**Launching Grow it Lent in your church**

**Grow it Lent** is a new fundraising initiative from The Children’s Society in which churches will be given £500 and asked to use their time and talents to ‘grow their share and show they care’ during Lent.

This resource contains some ideas for kicking off Grow it Lent in your church or children’s group.

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**Talk ideas for launching Grow It Lent**

Why not launch Grow it Lent during the sermon or talk slot on the first Sunday of Lent?

Here are two ideas for talks you might like to give:

1. **Giving something up for Lent?**

It’s the time of year when people might ask: ‘What are you giving up for Lent?’ Some of us may reply ‘chocolate’ or ‘alcohol’, seeing Lent as an opportunity to improve our health (and waistlines). Others give up something they enjoy in order to help others – for example we may give up our daily coffee on the way to work in order to save the money to help someone less well off than ourselves. Or we may go to a ‘hunger lunch’ in order to think about those who don’t have enough to eat.

Lent has always been a period of self-denial and penance in the Church year – which is why Shrove Tuesday, or Mardi Gras (literally ‘Fat Tuesday’), comes before Ash Wednesday. On Shrove Tuesday, all the rich foods of the household (such as butter and eggs) would be used up before the Lenten fast.

Traditionally, Lent was also the time of the Church’s year when candidates were prepared for their baptism on Easter Day. They would be expected to undertake a period of study and teaching before their baptism. Today, we might go to a study group or focus more on prayer during Lent.

The 40 days of Lent echo the 40 days that Jesus spent in the wilderness, being tempted and tested to his very limits, in preparation for his earthly ministry. We are told in Luke’s account that Jesus ‘ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished.’ (Luke 4.2). He must have been sorely tempted to take up the devil’s invitation to prove he was indeed God’s Son by turning dusty desert stones into bread. But he didn’t give in.

This Lent, we are asking you to give something up in order to grow something else. And it’s not just a bar of chocolate. We are asking you all to give up your time and to give of your creative talents in order to grow funds for the vital work of The Children’s Society.

The Children’s Society works with some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people in our society. They work with children who feel unsafe, alone and like they just don’t matter, and support them for as long as it takes for them to get back on their feet.

As part of their Grow it Lent appeal, The Children’s Society are giving us some ‘seed money’, which they are encouraging us to grow even larger. But we all need to play our part in thinking of creative ways of making it grow, so we can raise funds to help vulnerable children and young people.

[if you wish, use the ‘Grow it Lent’ tree activity here (see section 3) or invite the congregation to think about what they might do to grow the ‘seed money’ during Lent]

[conclude in prayer]

1. **An interactive talk using the Parable of the Talents**

***What you will need***

* One **Grow it Lent leaf pledge card** per person (see template at end of this resource.
* Pens

If you are doing the drama, please see list of props required below.

***The talk***

Have someone read the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25.14-30). Talk about the meaning of the parable. A ‘talent’ (or mina) was a coin, but we can also interpret the parable as being about using our gifts and skills wisely (‘talents’ in a wider sense) to bring greater riches for God.

*Introduce the idea of Grow it Lent as follows:*By participating in Grow it Lent, you can use your gifts and skills to ‘grow’ funds that will help The Children’s Society to support vulnerable children and young people.

Then invite the congregation to consider how they will use their talents to help ‘grow their share and show they care’.

Do a dramatised reading or act out the Parable. It’s fun to do this in modern or period dress, especially if children are involved. The following is a suggestion for acting out the scene.

***Props required***

* Baking equipment, eg mixing bowl, wooden spoon, cake cases (or even some prepared cupcakes)
* A bucket, sponge and cloth
* Toy money (eg from Monopoly) or chocolate coins to represent money

***Acting out the story***

* Have the vicar or a ‘boss’ figure (perhaps dressed up as a businessperson) hand out three different amounts of money to three pre-selected people (who are the ‘servants’ in the parable).
* The ‘boss’ gives the first person £100. They receive this with glee, with lots of ‘oohs’! They go away and buy equipment (the mixing bowl, spoon etc props) to make cakes. They can act out making the cakes and then setting up a stall and selling them. They raise £100 more.
* The second person receives £50. They also receive this with glee and look very excited. They go away and spend the money on cleaning materials (their sponge and bucket props) for washing cars They then mime going out and cleaning cars. They raise £50 more.
* The third person receives £10. They look at the money curiously, sigh, fold it up and put it in their pocket.
* The ‘boss’ returns and asks the servants what they have done with the money. The servants can mime their responses (showing the boss what they have done by acting it out) or they can use words.
* The boss is delighted with the first two servants, collects the money they have made and puts it in a large collecting box or bucket with the words ‘The Children’s Society’ on it. He/she pats them on the back and invites the congregation to applaud. They take a bow.
* The third person (the one who kept the money in their pocket) is hiding in a corner as the boss approaches. They approach the boss sheepishly. The boss asks/mimes asking where the money is – what have they done with it?
* The third person gets the folded £10 note out of their pocket, where it has been all the time. The boss shakes their head sadly and sends them out of the room.
* Invite the congregation to think about their own ‘talents’. Explain that you are not talking about money here, but the gifts and talents we all possess.
* Introduce the idea of Grow it Lent, explaining that this is a new way of raising money for the vital work of The Children’s Society.
* Invite the congregation to think about how they can use their own gifts and talents (eg in music, craft, baking, hospitality, etc) to ‘double their money’, or multiply it many times!
* Invite everyone to write down on their Grow it Lent pledge card how they intend to use their talents during Lent to ‘grow their share and show they care’.
* If appropriate, invite people to talk to their neighbour or in a small group about their intentions.
* Conclude in prayer (see the ‘Prayers’ section below)

