

LENT

Lent marks the forty days leading up to Easter, mirroring the forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness. It is a practice that began during the 4th century as a way to prepare Christians for the holiest days of the year. During Lent, we ask God to show us the world as it is. We begin with the reality of our finitude rubbed on our foreheads on Ash Wednesday — from dust we were made, to dust we shall return. Then, as a community, together we walk through that reality towards the cross. Of course, the cross isn't the end of the story, but this season of grief is carved out to acknowledge the reality of Christ's sacrifice. And the reality of suffering that so many of our circumstances reflect too — our own pain and grief and despair. Easter is coming, yes. But for now, we sit in the ashes of our broken dreams and broken hearts, knowing that God sits here with us. Many people practice Lent by giving something up—alcohol, meat, chocolate, social media. Some take up something new—a new prayer practice or ritual. Whatever it be, Lent is an incredible moment for spiritual honesty. Together, we can bless these forty days, while longing for the future God promised when there will be no tears or pain. (Adapted from Kate Bowler's "Bless the Lent We Actually Have: 40 Days to Reflect, Pray, and Bless Our Imperfect Lives")

Lenten Invitation

Each year, during the Ash Wednesday liturgy, we are invited to reflect on the gospel reading from Matthew (Mt. 6:1-6, 16-18). The scripture provides a simple framework for our Lenten devotion: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. This year at Catholic Charities of Central and Northern Missouri, we have an opportunity for staff to join in a special Lenten practice. At each CCCNMO location there will be handouts (small purple strips of paper) with suggestions to pray, fast, and give. Each suggestion focuses on one of the unique services we offer our community. This is an invitation to connect, reflect, and grow. Keep the handout as a reminder and once you feel you have completed the suggestions on the handout, bring the paper back to the chapel at the Edmonds Street location and attach it to the paper chain. For staff located in Columbia or Sedalia, you are welcome to contribute to the paper chain during the opening prayer of our next all-staff gathering in March. As this chain grows throughout the forty days of Lent; so too may our community grow in faith, hope, and love. May this symbol remind us that we are not separate from the whole. We are one with the sun, the air, the earth. We are dust and to dust we shall return.

What if I'm not Catholic or I don't observe Lent?

This is an invitation for everyone regardless of faith tradition. Many, if not all, of the suggestions transcend religion. If you'd like to participate, please feel free to intentionally select a handout with which you are comfortable.

What if I already have a Lenten practice to which I have committed?

There are blank slips of purple paper available as well. We invite you to write a personal Lenten commitment (whatever you are comfortable sharing) and add it to the communal chain.

What if the suggestions don't resonate with me or what if I already practice the suggestions on my handout?

If they don't resonate with you, please select a new handout. If you already practice similar devotions, you might consider going deeper with your current practices. Can you give more or pray in new ways?

Can I take multiple handouts? (i.e. a new one every week of Lent or one for a family member)

Take as many handouts as you'd like. If you take the last handout, just let Marissa know so she can print more.

What if I am unable to fulfill all 3 suggestions on my handout?

The suggestions are simply a guide to inspire your Lenten journey. Do what you can and let the rest go. Take what energizes or challenges you. Leave what doesn't serve you.

Pray for families struggling to secure permanent housing.

Fast from streaming services and read more about the housing crisis in the U.S. (Select articles on your own or try this book recommendation: *Evicted* by Matthew Desmond)

Give food or cash (without question or assumption) to someone on the streets asking for help.

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Pray for people who are unhoused during the cold winter months.

Fast from streaming for entertainment purposes. Instead, select a documentary with firsthand accounts of people living on the streets.

Give a note of gratitude to someone who has made you feel at home.

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Pray for communities that have been targeted by payday loans, widening the racial wealth gap.

Fast from watching or reading or listening to white perspectives. Find a podcast, article, interview etc. that would expand your understanding of race and racism in the U.S.

Give by supporting Black owned businesses and reading Black authors.

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Pray for people trapped in a cycle of debt.

Fast from unnecessary purchases this week.

Give note(s) of gratitude to someone who has supported you in your education, career, or another aspect of your life.

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Pray for families that have been left without shelter due to a natural disaster.

Fast from wasting water and power at home.

Give some time to learn about the needs of the unhoused in mid-Missouri.

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Pray that pregnant women will receive support throughout their childbearing continuum.

Fast from judgments regarding the choices made by pregnant and new parents.

Give some time to a new mom who wants to share her birth story or needs help with childcare.

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Pray to end discrimination against Hispanics in the U.S.

Fast from polarizing conversations. Practice listening to understand rather than listening to respond.

Give time to learn more about the diversity among Hispanics in the U.S. Attend a cultural event open to the public or a liturgy in Spanish.

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Pray for families struggling with food insecurity.

Fast from food waste. Eat leftovers for lunch this week.

Give some time to learn about the food pantry: What does it offer people? What are its greatest challenges?

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Pray for children who go to bed hungry.

Fast from unnecessary food purchases this week (i.e. coffee to-go, fast food etc.)

Give the money saved from not going out to eat to a charity of your choice.

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Pray for teens struggling with mental health.

Fast from social media for a day.

Give some time to listen to someone who needs a supportive friend right now.

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Pray for people who cannot work because of mental illness.

Fast from pretending things are perfect. Be honest about feelings. Encourage others to be honest too.

Give time for yourself to be outdoors. Invite a friend or family member to take a walk.

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Pray for refugees awaiting family reunification.

Fast from petty arguments with your spouse or other family members.

Give some time to do something special for a loved one.

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Pray for refugees facing discrimination in their new country.

Fast from alcohol this week. Try practicing a lovingkindness meditation beginning with yourself and expanding to all the world. (Check YouTube for guided meditations.)

Give some time to learn a few key phrases in a new language that might make clients feel more welcome.

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Pray for refugees in the process of resettling, seeking employment, and learning English.

Fast from your usual meals. Try a new recipe from a different culture. Or support a restaurant owned by immigrants or refugees.

Give by learning more about refugees. UNHCR, Catholic Relief Services, & Jesuit Refugee Services have great resources and simulations.

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Pray for mixed status immigrant families.

Fast from making assumptions about people.

Give some time to learn more about the root causes of immigration.

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Pray for immigrants who are exploited at their places of employment.

Fast from conversations that denigrate newcomers.

Give a donation to a pro-immigrant rights organization of your choice.

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