

A Handbook for the
Discipline of Lent



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An Invitation

Brothers and sisters: God created us to experience Joy in communion with him, to love all humanity, and to live in harmony with all of his creation. But sin separates us from God, our neighbors, and creation, and so we do not enjoy the life our Creator intended for us. Also, by our sin we grieve our Father, who does not desire us to come under his judgment, but to turn to him and live.

As disciples of the Lord Jesus we are called to struggle against everything that leads us away from love of God and neighbor. Repentance, fasting, prayer, and works of love -- the discipline of Lent -- help us to wage our spiritual warfare. I invite you, therefore, to commit yourselves to this struggle and confess your sins, asking our Father for strength to persevere in your Lenten discipline.

Pastor Mike

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What is Lent?

The season of Lent derives from the ancient Church's period of preparation for those who were to be baptized at the Easter Vigil. That preparation included instruction, fasting, repentance, prayers and special acts of devotion. Today, the entire Church uses this same period and some of those same practices to prepare for the Feast of the Resurrection of Christ.

The word "Lent" comes from the old English word "lencten" which means "lengthen", and is a reference to the lengthening of days that occurs during this time of the year. For that reason, Lent is associated with Spring. As the earth sees a rebirth and renewal of the plants and flowers during this season, so Lent is a time for Christians to consider our rebirth in Baptism and engage in spiritual renewal as preparation for Easter.

To assist in that spiritual renewal, the Church makes noticeable changes in its worship. The "Alleluia" (Hebrew for "Praise the Lord") and the Hymn of Praise ("Glory to God," "This is the Feast") are removed from the liturgy. All hymns and songs become more reflective in nature. The paraments and banners are darker in color. Crosses and crucifixes are covered with veils to emphasize how sin separates us from God. Everything turns inward until the victorious Resurrection when the colors brighten, the veils are removed, and the Alleluias and praises break forth in joyous celebration.

Lent is 40 days long, counting from Ash Wednesday (and minus the six Sundays, which are little celebrations of the resurrection). Those 40 days identify with Jesus' 40 days of fasting and prayer in the wilderness as he prepared for his ministry; with Moses' 40 days of fasting and prayer on Mt. Sinai as he waited to receive the Law from God; and with Elijah's 40 days of fasting and prayer on his way to Mt. Horeb, the mountain of God.

The Discipline of Lent

On Ash Wednesday, as Lent begins, we are invited "to struggle against everything that leads us away from love of God and neighbor" by exercising the Discipline of Lent: repentance, fasting,

prayer and works of love. These become the specific occasions and opportunities for spiritual renewal during this season of renewal.

Living out a discipline takes our Lord's words about self-denial seriously (Matt.16:24). Through discipline, we find freedom and grace, just as parental discipline is loving and brings a child to freedom and righteousness (Heb.12:3-13).

In the Lenten Discipline, we focus our lives on Christ's self-sacrificing passion, death and resurrection, which has brought us acceptance, forgiveness and redemption by God. Through that same discipline, we make a loving response to God.

Repentance

Repentance means turning 180 degrees away from sin to walk toward God. Repentance includes an examination of our lives and our actions in light of God's grace and love, which comes to us free and undeserved through Christ's death and resurrection.

St. Paul tells us that we have been joined to Christ's death and resurrection through our dying to sin and rising to new life in Baptism (Rom.6:3-4). Repentance therefore also means returning to our Baptism, that occasion when we were washed of sin, joined to God in Christ and received the Holy Spirit.

Here are some ways in which we can make that return to our Baptism through repentance:

1. Remember your Baptism each day when you rise and before you retire by placing a small bowl of water in your bedroom, dipping your fingers in it and making the sign of the cross while saying the Invocation: "In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."
2. Attend the Ash Wednesday Liturgy to begin your Lent with this major act of corporate confession and receive the ashes as a sign of repentance and renewal.
3. Attend worship each Sunday when corporate confession is made.
4. During your daily prayers, examine your life in light of the Ten

Commandments and ask God to forgive you and to lead you into ways of loving him and your neighbor more deeply.

5. Take advantage of private confession when it is offered, or make an appointment with the pastor during Lent. In preparation, read Luther's instruction on confession in the Small Catechism.
6. If there is conflict or tension between you and someone else in your life, seek to resolve it so that it does not become a stumbling block to your faith and spiritual growth.
7. Attend the Maundy Thursday Liturgy to receive the final absolution of Lent to close this season of repentance and renewal.
8. Renew your Baptismal vows at the Easter Vigil as final preparation for the great 50 days of celebrating the Easter victory.

