



New Life Beyond Our Present Normal

It's almost year now since the Coronavirus pandemic has changed how we gather together, move about, interact with each other, and try to live faithfully as the sons and daughters of God in the world today. It has not been easy. There have been controversies over: who started it; who to listen to for accurate information; whose advice to follow regarding wearing masks, using hand sanitizer, social distancing and not gathering in large groups to protect front-line workers and those who are most vulnerable to Covid-19; when to reopen businesses, schools, churches, movie theaters, sporting events or concerts.

While all that was going on, we have had social unrest, a contentious national election that culminated with a home-grown attack on our Nation's capitol with violence and death. And there has been fires, hurricanes and other storms during the summer, and just recently the severe winter storms especially in Texas almost knocking out their power grid, yet still leaving millions in the dark and cold.

Then, to top it all off, there has now been over 2.5million deaths due to Covid-19 around the world, with over 500,000 deaths in our country alone. A year ago, this didn't seem possible. We thought by summer of 2020 Covid-19 would fade away and by Fall everything would be back to normal. This didn't happen and the focus turned to the fast-developing vaccines which are now being administered with difficulties in getting good supply and access to them.

To say the least there has been a lot of suffering, anxiety, worry, and strain on all of us in this last year. Now, there is hope that the vaccines will eventually get us to the herd immunity the experts talk about, even though they don't know if the vaccines will be effective with the adapting strains of the virus, or if the vaccines will have a long-term effect. We may have to get yearly boosters.

Getting life back to "normal" may still take a while. Let's take it slow in opening up and doing worship and other church activities. The church councils and Parish council will continue to monitor how we move forward. Be patient. Be kind. Be loving. Be hopeful. Be faithful to the Lord your God, for God goes with us, into new life beyond our present normal. Jesus said, ***"And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*** (Mt. 28:20b)

Pr. Ahles



For March we will be collecting
Cloth Diapers for Baby Care Kits.

COMMUNITY LENTEN SERVICES



<https://www.peacelutheranofpigeonfalls.com/LiveStream>

Our 2021 Lenten Journey

The stories of various woodland animals in *All Creation Waits: The Advent Mystery of New Beginnings* by Gayle Boss, illustrate themes of stillness, adaptation, transformation, endings and beginnings. While the book was written as an Advent devotional, the stories of various animals provide an entrée into Lenten themes of spiritual life and death and resurrection. They also touch on realities of isolation and adaptation people face during a time of pandemic. As Winter transforms into Spring, these stories will help people interpret their Lenten journey in rhythm with the natural world.

Worship will be live-stream each Wednesday at 11:00 a.m. from Peace Lutheran of Pigeon Falls and can be viewed anytime up to 30 days after. Our journey is each Wednesday through March 24th. <https://www.peacelutheranofpigeonfalls.com/LiveStream>



Lines from LaVerne..... Believe. Do you believe with all your heart and soul that God wants us to be happy because He is our heavenly Father and He loves us? Our Christian faith is the only answer for a more peaceful and abundant life. We can give our burdens to our heavenly Father and save our nervous systems and our daily strength. After all, He is in control, anyway and He is our comfort and protection. Is it any wonder people that try to carry their own burdens alone are tired, discouraged and maybe even sick? Our human batteries need to be recharged. Peace of mind is the greatest asset we can have for a happy and healthy living. This inner victory only comes from knowing God intimately. Then we realize that the spiritual values are the only real values in life. We have this power within us and we learn by having faith. The answer to our problems is to think positively and trust in God. This love of God drives fear out. Think peace knowing Christ lives there. Christ is our safety value for our emotions. You cannot have a nervous condition when you open this safety valve. Are there some sins or hate dominating your life? You need to admit them and learn to meditate with God. Show all love, even to those who have hurt you in the past. Always look for the good in other people and in their actions. Everyone is different. Ignore the evil they sometimes do to us. Keep your mind fixed on God and His values. Do you realize that God gives us the privilege to live a lifetime on earth and has never once criticized or condemned us? He gave us brains, a free will, talents, and the Bible, a book of rules to follow. Change the pattern of your thinking. Become a positive thinker instead of a negative thinker. When you find Christ, you don't have to give up anything good.

Your Lay Minister,
LaVerne

P.S. You all matter so very much, especially to your family and your creator, God. Each day is a day to rejoice in. It is a gift to you and that's why they call it the present. Take one day at a time and feel great all week.

SUNDAY SCHOOL:

*****Children's Choir has resumed!!!*****

Teachers and students have been meeting after services (around 9:20) in their classrooms with masks.



