



SCHOOL UPDATES & REMINDERS

LENT UPDATE:

As you will be aware, we are swiftly moving through the weeks of Lent as we journey towards the joyous celebration of the resurrection of our Lord at Easter. In class, pupils have been learning about the season of Lent and its related scripture as well as how and why Christians prepare themselves for Easter.

Since their return to school, pupils have been taking part each week in our 'new look' whole school virtual Collective Worship. It has been wonderful to see all the children – albeit virtually – in the same place at the same time as we come together in prayer and worship as one family. During our Collective Worship, we have been speaking about the three challenges we are given as Christians during the season of Lent: to renew our prayer lives; to try to 'give up' behaviours which cause barriers between us and God; to do more for others in need. Over the next couple of weeks, we will be trying to 'Live Lent' at St Mary's by doing these three things, and it would be great if parents and carers could get on board by talking to your child(ren) about their learning, praying together as a family and supporting our Lenten charity appeals.

LENTEN APPEAL – PART 1:

This Lent, we will once again be asking for donations to support projects championed by our Parish Gift for Life group – both locally and globally (Kenya and India). Pupils will be taking part in a special dance challenge in the last week of term as a way of sharing the joy of being back together, and we will be using the event to promote awareness of our Lenten appeal through which we hope to raise a healthy amount for some really worthy causes.

We would ask that families wishing to donate to the cause either make a donation online via SIMS Pay (<https://www.sims-pay.co.uk/Home>) – Lent Appeal 2021 – or by sending money in to school, in a clearly labelled envelope, by Wednesday 31st March.

Please feel free to spread the word among friends and family!

GIFT FOR LIFE UPDATE:

The money we have raised for Gift for Life in recent years has had a huge impact in the lives of men, women and children living in genuine hardship. Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the challenges facing these, our brothers and sisters, have grown significantly, and there is so much more we can do to help.

In Kenya, our friend Sr Vicky (of the Little Sisters of St Francis), with whom we have had a link for over 15 years, has reported that a large number of babies have been born at St Anthony's health centre, Nakuru, and financial aid is now so much more important to ensure that these infants and their mothers can be cared for. St Anthony's school, which is situated next to the health centre, is currently closed to children, and as such, the Sisters are running a food distribution programme for families whose children will, for the time-being, not access a warm meal at school each day, as well as supporting local men and women with projects in agriculture and farming.

At *Balamma Satram Holy Family Home for the Needy*, India, Gift for Life has enabled the religious community there to support local children who are not able to access school during the national lockdown by buying books, pens and paper for children to learn at home. The home continues to provide shelter, care and medical treatment for destitute adults – work which is all the more important given the global

pandemic. They have recently been able buy firewood – essential for cooking – which should last six months, and our donations have also been used to help fund ten patients with much needed successful eye operations.

Finally, in our local area, Gift for Life have helped by donating funds to support the homeless and refugees in Newcastle and Gateshead who have become even more isolated during lockdown. As a parish we have seen a fantastic response to the food bank which provides weekly food parcels to families living in our own area, and as a school we also plan to help support this work through donations of food, toiletries and other much needed items.

We hope and pray that we may continue to support the amazing work undertaken by these different projects. Please consider making a manageable donation this Lent; together, we can make a huge difference in our world. Thank you!

LENTEN APPEAL – PART 2:

As well as raising much needed funds, we will also be supporting the work of the Diocesan Refugee Project by collecting donations of much needed items **next week**. Through our efforts, we will help support the clients of the project who, like so many others, have been affected massively over the past year due to the ongoing pandemic. Each class will be asked to bring one specific item (1 item – or as many as your child can carry in to school!), which will then be donated to the project. Children are being asked to bring the following items:

Reception – Toiletries (shampoo, shower gel, soap, deodorant and toothpaste)

Y1 – Biscuits (single packs – as these are easier to distribute)

Y2 – Tinned tuna

Y3 – Chickpeas

Y4 – Tinned tomatoes

Y5 – Rice (not microwaveable)

Y6 – Sugar (standard 1kg bags preferably)

Please ensure that all donations are sent into school by **Monday 29th March 2021**. Thank you!

