



Local events For Lent

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TRAVERSE CITY -- The Lenten season marks a key period on the Christian calendar.

In the weeks before Easter, Christians are encouraged to pray, fast, study the Bible and give. Here's a snapshot of what local pastors have to say about Lent:

-- Grace Episcopal Church

The Rev. Daniel Richards said the Traverse City church holds book and Bible discussions during Lent and emphasizes the season as a "preparation for baptism."

"The tradition of fasting and preparation is very much part of the tradition..., at the same time it's usually coupled with Bible study and prayer," he said. "In our tradition, you wouldn't separate the two. They will always come together."

Richards is leading a Bible study on the Letters of Paul. The church will hold an ongoing discussion of the book "Adam: God's Beloved" by Henri Nouwen. Richards said the book examines "questions about humanity and faith" and is both "stunning" and "challenging." It details the author's reflections on Adam, a young man with disabilities who led Nouwen to a greater understanding of faith.

★ -- Archangel Gabriel Greek Orthodox Church ★

The Traverse City church practices an "accelerated prayer life and liturgical life" during Lent, among other ways of marking the season, said the Rev. Iakovos Olechnowicz. More time is taken for prayer, and less time for socializing and entertainment.

"The Eastern Church has less of an idea of giving up and more of an idea of returning to," he said.

Weeks before the church's Lent begins, members begin to stop eating certain foods. Meat, fish and dairy products are eliminated, and the diet becomes simple and spare. Heavy, rich foods can contribute to a "stiff and uninspired" prayer life, Olechnowicz said.

"The food that we eat has an impact in terms of our spiritual life," he said. "So, the idea is to create this lightness that comes from eating well and eating properly -- eating foods that we were designed to eat."

The church also emphasizes alms-giving and charitable works. Olechnowicz said that could range from

volunteering at the Father Fred Foundation or visiting people in the hospital or prison. Particular attention is paid to "doing charity for people that you don't like or that don't like you," he said.

-- Trinity Lutheran Church

Church members are to reflect during Lent on all of the things in their lives which caused Jesus the need to go to the cross, said the Rev. Robert Zagore.

The Traverse City church adds worship services, and members are encouraged to take on a Bible study or spend more time in prayer. Fasting is not emphasized as much as doing "something positive," such as prayer or Bible study.

"We kind of go the other way. I've encouraged our congregation, instead of giving something up for Lent... to take on something which is Godly," Zagore said.

-- Christ the King Catholic Church

The Rev. Jerry Micketti tells parishioners at the Acme church to consider why they fast or give up something for Lent and who benefits.

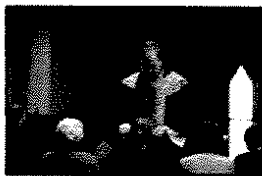
Think about, for example, not just giving up apple pie, but "who gets the money that I don't spend by not eating that apple pie," he said. For some, fasting may be modified from eating no food to eating less than normal or giving up an activity such as watching television. One could use that extra time to spend volunteering, Micketti suggested. The idea is that one is depriving oneself "of something for something more important," he said.

He also encouraged people to consider how to continue their Lenten routine throughout the rest of the year.

"Great, I did my obligation for Lent, but if it doesn't change my life beyond Lent, then why did you do it?" Micketti said.

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Rev. Daniel Richards gives the imposition of ashes during Ash Wednesday services at Grace Episcopal Church. The day marks the beginning of Lent, a period of preparation for Easter through prayer, penitence, alms-giving and self-denial for the Christian faith. Traverse City Record-Eagle