

Lent, 2008



As a parish, we will attempt to achieve specific goals this Lent, which starts on **Ash Wednesday**, 6th February, which is a very early start compared to some years.

Our goals are two-fold.

The **first goal** is to leaflet some areas of the parish with an invitation to come to the church on specified dates with a view to seeing the buildings, meeting people and hearing about the Christian faith today during the final two weeks of Lent which are 2nd March-16th March.



We will ask members of the congregation to leaflet some streets with the invitations and then for some of them to be present in the Church on the dates specified for the invitation. The Church is a major asset to us as Christians. It has stood there for hundreds of years and is a mine of wonderful artefacts and symbols of our faith. It would be wise to use it for the purpose for which it was always intended- to glorify God. Their role will be to support the project by talking to people, showing them around the interesting architectural features, which of course, all speak about the Christian faith. We will also need a team serving refreshments and

people being there for the talk about our faith which will be offered to those who accept the invitation. The idea is that if there any people interested in looking further into the possibility of continuing at Holy Cross Church, then those present will form a welcoming group, helping the new people over the Church's threshold and into our common life. It would be good if current members of the congregation could continue in this welcoming role for a time to ensure that the new people really feel at home.

But before this, our **second goal** is to prepare as a congregation for the visitors by refreshing our vision of the Christian faith and our life as a Church community. To that end, the first four weeks of Lent will present opportunities for people to study and think and pray in groups together. A study pack will be prepared. It is hoped that there will be a good response to this opportunity, both because of our Lent project and also because in the challenging multi-faith world in which we all now live, we need to know more, share doubts, explore issues about our faith so that we are personally confident and open to any discussions.

There will be a chance to start being part of this exciting project in January when we will start our preparations. Please tell Neil if you wish to become more involved but I hope that every member of the congregation will want to know about this and want to make it a success.

Other Lenten activities

Lent is a word which simply means Spring. It is not meant to be a time of self-flagellation or depression but rather an optimistic and forward looking preparation for the celebration of Easter.

Ash Wednesday

It is always a good plan to start Lent with attending Mass on Ash Wednesday if at all possible.



The powerful symbolism of the Ash Wednesday ritual touches profoundly all human needs and hopes, joys and sorrows.

Palm crosses from the previous year are burned and ground down to provide ash for the ashing ceremony. The symbols involve the feelings of empty triumph and inner triumph which are in evidence on Palm Sunday and which are turned on their heads by the reality of Christ's real identity and purpose.

As we receive the ash, we know our human finitude very deeply. "Dust you are and to dust you shall return." And yet we also know the reality of being inspired by the spirit of the living God who transforms us by breathing new life into our old selves. Mass with ashing at 7am and 8pm – Old Church.

Lent Lunches

We plan another Lent Lunch series with a combination of activities in and around the church including a visit to the Litten Nature Reserve on Saturday 8th March, 10am-12 noon, to inspire and enthuse us, old and young. The aim of these lunches is to provide a focus and an expression of our Lenten discipline as a Christian congregation.

We use them to fulfil three aims:-

- 1) to be together to deepen our faith and awareness of God's word and world;
- 2) to give alms to assist others in need - this year, our link with Angola and Mozambique projects with which the Diocese has long-term and fruitful connections and partnerships;
- 3) to serve each other's needs in preparing simple food and sharing it with guests.

Individual processes may be helpful

- 1) Private reading

Some people find reading a thought-provoking book, whether specifically about faith or otherwise, a good way of observing Lent. It starts off a reflective mood and can encourage good habits.

- 2) A Lenten partner

Some people have found working with a partner for 6 weeks is a great help. They may just sit and talk about their lives or read the same book and talk about it. If the idea appeals to you, just ask a friend to be your Lenten partner and arrange dates.

I hope that your Lent is a profoundly good experience and enhances your celebration of Easter in 2008.

Neil Richardson