



Prepare for Lent by Celebrating Mardi Gras!

In our Church Year, the time between the Church Seasons is called Ordinary Time. There are two blocks of Ordinary Time in the Church Year. The first is in winter. It is the time between the end of the Christmas Season and the beginning of Lent. The second is the time between the end of the Easter Season and the beginning of Advent in the new Church year. During Ordinary Time in winter, we also are celebrating Carnival (not an official season in the Church), a word which literally means "farewell to the flesh." It is a time of feasting and celebrating before we enter the penitential season of Lent. The last day of Ordinary Time in the winter is the day before Ash Wednesday. This day is called Shrove Tuesday, or Mardi Gras, or Pancake Day.

When we think of celebrating Mardi Gras, we often think of Mardi Gras masks and Mardi Gras beads. This year, celebrate Carnival and prepare for Lent by making your own Mardi Gras "Good Deed Beads"! This activity can be done in your own home with your family, in a school or parish religion program setting, or by a youth group. Just follow these simple directions:

1. Begin with prayer. As part of your prayer, read and reflect on the Biblical passage about the Greatest Commandment (Luke 10: 25-28). Discuss Jesus' Law of Love: Love God, Love Your Neighbor, Love Yourself.
2. Briefly talk about the Liturgical Calendar. There are the Seasons of the Church Year: Advent, Christmas, Lent, Triduum, Easter. And there is the time between the Seasons, which we call Ordinary Time. During Ordinary Time in the winter, many countries and cultures celebrate "Carnival" a word which literally means "farewell to the flesh." It is a time of feasting and celebrating before we enter the penitential season of Lent. The last day of Ordinary Time in the winter is the day before Ash Wednesday. This day is called Shrove Tuesday, or Mardi Gras, or Pancake Day.

3. Summarize the history and celebration of Carnival and Mardi Gras. A children's book which has good information about the history and traditions of carnival is *Carnival*, written by Alice K. Flanagan; illustrated by Roberta Collier-Morales (ISBN 0756504783).
4. Have participants think about concrete ways they can live Jesus' Law of Love. Have each participant jot down 44* things they can do to live Jesus' Law of Love: 15 ways they can show love for God; 15 ways they can show love for their neighbor; and, 14 ways they can show love for themselves. (While we say there are 40 days in Lent, there are actually 44 days beginning with Ash Wednesday through sundown Holy Thursday, when we begin the Triduum.)
5. Next take strips of colored construction paper (44 strips for each participant: 15 green; 15 purple; and, 14 gold). Use the official Mardi Gras color scheme of purple, green and gold. Rex selected the official Mardi Gras colors in 1872. The 1892 Rex Parade Theme, *Symbolism of Colors*, gave meaning to the colors: purple represents justice; green represents faith; gold represents power.
6. It is quicker if these have been cut in advance. You can determine the size, but five inches long by two inches wide works well. Note: if participants are going to decorate the strips of paper with stick on craft "jewels", it is best to use a sturdier paper such as poster board.
7. Using a fine tip marker, on each gold strip, have the participant write down one way they can show love for God. On each purple strip, have the participant write down one way they can show love for their neighbor. On each green strip, have the participant write down one way they can show love for themselves.
8. If they want, participants can decorate each strip with crayons or markers, Mardi Gras stickers, or even stick on craft "jewels."
9. Staple or glue the ends of one strip and then interlock another strip, and repeat the process forming a chain or necklace. (Make sure you intersperse the colors in the chain.)
10. Participants can wear their Mardi Gras Good Deed Beads each day of the Carnival season and/or for a Mardi Gras/Shrove Tuesday party. Then, beginning with Ash Wednesday, they "deconstruct" their beads, doing one of their "good deeds" each day during Lent. By the end of Lent, their chain is "gone" - they have completely given themselves to serving God, neighbor, and self!

Creating Mardi Gras "Good Deed Beads" is an excellent way to celebrate the Carnival/Mardi Gras season, while concretely preparing for Lent!