Prayer

Prayer may generally be described as that activity in which we are drawn closer to God in contemplation and communication. Prayer is our half of a conversation with God. That means that prayer is not only speaking, but listening as well.

Prayer finds its anchor and focus in the Sunday Eucharist with the community of faith -- that Holy Supper in which we take God into ourselves by eating the Body and Blood of Christ. All prayer during the week springs forth from that union on Sunday and eagerly anticipates our Communion on the next Sunday.

It helps to have a consistent time and a quiet place for prayer, although prayer can happen anytime and anywhere. A cross or crucifix and a lighted candle can help create your place for prayer. For devotional aids or spiritual direction during the season of Lent, make an appointment with the pastor.

Daily prayer might include these things:

1. Begin by signing yourself with the cross and the words of Invocation. Then simply be quiet for a moment in God's presence.

2. Use a devotional aid such as *The Word in Season*, *Christ in Our Home*, or *the Way of the Cross* as a guide for prayer and meditation.
3. Use one of the Daily Prayer or Responsive Prayer services in the front of the Lutheran Book of Worship (pp.131-164), following the lessons in the Daily Lectionary on pp.178-192.
4. The Psalms are a wonderful treasure for prayer.
5. Read scripture each day, perhaps the Semon on the Mount (Matt.5-7) or a portion of the Passion Narrative (Matt. 26-27, Mark 14-15, Luke 22-23, John 18-19). Or take a book of the Bible, divide the number of chapters by the 40 days of Lent and read those portions each day.
6. The Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Creeds or even Luther's Small Catechism are good for meditation and prayer.
7. Examine yourself in light of your reading and meditation, and ask God to lead you into repentance and renewal in faith.
8. Close your prayer time with a favorite prayer, the Lord's Prayer, or the following prayer: "Heavenly Lord, thank you for this day and for this time of prayer. Through the discipline of Lent, help me to grow in my love for you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen"

Fasting & Abstinence

Fasting comes to us from Judaism and was recommended by Jesus both in example and teaching (Luke 4:2, Matt.6:16-18, Mark 2:20). It is a practice that is designed to strengthen the spiritual life by weakening one's attractions to pleasures of the senses. Thus fasting is always coupled with prayer and spiritual preparation.

Since ancient times, the entire season of Lent has been marked by fasting and abstinence. Fridays in particular have been a special day of fasting because of it being the day of Christ's death.

Fasting does not necessarily mean giving up all food for a day. More frequently it is the giving up or limiting of a particular food or food group (sweets, desserts, chocolate, butter, fat, eggs, etc.).

Water is never given up in a fast. In addition, children under 16, people over 65, those who are ill or on medication, pregnant women, and travelers have traditionally been excused from fasting.

Abstinence from some activity (such as television, movies, entertainment, etc.) on certain days, at certain hours or throughout the season is another way to observe the Lenten fast. This is designed to give more time for prayer and spiritual work.

Many of the following suggestions for fasting have been practiced by Christians for centuries:

1. Fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday with only one simple meal during the day, usually without meat.
2. Refrain from eating meat (bloody foods) on all Fridays in Lent, substituting fish for example.
3. Eliminate a food or food group for the entire season. Especially consider saving rich and fatty foods for Easter.
4. Consider not eating before receiving Communion in Lent.
5. Abstain from or limit a favorite activity (television, movies, etc.) for the entire season, and spend more time in prayer, Bible study, and reading devotional material.
6. Don't just give up something that you have to give up for your doctor or diet anyway. Make your fast a voluntary self-denial (i.e., discipline) that you offer to God in prayer.

Works of Love

The intention of this part of the Lenten Discipline is to connect our faith in God's love for us with actions that are loving of others in the world.

"God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16). Love is why Christ came. Love is why Christ died. Love is why God raised him from the dead. Love is the whole purpose and mission of the Church and of every Christian member: to show God's love in the world.

Consider one or more of these suggestions for this portion of your Lenten Discipline:

1. Use Matthew 25:31-40 and Luke 4:18-19 as guides for choosing to do a work of love.
2. Go out of your way to do something nice for somebody at least once a week during Lent.
3. Make a donation for the needy through your church.
4. Volunteer a portion of your time with a local service organization that serves the poor.
5. Offer to take a shut-in for errands or go for them.
6. Ask the church's Social Ministry Committee or the pastor for suggestions of a needy place or person that could use your time, talent or treasure.
7. Contact your local government center and see if you could perform any kind of volunteer service for the community, such as picking up litter.
8. Contact a hospital, nursing home or prison about making visits. Especially see those who otherwise receive no visitors.
9. Visit shut-in members of the church. Perhaps make something and take it as a gift (check on diet restrictions).
10. When doing your work of love, meditate upon Christ's words, "As you do it for the least of these, you do it for me" (Matt.25:40).

