

## Encouraging the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Lent calls us to return to God. Remind parishioners that we all need healing from sin in our lives; encourage them to take advantage of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

- Add an extra time slot to the weekly schedule on a day other than Saturday.
- Print points for an Examination of Conscience each week in the Bulletin.
- Print an Act of Contrition in the weekly bulletin.
- Speak of Reconciliation often during Lenten homilies.
- Arrange a time for children in the Parish to attend with parents/guardians.

*“Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, and weeping, and mourning;*

*Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the Lord, your God,*

*For gracious and merciful is He, slow to anger, rich in kindness, and relenting in punishment.*

*Perhaps He will again relent and leave behind Him a blessing,*

*Offerings and libations for the Lord, your God.”*

Joel 2:12-14

# ! Thirst for Souls



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**LENT  
and  
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# Prayer Fasting Charity

Lent should be a time of deep reflection about the meaning of our baptism and all that it calls us to. It is a time of sacrifice and love. The season of Lent does, indeed, draw people to God. Ash Wednesday continues to be one of the most popular days for lapsed Catholics to come back to Church. Though it may be partly due to a somewhat superstitious attitude, people also seem to realize the need periodically for a time to look within themselves. Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI, tells us that every so often, “one must make a journey of descent, be smudged, lose one’s luster, and wait while the ashes do their work.”

We need to take advantage of that fact and reach out to those “returnees”, who may not even be sure why they are there, as well as to provide programs and resources to stimulate and challenge active Catholics. We’ve collected some ideas along these lines, and share them with you.

- Weekends before, begin to publicize schedules and themes for Lent 2007, and information about any handouts to be given out on Ash Wednesday, such as the Gospel of John, a daily meditative book, etc.
- Arrange to have friendly greeters at the doors of church with the handout and/or bulletin of the Parish to offer people as they enter. The bulletin would contain announcements of interest to those non-practicing, e.g., How to Go to Confession, Confession Times, a simple Act of Contri-

tion, a Q/A Session on the Catholic faith as a way of inviting inactive parishioners back; RCIA information; perhaps the listing of names and/or contact information for people who would like information about divorce, bereavement, marriage counseling, etc.

- A short length of purple ribbon could be handed out with a small pin to be worn in the popular “loop” fashion (pink for breast cancer awareness; yellow for support of troops, etc.) during Lent as recognition of our commitment to turning away from sin and back to God.
- Have Scripture study sessions prepared to be offered during the Season.
- Take advantage of the New Evangelization Guide put out by this office for meditation and discussion.
- Join with neighboring parishes to sponsor a Stations of the Cross devotion that would be a more dramatic expression of the Passion than can normally be offered via the weekly schedule.
- “Twin” with a missionary group or parish so that both sides may be enriched by gifts of each. Ideas could include: have family members put aside a quarter (or some specified amount) for every meal they eat during Lent; gather recipes and meal ideas of typical Lenten fare from the mission country and print them in the bulletin, etc.
- Memorization of scripture is a time-proven way to keep people attuned to God’s presence in their lives. A one-page insert in the bulletin of a single scripture verse could be printed so parishioners can hang it in their homes to memorize. The scripture could be taken from the weekly readings or a thematic program.
- Encourage parishioners, via bulletin and homilies, to establish a “Family Altar” in their home during Lent. A small table or mantle could be draped with a simple purple cloth; a Bible, candles, statues and/or rosary beads could be added. Families could gather for

prayer; hopefully, the “altar” will become a permanent part of their home.

- Offer a “Family Movie Night” once a week with faith-based films. Serve popcorn! Many good films are available from Ignatius Press and other publishers. This could easily be combined with a simple soup supper.
- Encourage people to Keep the Sabbath. Certainly our society has, for the most part, forgotten God’s command about this. A small reminder printed in the bulletin or a separate flyer could ask people to think about what it means to “keep the Sabbath”. Suggestions could include: being faithful to attend Mass, preparing and gathering for a meal with loved ones, visiting the elderly or homebound, reflective reading, prayer, etc.
- 1.1 billion people in the world do not have access to clean water, representing 17% of the world’s population (according to the World Health Organization). Ask parishioners to be mindful of how they use their water at home—even a dripping faucet wastes gallons of water each day. Ask them to refill their water bottles from the tap and use the money they would save from buying water to donate to a mission country.
- Be a parish that participates in a specific Lenten program. One such example is Catholic Relief Services’ “Operation Rice Bowl”. This is their Lenten solidarity program that calls everyone to PRAY with their families and faith communities, FAST in solidarity with those who are hungry, LEARN about the joys and challenges of our sisters and brothers in the world, and GIVE sacrificial contributions to those in need.

