



## Diocese announces Ash Wednesday adaptations, launches Lenten website

Ash Wednesday, Feb. 17, will mark the beginning of the first full season of Lent to take place during the pandemic. As such, the Office of Worship of the Diocese of Erie has announced new protocols that will be in place to ensure the day is observed safely.

The most noticeable difference is that priests will use a practice common in many parts of the world, sprinkling ash on the crown of the head rather than marking foreheads with the sign of the cross. This approach requires no physical contact.

Another significant difference is that the distribution of ashes will take place in silence this year. Per instruction from the Congregation for Divine Worship in Rome, the priest will bless the ashes and sprinkle them with holy water. Then he will offer one of two prayers a single time rather than repeating it for each person. The phrases in the Roman Missal are: "Repent, and believe in the Gospel," or "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

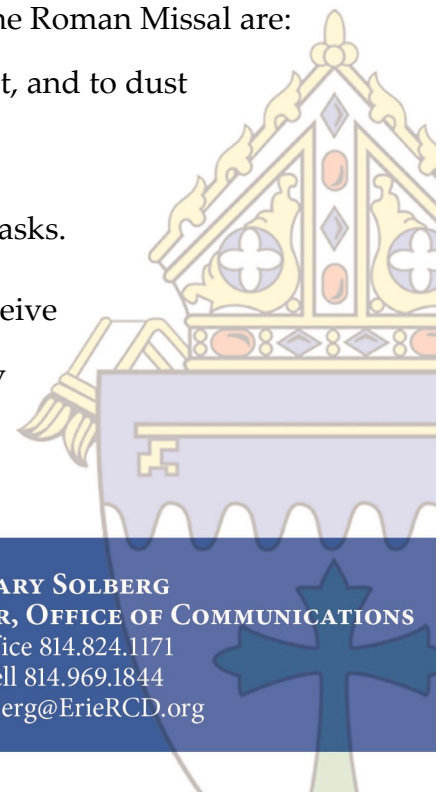
The directives also require the use of hand sanitizer, and of masks.

Catholics are reminded that there never is an obligation to receive ashes on Ash Wednesday. While the optional ritual is appreciated by

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**ANNE-MARIE WELSH**  
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS  
Office 814.824.1167  
Cell 814.746.6889  
[amwelsh@ErieRCD.org](mailto:amwelsh@ErieRCD.org)

**MARY SOLBERG**  
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS  
Office 814.824.1171  
Cell 814.969.1844  
[msolberg@ErieRCD.org](mailto:msolberg@ErieRCD.org)



many as a way to mark the beginning of Lent, the three pillars of the season are prayer, fasting and almsgiving, all of which can be practiced at home.

Sister Kathleen Dietz, FSO, recommends people consider almsgiving in broad terms this year. For those facing financial constraints, she notes that almsgiving can be practiced in the form of generosity of heart. Among the suggestions she makes are offering a smile of encouragement, even when it's challenging; forgiving someone who has caused hurt; overlooking the faults of others, including not pointing them out; not gossiping; and, not least, giving time to family members, friends or a charitable organization.

The Office of Faith Formation of the diocese also has created a Lenten micro-site available at [www.eriercd.org/lent.html](http://www.eriercd.org/lent.html). Called *Mercy and Grace*, it includes themes and ideas to consider on a week-by-week basis, as well as resources such as various Stations of the Cross meditations and a listing of Pope Francis' prayer intentions that can be used throughout the year.

It also features a wish list curated from Catholic Charities agencies scattered throughout the 13 counties of the diocese for those who would like to incorporate them in their almsgiving.

"Lent is a time during which we are called to align our journey with Jesus, who wants to reveal himself and love us through prayer, fasting and almsgiving," says Jillian Zaczyk, director of the Office of Young Adults and Youth for the diocese. "By participating in these practices, we encounter Jesus through conversation, purification and making the needs of other people our own. In this unique Lenten season, Jesus is with us wherever we start and cannot wait to take the first steps with you."

The following page contains a list of other Lenten practices Catholics are asked to observe.

# # #

*While public worship was reinstated at Catholic parishes in the Diocese of Erie beginning in June, the dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days remains in effect. Those who choose to attend Mass are asked to wear a mask, maintain social distancing, and sanitize their hands regularly.*

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, February 17, 2021, and concludes when the Paschal Triduum of the passion, death, and resurrection of the Lord at the start of the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday, April 1, 2021.

Traditional Lenten practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, as well as other forms of self-denial, are recommended most warmly by the church. Daily Mass is particularly encouraged. A listing of Masses available by livestream in the Diocese of Erie can be found at [www.eriecd.org/livestreammass.html](http://www.eriecd.org/livestreammass.html) .

- Ash Wednesday, all Fridays in Lent except March 19 and Good Friday are days of abstinence from eating meat for those 14 years of age and older. Because the Solemnity of St. Joseph (March 19) falls on a Friday of Lent, and solemnities are never days of penance, the faithful are not obliged to abstain from meat on that day.
- Ash Wednesday and Good Friday also are days of fasting for those ages 18 to 58 inclusive. On these days, those bound by the law of fasting may take one full meal. Two smaller meals, sufficient to maintain strength according to one's needs, also are permitted. Eating between meals is not permitted, but liquids including milk and fruit juices are allowed. When health or work is seriously affected, the law does not oblige.

If the COVID situation requires modifications to these practices,  
they will be communicated as they develop.