

From the Deacon's Desk

Prayers for Bishop Cistone:

Throughout the diocese we have begun to pray for Bishop Cistone who began his round of weekly chemo and radiation for lung cancer last Wednesday. His treatment will continue through the Lenten Season and we all pray for his healing and peace. I invite you all to join me in daily prayers for our chief shepherd, and you will find a prayer in today's bulletin to aid you in prayer. Perhaps you might want to send him a card for healing and support.

Alpha starts soon:

Alpha is an opportunity to explore the meaning of life and the Christian faith in a friendly, open and informal environment. Alpha has eleven sessions and includes food, a short DVD presentation and a discussion at the end where you can—but don't have to—share your thoughts. Alpha is for everyone, young and old, believer and non-believer alike.

Alpha will meet weekly on Monday evenings beginning February 19, 2017 from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM in the St. Vincent hall. The sessions are free although registration is required. Please sign up in the back of church in the gathering area.

Alpha for Youth:

This year we will also offer an Alpha Youth discussion group for kids between the ages of 11 to late teens. They will join the adults for the community meal and then break off into their own DVD presentation and faith discussion group.

Homemade Crosses Needed For Lent:

The Art & Environment Committee is inviting every parishioner, older and younger, to make a small cross out of any material, no bigger than six or ten inches, that will be used with our Lenten decorations. Be creative and use your imaginations.

Old Palms:

Please bring your Old Palms to Church for burning and making ashes for Ash Wednesday. Ash Wednesday is very early this year and celebrated on Valentine's Day, February 14th. On the day we as a culture celebrate love, we as a Church will also celebrate the ultimate example of God's love for us in the person of Jesus Christ, and the cross of ashes on our foreheads is the ultimate expression of God's love for us.

The Traveling Last Supper Troupe:

We will be hosting a live-drama presentation of the Last Supper by a community theater group on Saturday March 24 at 7 pm in St. Vincent church.

The Traveling Last Supper Troupe is an ecumenical group made up of a cast of 18 people, a narrator and a musical duo. The group has been performing since 2006, with 6 of the original members still in the cast. They are mostly Catholics from Hemlock, Merrill, Saginaw, Midland and the Auburn areas. The Last Supper presentation starts with Jesus informing the Apostles that He will be betrayed. In their horror they examine themselves to see if they might be that person. Admission is free but they do ask for an offering at the exit if you are able to contribute. The money they collect will go to area soup kitchens and food pantries, and they will keep a small amount for themselves for publicity materials and costume upkeep.

Lenten Reflection:

I received a copy of a Lenten reflection from Fr. Ron Wagner who is the vicar for priests in the diocese, and I thought it worth sharing with you.

February and Lent are paired together this year. It kicks up our activities a notch at the parish and fills our calendars with events and reconciliation and prayer services. For those coming into the Church, it's a meaningful time to reflect and prepare spiritually for the sacraments they will be celebrating. All of us will be praying for them and asking God to work more deeply in their lives and in our own lives as well. If God is not at the center of our lives, how can we ask others to make God the center of their lives? That old saying goes, "You can't give what you don't have."

This Lent beginning on St. Valentine's Day and Easter being on April Fools' Day is highly unusual. We will probably never see it again in our lifetimes. I've already used the line, "This Valentine's Day you may give chocolates, but they can't eat them". (I know, I know.) Or could you imagine, hearing a voice from the empty tomb say, "April Fools".

I know Lent is a time of penance, fasting and almsgiving, but it is also a time of enlightenment, joy and growth. With every tear shed for sin, I hope there is a smile and a laugh that comes from knowing we are loved by God.

God uses different ways to release in us our best selves. I came across this reflection in "Give Us This Day" recently. Mary Stommes wrote, "Christ in us, of all people. This is the love that impels us to listen and learn, to be changed by our conversation with God and others---because a genuine religious conversion demands that we turn and face both God and other people. People who don't think like us or look like us or act like us. People who don't vote like us. People who don't pray like us or don't pray at all.

'Who are you?' we ask Christ. If we pay attention, we just might find the answer in the people we would rather demonize from a distance or avoid altogether. People who are just like us when it comes down to it, longing to be seen and heard, known and loved. Of all the blessed things."