Beginning Your Discipline

As with all things, begin with prayer, asking the Holy Spirit for guidance in choosing those things that would best fit you for your Lenten Discipline. Prayerfully dedicate all your choices to God as a commitment for the six weeks of Lent, and ask that your Lenten Discipline move you closer to God for the sake of the sufferings and death of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Keeping Your Discipline

After making your choices and beginning your discipline, it is not necessary to share your choices or your acts of love with anyone else. In fact, anonymity is regarded as better (Matt.6:1-7, 16-18).

Don't be too hard on yourself, too rigorous, or too legalistic. The idea is to have a discipline that moves you spiritually closer to God, not one that focuses you solely on your discipline.

If you break your discipline, you certainly will not be condemned eternally. However, breaking promises to God is not something to take lightly. So if you break your discipline, simply repent quietly and start over. Remember that Peter denied Jesus and all the others abandoned him. Yet all repented and were welcomed by Jesus after the resurrection.

A Lenten Discipline Worksheet

THE CHURCH'S TRADITION

- A. Repentance: Corporate Confession on Ash. Wed., Maundy Thu., and all Sundays in Lent, Private Confession by appt. & during Holy Week.
- B. Prayer: Holy Communion on all Sundays and Holy Days, Daily Private Prayer.
- C. Fasting: Ash Wed., Good Friday, all Fridays in Lent, Self-denial all the days of Lent.
- D. Works of Love: Almsgiving, volunteer work, helping others

MY DISCIPLINE FOR THIS LENT

A. For Repentance, I will:

B. For Prayer, I will:

C. For Fasting, I will:

D. For Works of Love, I will:

Making the Sign of the Cross

"(Name), child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever."

Those words were spoken at your Baptism as a cross was marked upon you, perhaps with oil. That same cross is made upon you with ashes after your confession on Ash Wednesday. With that cross, we are blessed forever. Under that cross we live. And by that cross we are brought to eternal life.

As Christians, we are proud to bear the cross of Christ and to show that sign before all, whether that cross is in jewelry that we wear or embossed upon a book that we carry. For the same reasons, Christians since the second century have marked themselves with the cross, as a sign of allegiance, as a sign of blessing, and as a sign of remembrance of their baptisms.

To make the sign of the cross, one touches the forehead, the mid-section, one shoulder, then the other. It doesn't matter which shoulder is touched first, nor which hand is used in making the sign. The sign of the cross is made at the beginning and end of private prayer, at the Invocation of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, at Communion, and whenever the cross symbol + is seen in the liturgy.

Because of Lent's focus on the cross of Christ, it is a good time to make use of this ancient Christian custom. Many Lutherans have "tried it on" and find that "it fits" their piety.

Should I Go to Confession?

"Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed" (James 5:16). "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

The Church of Jesus Christ has always provided a means by which Christians burdened by sin may confess and find the healing grace of personal forgiveness. Jesus forgave sins as a part of healing and charged his disciples to do the same (Luke 5:17-26; John 20:22-23).

Martin Luther regarded private confession as a "precious and comforting treasure" (Large Catechism 457:7), because it "strengthens and consoles the conscience" (Apology to the Augsburg Confession XII:39).

Should I go to private confession? Examine yourself and your relationship with God and with others. Is there something in the way? Is there something you have trouble forgetting? Private confession is an exercise in complete honesty about ourselves that seeks to remove obstacles to our spiritual growth in Christ. Read the rite of "Individual Confession and Forgiveness" on p.196 in the Lutheran Book of Worship and decide for yourself.

How to Go to Confession

From the Small Catechism by Martin Luther

WHAT IS PRIVATE CONFESSION?

Private confession has two parts. First, we make a personal confession of sins to the pastor, and then we receive absolution, which means forgiveness as from God himself. This absolution we should not doubt, but firmly believe that thereby our sins are forgiven before God in heaven.

WHAT SINS SHOULD WE CONFESS?

Before God we should confess that we are guilty of all sins, even those which are not known to us, as we do in the Lord's Prayer. But in private confession, as before the pastor, we should confess

only those sins which trouble us in heart and mind.

WHAT ARE SUCH SINS?

We can examine our everyday life according to the Ten Commandments -- for example, how we act toward father or mother, son or daughter, husband or wife, or toward the people with whom we work, and so on. We may ask ourselves whether we have been disobedient or unfaithful, bad-tempered or dishonest, or whether we have hurt anyone by word or deed.

