie Reiniche: Easter love Letters from God, a great book for families. Can be given to each family for less than the cost of the candy you would purchase for an Easter Egg Hunt. Link: https://smile.amazon.com/Easter-Love-Letters-God-Stories/dp/0310760658/ref=sr_1_1?crid=3BH4U3Q1VN4ZC&keywords=easter+love+letters+from+god&qid=1643227717&s=books&srefix=easter+love+le%2Cstripbooks%2C125&sr=1-1

We also asked breakout group members to share highlights of their conversations:

Chris Epstein shared for her group:

- One of the ideas that stood out in particular was a “popup love shop.”
- Another church gave children Micah 6:8 bracelets to wear and learn during Lent, and children had an opportunity to redeem them on Easter Sunday for a special basket.
- The group discussed family stations of the cross, where the families received a token or symbol at each of the stations.
- The *Faithful Families* book ([details and purchase link](#)) was a popular suggestion in the group.
- Taking a selfie “selfie-less” with the camera turned out, looking outward instead of at oneself was a suggestion from Kathy Roberts.
- Several people shared that they had a wooden cross and they had the kids put little papers on them (flowers or rolled up) with things that they were giving up or adding in during Lent and at the end of Lent the cross was really beautiful and colorful thing that showed ways of cleaning the heart.
- The group also discussed ways of doing drive-through events for families that weren’t attending regularly on Sundays because of Covid. The event included giving materials to families for use at home and collecting canned goods for the food bank and people in costumes. This was a good way to connect with families. It was a really good discussion.

Ron shared that a lot of his group was still dealing with doing both online and onsite Sunday school and events, and how to manage that. Biggest topic of conversation was Easter egg hunts.

Debbie Reiniche shared a fascinating way of going deeper than just an egg hunt and making it a full-fledged program: they did a rotation on a Saturday; families invited people from the community to attend. Everyone gathered in the sanctuary and kids were given color-coded wristbands to divide them into four groups; parents had to stay with their children as the groups visited the four activities. In the sanctuary the story was shared using [resurrection eggs](#). In the kitchen, the groups made [resurrection rolls](#); another group did crafts. There was an Easter egg hunt outside (with four different sections for the four groups to visit in turn). This arrangement allowed the parents to hear the story as well, and grownups had the opportunity to interact with other adults as they helped their kids.

We encourage participants to share other Easter and Lent ideas you gleaned from this gathering at Rotation.org! We love our creative sharing community and how our members encourage one another. Don’t forget that you can ask for ideas and help developing lessons and programs by posting a question in our [Teachers' Lounge](#). We encourage you to share your programs and photos and ideas at our site to inspire others. (Email amycrane@hotmail.com if you need help posting your pictures and videos.)

A few people stayed online for continued conversation after the hour-long Coffee Chat ended. Here is a summary of the highlights:

Katherine Barker asked about when seasonal stories are taught. She is following the lectionary at her current church and it seemed odd teaching about the baptism of Jesus in early January – she is used to teaching that story at the start of Lent. Debbie Fisher shared that she like using Workshop Rotation Model to teach the Bible stories or themes that she chooses and she schedules when she wants to teach them; her Sunday school is not tied to the lectionary. Debbie pointed out that the flexibility of the rotation model is a benefit of her. She is currently teaching about the boy Jesus and most of her lessons came from our site. She likes looking at a single story in depth for four weeks.

We discussed how different communities are experiencing the return of children/families and volunteers in different ways. Debbie noted that people are very grateful for whatever the church does do at this time (she is sharing things in-person and also online). Debbie explained that attendance is Covid-dependent *and* weather-dependent for both volunteers and children. She is recording her lessons weekly and sends a link only to parents who ask for the online lessons. She is willing to share a lesson with anyone who wants to see what she is doing; e-mail her at dfisher@stalbansmaine.org if you want the link. She records using Photobooth and transfers it to iMovie – it is just her and the screen.

Debbie also sends a weekly email to parents, in addition to a section in the church’s weekly e-newsletter. She has learned in her years working in the church that no matter how many times you communicate something, someone will still say they did not know about it.

Chris Epstein used Zoom for Sunday school at the beginning of the pandemic shutdown; once they were onsite, someone did a separate Zoom with some families for a while, but that has stopped. So her church has some families that they are currently not serving, and she appreciates the ideas from this group.

Debbie said, “It’s all about relationship. Your families know you are caring and trying if you pick up the phone or you send an email or an old-fashioned letter -- just the effort is so appreciated!” Chris agreed and said that she has sent postcards to the kids and those have been well-received.

Ian Grimm shared that something that is easy to use for video is Facebook’s video function (no editing or “fancy” stuff, just basic video recording). Set up a Facebook page or a group and invite your families to watch the videos (you can keep it private for your church if you want). It is something you can send to parents and they can access it on their phone or anywhere and share it with their kids.

We talked about how streaming worship or sermons may be here to stay, at least for some churches. (Others are considering dropping it so that people return to worshipping with the community.) The question is, What about Sunday school? Some people feel kids have too much screen time already. Michele Ottinger noted that even if you are reaching just one kid or family via your online efforts, it is still worthwhile.

Ian: The goal is not to replace Sunday school, but not everyone can always be there in person. Online is a tool to share the Gospel, and we need to learn to utilize the tools that will make it better as we move forward. Think of it like a church plant: you pull people from the plant community to your church and then send them out to that community to plant the new church. Virtual is similar in some ways. You pull them in, and then encourage them to go back into their community, wherever it is.

Shortage of volunteers: Chris doesn't have help with recording anything and feels spread thin and wants to do a great job. Katherine has increased volunteers, but they are elderly and can't manage the technical stuff. Ian recommended using simple programs that many are familiar with like Facebook. (We can't do the same things the big online churches can.) He also suggested calling on older elementary and youth in church to help; it can be as simple as them holding the phone to record and then uploading the video for you. That makes them a leader and gets them involved.

Michele's church has set up times when older people can come to church and younger people will be there and be the tutor and help the older members know how to access online sermons and things.

Another idea that was shared was having tablets that people can borrow from the church library to watch sermons and programs. The links can be on the device, or the video could be already loaded and the person watching wouldn't even need to have internet. (You can purchase inexpensive tablets or people can donate their old tablets.) This is a great way to get sermons to shut-ins. Chris's church has purchased little dvd players that they gave to shut-ins and deacons deliver the sermon/worship dvd during their weekly visit.

Ian shared that Easter is a day when many people attend church and then they don't attend again until Mother's day. So his church changed so that Easter was the start of something rather than the culmination. The Sunday after Easter was a big event in kids' ministry that was promoted on Easter (like PJs and Poptarts) so that the kids would want to return the week after Easter. Then, even if they missed the next Sunday, they were there with their families the following Sunday for Mother's Day, so that they were at church for three of four Sundays in a month and a habit was started. He has found that everything revolves around hooking kids in and then families will be there. If families are invested and parents see good things in their kids, they will see the benefit of regular attendance and they will attend more regularly. In other words, Easter can be a good bridge to a season of attendance rather than a culmination of attendance (building new attendance patterns).

Thank you for your time and input. We are grateful for our sharing community, and we are praying for you and your congregation! Remember, you can always reach out to us at the rotation.org site for further discussion and also with specific questions.