

Building Faith

A Ministry of Virginia Theological Seminary

buildfaith.org Printed on February 13, 2023

Making Pretzels: A Traditional Activity for Lent

February 27, 2017

Categories: Lent

Tags: children, cooking, fast, intergenerational, kitchen, Lent, pray, pretzels



“Pretzels provide a welcome activity during Lent, while teaching a bit of Christian history, baking, and scripture!”

An Ancient Lenten Practice

Pretzels for Lent date back to the early Church, perhaps sometime in the 4th century. During that time it was common for Christians to fast during the season, abstaining from meat, dairy, fats, and sweets. These quick breads are made with only a tiny bit of sugar (or honey, if you prefer) to activate the yeast and no fat – they are entirely flour, water and yeast!

Fasting is not an end in itself, it helps us empty ourselves and so draw closer to God. Praying is another way to draw closer to God and pretzels remind us of prayer, too. This soft dough is formed into a loop with ends crossed, meant to symbolize arms crossed in prayer. The word “pretzel” comes from the German translation of the Latin word for little arms, “bracellae.” Another story places the origin of the word in “preiola” which means little reward, so pretzels might have been given as an award to a child who had learned her prayers!

One of my favorite lessons that these pretzels teach is about yeast. We hear [Jesus compare the Kingdom of Heaven](#) to yeast that spreads through flour to make dough rise. Matthew’s version of the parable says that she uses a measure of yeast to 60 pounds of flour. In our recipe we use about a pound of flour, and we can see how much our measure of yeast makes it rise. The kingdom of heaven is like a tiny bit of leaven that makes flour into bread!

Putting Pretzels into Practice

I’ve been using this recipe since childhood and it is easy enough for children to make themselves. If you are uncertain in the kitchen, make a test batch before making them with your church group. This recipe makes 20 large pretzels. The best way to make more is to set up single-recipe stations, rather than doubling or tripling the recipe.



[Pretzel Recipe – Download the free PDF](#)

Pretzels: A Perfect Church Activity

Pretzels make for good turn-taking, as they require measuring, stirring, and kneading. Everyone can take a turn... and everyone can make their own pretzel, plus extras to share.

These pretzels take about 40 minutes to make from measuring to cooling. They work best as a Sunday school (or youth group) activity when you start by talking about the season of Lent, prayer, and fasting. Then make the

pretzels and bake them during worship. Invite your congregation or other Sunday school classes to join you in eating them or send them home in brown bags with your children.



If you are looking for something a little more concrete, Milestones Ministry co-director Debbie Streicher provided this write-up to be sent home to the entire congregation after a children's lesson on [Lenten Pray-ztels](#). You may use it; please attribute it to Debbie.

Charlotte Hand Greeson shares her passion for formation as a manager, editor, and writer for Building Faith. She currently lives in California. She made a batch of pretzels just to be sure they are still as delicious as in her memory!