HOW MIGHT WE CONFESS OUR SINS PRIVATELY?

We may say that we wish to confess our sins and to receive absolution in God's name. We may begin by saying, "I, a poor sinner, confess before God that I am guilty of many sins." Then we should name the sins that trouble us. We may close the confession with the words, "I repent of all these sins and pray for mercy. I promise to do better with God's help."

WHAT IF WE ARE NOT TROUBLED BY ANY SPECIAL SINS?

We should not torture ourselves with imaginary sins. If we cannot think of any sins to confess (which would hardly ever happen), we need not name any in particular, but may receive absolution because we have already made a general confession to God.

HOW MAY WE BE ASSURED OF FORGIVENESS?

The pastor may pronounce the absolution by saying, "By the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

Those who are heavily burdened in conscience the pastor may comfort and encourage with further assurances from God's Word.

The Tradition of the Stations of the Cross

As a Passion-centered devotion, the Stations of the Cross combine art, literature and movement to recreate Christ's walk to the cross within the walls of the church, thus allowing those at home to make a "pilgrimage to Jerusalem" and be drawn closer to the Christ who walked there.

All Christians, from time immemorial, have wanted to go to the

Holy Land and walk the path that Jesus walked, especially the path to the cross. It is from this longing and from pilgrimages accomplished that the Stations of the Cross derive their popularity and devotion.

No sooner had the Roman Emperor Constantine been converted in 313 A.D., his mother Helena set out on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land to officially mark and build churches at places significant to Christ's life, most notably the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.

The earliest diary of a pilgrimage is given by a young woman named Egeria (perhaps a nun) around 394 A.D. She writes in detail about the Holy Week liturgies that occurred in sequence at different churches (stations) in Jerusalem as each related to the story of Jesus' Way of the Cross.

The reason, of course, for pilgrimages and remembrances of them, both then and now, is contained in the idea of sacred space. Palestine, and Jerusalem in particular, were places made sacred by the presence of the Son in whom God was made manifest to us. Certainly every Christian Church is also a space made sacred by the presence of God made manifest in the Word and in the Sacraments. It is natural therefore that returning pilgrims from the Holy Land would join these two sacred spaces with artistic renderings or mementoes, thereby creating an added connection with the events of Jerusalem as celebrated in Word and Sacrament.

Over the years, pilgrims have visited and marked many and varied holy spots in the Holy Land. During the time of the Crusades (12th-13th centuries), devotion to the holy places relating to Christ's passion received particular attention with returning Crusaders frequently erecting tableaux of these places in their homeland. When Franciscan monks were given custody of the holy places for care and keeping in 1342, they promoted this kind of devotion by erecting similar series of tableaux in their churches, where local people could walk, pray and meditate on Christ's Way of The Cross. From there, the practice spread widely.

The number and subject matter of the Stations of the Cross have varied as widely as the number of sites marked at various times in

the Holy Land itself. One 15th century account lists over 100, while others have listed 30 or even as few as five. The number 14 seems to have appeared first in the early 16th century in a list devised by a Belgian Carmelite monk named John Pascha. The number and subject matter was fixed in 1731 by Pope Clement XII, consisting of nine gospel scenes and five scenes from popular tradition, although the Roman Catholic Church is today considering a change in the number again.

The Stations are intended to be a personal or small group devotion, to be walked and prayed at a time other than the usual liturgical worship of the community. Because the "Way of the Cross" has always existed as a devotion with no one official text, there have been many versions of it available. Those using Biblical readings, meditations and responses are generally preferred.

Until recently, Stations of the Cross could be found only in Roman Catholic and Episcopal (Anglican) churches. In the last 35 years, however, Lutherans too have gradually found that the piety of the Stations matches well with their traditional Lenten piety.

The Triduum : The Three Sacred Days

The ancient Triduum, the Three Sacred Days, are the most dramatic and moving liturgies of the entire Church Year. It is the Christian Passover. The Triduum (pronounced "trid' - oo - um) counts the three days from sundown on Maundy Thursday to Easter sundown.

Once begun on Maundy Thursday, the liturgies continue in succession without a benediction to close until the Easter victory is celebrated. Thus the Passion and Resurrection are observed as a whole, with each part and each liturgy dependent upon the next.

The central events of Christianity are commemorated during the Triduum. For this reason, it is important to plan ahead and clear calendars so that you can attend each liturgy.

Maundy Thursday

The Maundy Thursday Liturgy is one of endings and beginnings.

