8. Clean something

Ash Wednesday is a good day to get a jump on your spring cleaning. Spend an hour with the junk drawer, that cabinet at work, or organizing the files on your computer.

As you remove things you no longer need and reorder those you do, be mindful of the ways God "cleans" us. The Bible tells us "As far as east is from west—that's how far God has removed our sin from us." (Psalm 103:12, CEB) As we get things in order, we remember that Jesus gave his life so that we might be free from our sins and know new life.

9. Burn something

When you finish cleaning, take some of the papers you no longer need to the fireplace. Light them and watch as they turn to ashes.

The ashes in the fireplace are not the same as the ones used in worship, but can serve as a similar reminder that your sins are forgiven. As the smoke rises up the chimney, know your prayers are rising to God as well.

10. Forgive and seek forgiveness

As we pray for God's grace, we should also seek forgiveness from those we have wronged. Ash Wednesday is a great time to go to those you have hurt.

It is also a wonderful day to forgive one another. Jesus taught us to pray, "Forgive us for the ways we have wronged you, just as we also forgive those who have wronged us." (Matthew 6:12 CEB) Maybe while you are burning those old papers, you might also burn a grudge. If appropriate, let the person know you forgive them. Remember, however, that forgiveness has much more to do about us than the one who offended us.

Upper New York resources for Lent

Looking for resources to help you celebrate Lent?

Visit https://bit.ly/UNYLent2023 or scan the QR code for a collection of spiritual practices, books, devotions, and more to help you celebrate Lent.

The Bridge is a Conference Communications Ministry tool that delivers to local churches news and stories of ministry from around the Upper New York Conference and the world. For more news and stories visit: www.unyumc.org

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the Bridge

Connecting local churches to each other & ministries around the world

"It is a time when we reflect on what we need to change in our lives to live responsibly and lovingly as a member of the created world."

Read more on page 2.

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The Upper New York Conference's vision is to live the gospel of Jesus Christ and to be God's love with our neighbors in all places.

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Why ashes on Ash Wednesday?

The ashes symbolize our humility before God, and our recognition that we are mortal. It is a time when we reflect on what we need to change in our lives to live responsibly and lovingly as a member of the created world.

10 ideas for a more meaningful Ash Wednesday

By Joe Iovino,
UMC.org

Ash Wednesday is an important day in the church calendar. It marks the beginning of Lent, a season of preparation for the celebration of Easter.

Can you believe that Ash Wednesday and the season of Lent starts on Feb. 22?

This holy day is not a holiday from work, school, or most other obligations, so if we are not intentional in our observance it is likely to resemble any ordinary Wednesday.

To help us find ways to remember the holy during our routines—something we should strive for every day—we offer some ideas to consider.

1. Worship

Many congregations typically offer worship services on Ash Wednesday.

In a typical United Methodist service, expect times of prayer, singing, confession and pardon, a sermon, and the imposition of ashes. The somber tone helps us reflect on our own mortality and the need for us to confess our sins.

2. Serve

On Ash Wednesday, we remember that we are part of the human family, making it a great day to serve others. If possible, find a place to volunteer for the day. Or simply use your lunch hour to hand out sandwiches and drinks to the homeless in your city, take an hour to shovel a neighbor's driveway if needed.

3. Give

We encourage you to give to your congregation, the United Methodist Committee on Relief, or a service project advance. People living in Turkey and Syria following the deadly earthquakes earlier this month are in desperate need of help. Make a special donation to the UMCOR International Disaster Response and Recovery by writing a check with the advance number 982450 in the memo line.

Alternately, leave your server an above-and-beyond tip. Put money in the instrument case of a street musician. Purchase a paper from the homeless woman on the corner. Find ways to bless others with that which God entrusts you.

4. Abstain/Fast

"Giving something up for Lent" is a common practice for many Christians. Often, we give up a favorite food or try to kick a bad habit during Lent. Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, is when this begins, but don't confine yourself to food or habits.

Can you abstain from gossip or complaining for Ash Wednesday? What about defensive attitudes, fear, or anxiety? You probably won't be perfect at this, but when these attitudes begin to take hold of your day, pause for prayer.

5. Pray your day

Pray for the drivers of the vehicles and fellow mass transit passengers with whom you share your commute. Pray as you pass the hospital, police station, and government offices. Lift up the trash collector and mail carrier. Offer sentence prayers throughout the day thanking God for your coworkers.

6. Make something

Some of us reflect and pray best when our hands are busy. Get back in the workshop and spend time cutting, sanding, and gluing. Sit at a piano and let the music flow. Take out the paints, glue, clay, and other supplies to create a work of art. As you create, give thanks to our Creator who longs to be in a relationship with you.

7. Be still

Others find meaning in stillness. Light a candle and pause before the presence of God. Take a holy yoga class. Enjoy a cup of coffee and listen for the voice of God.

Continued on page 4.