Council Notes

Elk Creek Lutheran Church Council Meeting -- February 2, 2021

The meeting was called to order by President Keith Nelson at 7:08 PM. Members present were: Pastor Valerian Ahles, Cedric Anderson, Jan Berg, Brian Christopherson, Ryan Johnson, Rhonda Koval, Anson McCune, Keith Nelson, Lindsey Nelson, Lori Nelson, Becky Rongstad, and Stephanie Rumstick.

Devotions and Prayer -- Pastor noted that confusion with the Bishop meant she would be joining us virtually next month, rather than in February. He then began by lighting a candle to celebrate Candlemas Day which marks the end of the Christmas season and pivots us so that we are pointed toward the Cross and the empty grave. He shared the story of Simian from Luke 2 : 25-35 and closed with a prayer.

Secretary's Report -- Brian made a motion to approve the Secretary's Report as it was written; Rhonda seconded; motion passed.

Treasurer's Report -- was presented by Keith with information provided by Haukeness Financial Service. Cedric asked about possibly putting some of the General Fund Savings 2050 into a Thrivent account so that it could earn interest; which is what the Cemetery Association currently does. Keith will ask Jessica to attend the March meeting to explain the options. Rhonda made a motion to approve the reports as presented; Stephanie seconded; motion passed.

Elk Creek Lutheran Church Accounts

- General Checking Account - \$25,036.16
- General Savings Account - \$38,523.53
- CD 4145 - \$10,269.85
- Building Fund Checking - \$10,010.61
- Memorial Fund - \$4,587.24

Joint Parish Financial Accounts

Assets Elk Creek Immanuel Total

Beginning Balance - \$7,060.98 \$9,616.60 \$16,677.58

Payments - \$3,095.68 \$4,616.18 \$7,711.86

Ending Balance - \$10,775.57 \$15,215.82 \$25,991.39

Pastor's Report --

Pastor conducted 4 in-person worship services and 4 live stream services. He attended 4 Coffee Fellowships. Pastor delivered 19 Daily Devotions on Facebook and had phone visits with 21 family units. He met in-person with the Confirmation class 4 times, although 2 of the students were in quarantine for two weeks. He wrote 2 Pastoral Letters (one for the Annual Report and one for the February Newsletter). Pastor attended 5 Dairyland Conference Pastor's Text Studies & Meetings on Zoom and 1 Synod Winter Theological Zoom Meeting. He also participated in an ELCA Webinar on Christian Nationalism. Pastor Ahles' Office Hours at Elk Creek are generally from 8:30 - 12:30 on Wednesday mornings. Pastor Ahles can be reached at [cell] 533-0939 or [parsonage] 694-2427.

He noted the congregational leaders will be installed on Feb. 7, the Parish Council Meeting will be Feb. 16 at Elk Creek, and most of the students will be taking First Communion for the first time on March 7. Plus Ash Wednesday is February 17 and that kicks off Lent.

WELCA Report -- No report

Choir -- No report

Memorial Committee -- No report

**WE WELCOME EVERYONE TO
COFFEE HOUR WEDNESDAYS
AT 10 AM IN THE CHURCH
BASEMENT. JOIN US FOR
COFFEE AND CHATS!**

Youth Group -- No report
Sunday School -- No report
Janitor -- No report
Office Staff -- No report

Council Meeting is Tuesday, March 2 at 7 p.m.

Old Business --

- **Carpet** -- Jan and Becky got samples of carpeting which is available in both tiles and broadloom from Howards. They were impressed after visiting St. Paul's in Fall Creek to see how the tiles / broadloom combination looked. The tiles would be used for the aisle and the entry, while the broadloom would be used for the stairways to the basement and balcony, plus the stairs and altar area of the sanctuary. They showed several samples -- no color has been selected.
- **Lutefisk Supper** -- Becky said this is cancelled for February primarily because people didn't feel comfortable working as a larger group at this time. It was suggested that we consider switching to a different type of meal possibly in late spring of summer.
- **Church Services / Sunday School** -- Council members agreed that services have been working well. Discussion of possibly allowing Sunday School students to sing while wearing masks. Council requests the Board of Education to meet and discuss options.
- **Room Divider Curtains for Sunday School classrooms** -- Lindsey has been checking on possible suppliers [currently HufCor] and will get prices. Replacements would be for the divider upstairs in the Council Room and downstairs between the diningroom and the large Sunday School room. The curtain within the large lower floor Sunday School room will not be replaced. Discussion about possibly reusing the hardware and paying for this from Memorial Funds ensued. Lori will contact the members of the Memorial Committee.
- **Council Room Light** -- No action.
- **Riverland Energy Audit** -- Lindsey contacted A1 Insulation to look at problem areas in the bell tower area of the attic and small closet at the back of the sanctuary. Allen Rongstad will meet with the company representative on Feb. 8 at 4:00 PM. Allen is currently creating a new well-insulated attic door.