**2. Activity to mark progress and success**

**Create a ‘Grow it Lent’ tree**

You might want to use the following idea as a ‘visual focus’ throughout the whole ‘Grow it Lent’ project:

* Either have a large outline drawing of a tree (without leaves) or a large bunch of bare branches in a pot (these need to be stable enough for people to tie on their Grow it Lent paper leaves).
* Place your drawing or pot with branches in a prominent place at the front of your church or meeting space.
* Provide leaf templates (see page 9), luggage labels or gift tags on which people can write down their fundraising idea and hang or place it on the tree. You may wish to do this as part of a reflective prayer time.
* Once the fundraising idea has been carried out, invite people to add the total raised to their leaf or label.
* Incorporate a Grow it Lent focus in your service each week in which you draw attention to the tree, and read out some of the ideas and the totals raised if the activity has already happened.

**3. Prayers**

**A prayer to mark the start of Grow it Lent**

Generous God,

as we mark the start of Lent,

help us to be mindful of our own greed and selfishness.

Forgive us for those times when we have given things up

for the benefit of our health or bank balances,

rather than the good of others.

This Lent, we pledge to give of our time and talents

to grow our share and show we care.

Inspire us with creative ideas and fresh energy;

encourage us as we work with others to raise vital funds for The Children’s Society;

remind us that we are doing this to give vulnerable children and young people

a brighter future,

because no child should feel alone.

Bless our efforts, we pray.

In Jesus’ name.

**Amen.**

**A thanksgiving prayer to mark the end of Grow it Lent**

God of new beginnings,

thank you for all that has been achieved through Grow it Lent.

Thank you for talents discovered and shared,

for creativity, energy and fun.

Bless all that we have offered and may it be used to better the lives of vulnerable children and young people.

For your sake.

**Amen.**

**4. Activity for children or young people**

***What you will need***

* Printed copies of the Parable of the Talents, Matthew 25.14-30
* Chocolate coins
* If you’re using the YouTube clip, a Wifi connection and the means to play it

***Telling the story***

* Tell the story of the Parable of the Talents, either in a child-friendly version or watch it together on YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bbPKhYBaWRg>
* Invite the children to act out a dramatised version, using ‘chocolate coins’ as money.
* Encourage the children to be creative in acting out how the servants used the differing amounts they received.

***Responding to the story***

Talk about the meaning of the story. You might use the following questions:

* I wonder what this story is about?
* I wonder which part of this story you like best?
* I wonder which part of this story you like least?
* I wonder why the boss was pleased with some of the servants?
* I wonder why the boss was angry with one of the servants?

***Using our talents to help others***

* Explain that in the story two of the servants used their ‘talents’ (ie money) and combined this with their other ‘talents’ (gifts, abilities and interests) to ‘grow’ what they had originally been given.
* Explain that during Lent, your church will support The Children’s Society, a charity who work with vulnerable children and young people who feel afraid, unsafe and alone.
* Invite them as a group to come up with ideas of how they can use their ‘share’ to ‘grow’ more money.
* Write the ideas down a large sheet of paper to share with the rest of the congregation, or give each child a Grow it Lent ‘leaf’ (see template at end of this resource) on which to write down their idea and hang it on the tree in church later.
* Finish in prayer.

**NB: You will need to have considered beforehand how you will support the children and young people in growing their share.**

Some suggestions:

* Could you organise a bake sale, eg after the Mothering Sunday service when there might be more visitors at church or during other local events?
* Could the young people organise a talent show and charge for entry?
* Could they do car washing or cleaning? (with adult supervision)

**5. Marking the end of Grow it Lent**

It’s important to look back at the end of Lent and celebrate all that was achieved and the money raised. You could do this in a variety of ways.

* Ask someone to compile a PowerPoint presentation with photos of the various events, or ask a few people to report back on what happened.
* Report back on the total raised.
* Make sure everyone is thanked for their efforts.
* Remind everyone that the money raised will help The Children’s Society work with even more vulnerable children and young people.
* Use the Grow it Lent thanksgiving prayer (see p.6).

**6. The Grow it Lent leaf template**

* Print the leaf onto card and cut around the shape
* Hang on a ‘tree’ or stick on a large sheet of paper during Lent