COMIC RELIEF:

Thank you to all those who donated money for our own clothes day in support of Comic Relief on Friday. We raised over £150 on the day and shared a few jokes as part of our weekly virtual celebration assembly in the spirit of this really worthy cause.

PUFFIN ‘WORLD OF STORIES’ INITIATIVE:

We took delivery of three jam-packed boxes of new books, audio CDs, library resources and a brand new *Yoto* player which Mrs Sanderson has managed to secure for free for the school as part of the Puffin World or Stories initiative funded by the Literacy Trust. We can't wait for the pupils to get their hands on the resources in school! You can see more on our Twitter page (@whickhamstmarys).

REMINDER – CONTINUING COVID-19 PROTOCOLS:

Please share these protocols with all adults involved in providing care for your child.

If your child displays any of the following COVID symptoms:

- A high temperature
- A new, continuous cough
- A loss or change of the sense of smell or taste

it is vital that you:

- **Keep your child and any siblings/household members at home** and isolated;
- **Book a test.** Tests can be booked online <https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test> or by ringing 119 if you have problems using the online service;
- **Notify school immediately** by emailing wsmcovid@gatedu.org.

You are strongly encouraged to book a test at a testing centre – rather than a postal test – to avoid the delay of critical information to contacts.

If any member of your household or **any close contact that your child has outside of school** develops symptoms, **your child must isolate immediately** and **must not come to school** until a COVID-19 test outcome is received by the symptomatic case.

ASYMPTOMATIC TESTING FOR COVID-19 FOR PARENTS AND CARERS:

Undertaking regular, rapid coronavirus (COVID-19) testing helps reduce transmission of the virus. Parents and other adults in households with children at school or college, who do not have symptoms, can now access regular, rapid coronavirus (COVID-19) testing. This includes childcare and support bubbles. Tests are fast, easy and completely free. There are different ways for a household, childcare or support bubble to collect their test to take at home, twice-weekly:

- through your employer, if they offer testing to employees
- by collecting a home test kit from a local test site – anyone aged 18 or over can collect 2 packs of 7 tests
- by ordering a home test kit online – please do not order online if you can access testing through other routes, this frees up home delivery for those who need it most

You can find more information here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/rapid-lateral-flow-testing-for-households-and-bubbles-of-school-pupils-and-staff>.

If you have any queries about the tests, and you live in England, please call 119 (free from mobiles and landlines). Lines are open every day from 7am to 11pm.

Children of primary school age (and below) without symptoms are not being asked to take a test. Testing is voluntary, but strongly recommended to all who are eligible. Alongside the vaccine, washing hands, wearing face coverings, and maintaining social distancing, rapid testing plays a vital role in reducing transmission rates. Getting into the habit of regular testing as part of our everyday lives will help us all to play our part and do what we can to protect each other.

Lateral flow tests should **not** be used by anyone who has coronavirus symptoms. If anyone in your household has coronavirus symptoms they should get a test to check if they have coronavirus via the gov.uk website (here: <https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test>) or by ringing 119.

If you have been advised by your child's school or childcare setting that your child has been identified as a close contact of a positive coronavirus case they must isolate for 10 days, and you must follow the advice given by the school or childcare setting.

If your child is isolating because they have been identified as a close contact of someone with coronavirus they cannot return to the school or childcare setting before the end of the 10-day isolation period even if they have a negative test result (either PCR or lateral flow).

Lateral flow test kits should **only** be used by the person they were issued to. If you have a child in secondary school who is testing themselves at home the tests must not be used by anyone else in the household e.g. a sibling or parent.

Similarly, if you have access to lateral flow tests through your workplace you should not use these to test your children at home.

