Lent and Easter
praying with pretzels

AIM

To explore pretzel making as a prayerful activity during Lent.
This activity is a variation on the bread making prayer in the Prayer toolkit.

INTRODUCTION

Pretzels are originally Lent food – not the little ones that we buy as snacks from the supermarket, but big soft breads in the same shape. A famous picture by Pieter Bruegel (1559) called ‘The fight between carnival and lent’ of 1559 shows us this connection. Pretzels can be seen on lent’s wagon in the bottom right corner. You can view this picture on www.kitchenproject.com/history/images/carnival.jpg.

But the link between pretzels and Lent is much older than Bruegel’s picture. In the early church fasting laws were so strict that all one could really eat was bread and the story goes that monks in Italy (around 600AD) started to make a special dough of flour, salt and water. They rolled the dough in strips and then shaped each strip in the form of arms folded in prayer. Folding one’s arms over each other on the chest was the popular prayer position of the time. The three holes in the bread are said to represent the Trinity. The dough was then baked as a soft bread.

Because the bread was shaped in the form of crossed arms, they were called ‘bracellae’ which is Latin for little arms. From this word the Germans derived the word bretzel which has since mutated to pretzel. Another explanation is that the monks made the special breads as rewards for children who memorised their prayers correctly. It is the word for little rewards, ‘pretiola’, that became today’s pretzel.

Whatever the background, pretzels remind us that Lent is a time of prayer, of self-examination, of facing up to who we are, to confess and to prepare ourselves for Easter.

ACTIVITY

A good Lenten family activity is to make pretzels, explaining to children their significance, followed by praying together.

Here is a simple recipe (you can find others on the internet):

Ingredients

- Dried baking yeast – small sachet
- 6 fluid ounces of warm water or 175 mls
- ½ teaspoon of sugar
- ¼ teaspoon of salt
- 10 ounces of strong bread flour or 280 grms
- 1 beaten egg
- coarse salt, sesame seeds, sunflower seeds, etc to decorate.
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**Method**

1. Dissolve the yeast in the warm water in a small jug or bowl.

2. In a large bowl mix together the yeast mixture, sugar, salt and about half of the flour and beat it well. Add the remaining flour to form a stiff but elastic dough.

3. Put the dough to rise in a warm place until it has doubled in size.

4. Preheat the oven to 230 C/Gas mark 8 and lightly grease a baking tray.

5. Put the risen dough on a lightly floured surface and divide into between 8-12 roughly equal pieces depending on what size you want your pretzels. Roll each piece into a long stick/sausage shape and then form into a pretzel shape (see photograph is unsure what this is).

6. Place the pretzels on a baking sheet and brush with the beaten egg. Top with coarse salt. You may want to add other toppings like sesame or sunflower seeds (caution for nut allergy sufferers), or cheese or herbs.

7. Cook for 12-15 minutes. A golden brown colour is lightly bakes and will allow for reheating. A darker brown may mean they are a firmer bite.

**Prayer**

During or after making the pretzels spend some time thinking about the things you would like to pray for. As Lent is a time of self-examination and confession, focus on the things you would like to say sorry for.

Lenten God, in our making and baking
we take time to examine ourselves.

Help us to be honest and truthful and attend to the details of our relationships.

As the pretzels dough grows so may Lent be a time of growing for us.

As the smell of newly baked pretzels creates an inviting atmosphere,

so may we be made new by the invitation to prayer and service that we encounter this Lent.

**EVALUATION**

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

1. What was the most helpful thing?
2. What was the least helpful thing?
3. What would you like to try now?

**THE NEXT STEP**

If you want more Lent and Easter items please revisit the Website. Items for other season will be added during the year.
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HOW TO FEEDBACK TO VISION4LIFE?

If you wish to offer any feedback – brickbats and bouquets are equally welcome! – you can do so in various ways.

You can email the Vision4Life steering group about general or website V4L issues via the website or at admin@vision4life.org.uk

If you have comments and particularly contributions to the prayer year, you can email the V4L prayer year coordinator via prayer@vision4life.org.uk

If you want to make contributions or ask questions about other V4L years you can email:

Year 3 – Transformed for Evangelism: evangelism@vision4life.org.uk