What was begun on Ash Wednesday is brought to a close on this night. What begins this night does not end until the resurrection.

The liturgy opens with the sermon, which serves to bridge the ending of Lent and the beginning of the Triduum. The theme is love, our Savior's love for us, expressed in the washing of the disciples' feet, in giving himself in bread and wine, in dying upon the cross.

On Ash Wednesday, Lent began with a major act of confession and ashes, but without absolution. The last corporate confession of Lent is made on this night, with the long awaited absolution. As the ashes were individually given, so forgiveness is individually given with a laying of hands.

The lessons of love are followed by an example of love in the footwashing, Christ the Master serving the servant. A new command derives from it: "Love one another." From this new command (mandatum) comes the name for this night: Maundy Thursday.

The Lord's Supper continues the love theme with Christ's self-giving of his body and blood in the forms of bread and wine. Too soon, the love feast is ended, and the markings of betrayal are seen. The symbol of Christ in our midst, the altar, is stripped bare as Christ was stripped of his power and glory. The starkness of Good Friday and death is inescapable.

All depart in silence without benediction.

Good Friday

The Good Friday Liturgy begins as it ended on Maundy Thursday: with silence and austerity. The chancel is bare, There is no organ music except to accompany hymns. Everything is focused on the adoration of the Crucified Lord, reigning from the throne of the cross.

The opening of the liturgy includes no praise, but proceeds directly to the Prayer of the Day and the lessons. The Passion according to St. John details the events of this day and is followed by the Bidding Prayer for the needs of our world.

Then a large cross is brought into the church in solemn procession and placed centrally in the chancel. It becomes the focus of adoration of the crucified Christ. The words of meditation are the ancient Reproaches, in which God directs his reproach at us, his people, who have crucified his Son by our sin (cf. Micah 6:3-5).

The liturgy does not end on a note of reproach, however. The closing versicles and prayer emphasize the triumph and redemption that comes through the cross. God will have the final word, but we must wait.

Again, all depart in silence, without benediction.

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The Great Vigil of Easter

The Vigil of Easter begins with little changed from Friday night. The church is bare and also dark. Like the children of Israel who watched and waited through the night for the Lord of the Exodus, everyone gathers late on Holy Saturday to watch and to wait for the Lord of the Resurrection.

The first task is to break the darkness with the light of Christ burning atop the Paschal candle. This is the Light of Christ, dispelling the darkness of night, of sin, of death. This light will be a constant reminder of the Easter victory at all Easter services, at every baptism, and at every funeral.

Having broken the darkness, the stories of faith and salvation, are told while the Vigil goes on. These are our family stories that lead us to the Resurrected One.

After hearing the stories, baptisms occur, new members are received, and all renew their baptismal vows so that everyone is ready to receive the Lord of the Resurrection. Quickly the table is set, and the room is made ready with flowers, banners and festive array.

At last He comes! The victory is won! The Risen Lord comes in bread and wine and songs of praise. This is the feast of victory!

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Blessings over Food at Easter

As you start thinking about your Easter table and menu, here are some Easter table prayers that may give you some ideas. They come from the Book of Occasional Services of the Episcopal Church (1979). It shows you a traditional sampling of what Christians have been eating on Easter.

OVER WINE

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, creator of the fruit of the vine: Grant that we who share this wine, which gladdens our hearts, may share for ever the new life of the true Vine, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

OVER LAMB

Stir up our memory, O Lord, as we eat this Easter lamb that, remembering Israel of old, who in obedience to your command ate the Paschal lamb and was delivered from the bondage of slavery, we, your new Israel, may rejoice in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the true Lamb who has delivered us from the bondage of sin and death, and who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen

OVER EGGS

O Lord our God, in celebration of the Paschal feast we have prepared these eggs from your creation: Grant that they may be to us a sign of the new life and immortality promised to those who follow your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

OVER BREAD

Blessed are you, O Lord our God; you bring forth bread from the earth and make the risen Lord to be for us the Bread of life: Grant that we who daily seek the bread which sustains our bodies may also hunger for the food of everlasting life, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

OVER OTHER FOODS

Blessed are you, O Lord our God; you have given us the risen Savior to be the Shepherd of your people: Lead us, by him, to springs of living waters, and feed us with the food that endures to eternal life; where with you, O Father, and with the Holy Spirit, he lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

Lutherans have had the “Discipline of Lent” since the publication of the Lutheran Book of Worship in 1978. And yet, when it comes to understanding and actually making use of this discipline, to which we are all invited on Ash Wednesday, there is little guidance from church to church or even from pastor to pastor as spiritual leader within a congregation.