New Business --

- **Election of Officers** -- Following discussion, Lindsey nominated Keith Nelson for Council President; Anson seconded; and the motion passed. Jan nominated Tyan Johnson for Council Vice-President; Stephanie seconded; and the motion passed. Lori made a motion that Anson McCune and Becky Rongstad be Co-Treasurers; Cedric seconded; and the motion passed. Stephanie Rumstick has one more year to serve as the Financial Secretary and Lori Nelson has two more years to serve as the Recording Secretary. Anson proposed a Resolution that Becky Rongstad, as one of the Co-Treasurers, shall be given access to online transactions from CCF Bank for all of Elk Creek Lutheran Church accounts.
- **Monthly Bills** -- Payment of \$400 to Haukeness Financial for Elk Creek Lutheran Church's accounting services for the year and a payment of \$200 to Haukeness Financial for Elk Creek Lutheran Church's portion of the payment for the Joint Parish accounting services for the year. It was noted that the LP Gas bill should arrive shortly. Anson made a motion that the bills to Haukeness and LP Gas (when it arrives) be paid. Lindsey seconded and the motion passed.
- **Correspondence** --
 - Keith read a letter from ELCA World Hunger: 40 Days of Giving asking for a donation during Lent. Jan made a motion to make a donation of \$100 to ELCA World Hunger: 40 Days of Giving; Rhonda seconded; and the motion passed.
 - Luther Park sent a Thank You note for the financial donation to the Luther Park Building & Rejoicing Capital Campaign.
- **Ash Wednesday, Lenten, & Easter Services** --
 - Elk Creek Lutheran Church's Ash Wednesday services will be held at 5:30 PM. In an effort to minimize physical interactions, this year the ashes will be placed in sealed baggies and given to individuals to take home.
 - Pastor Ahles will be taking part in the Round Robin of area pastors providing sermons for Lenten Services. Each pastor will record a sermon which is available online from Peace Lutheran Church's website. These sermons will be live-stream broadcast at 11:00 each Wednesday in Lent and can be watched at any time.
 - Following discussion, Jan made a motion to have Lenten services available for those desiring fellowship in the church basements at 5:30 PM on the Wednesdays of Lent. Lindsey seconded and the motion passed. Pastor will set up services which will include the on-line sermon and may include hymns and/or additional readings.
 - After a discussion on the idea of Christians demonstrating their faith during Lent by giving donations, the Council chose to issue the same Lenten Challenge as last year -- where church members are asked to donate \$ 2.00 for each of the 40 days of Lent. These monetary donations can be made using the current offering envelopes with the word "Lenten" or "Hunger" specified on the line marked "Other."

Cedric made a motion that donations designated as Lenten offerings be donated to the Feed My People charity in Eau Claire. Rhonda seconded it and the motion passed. It was noted that the Curds for Kids program is being coordinated by Feed My People this year.

- This year's Easter Service will be held at 8:30 AM on April 4. Jan will contact her employer and will speak with Linda Odness about encouraging flower orders.
- **Entryway Doors** -- It was noted that there have been problems with the main doors into the church building. Ryan made a motion to have Cedric take care of getting and installing a seal and a brush if it is needed. Rhonda seconded and the motion passed.
- **Constitution** -- After several questions about Constitutional procedures, Becky asked that copies of the current constitution be printed and so that a copy can be distributed to each family.
- **Joint Parish Council Meeting** will be held on Feb. 16 at Elk Creek. President Keith is unable to attend so Cedric will attend in his place. Others attending from Elk Creek are Lindsey Nelson, Pam Johnson, and Henry Filla.
- **Websites** --
 - Official Elk Creek Lutheran Church -- Lori is working on updating it and would like to add photos. Please send any to her.
 - Elk Creek Lutheran Church's FaceBook page -- Why is this restricted to a private group and who is the administrator?

Next Meeting -- The next Council meeting will be on March 2 at 7 pm.

Adjournment -- Lori made a motion to adjourn; Anson seconded; motion passed. The meeting was closed at 9:11 PM with the Lord's Prayer.

Respectfully submitted by Lori Nelson, Recording Secretary

Annual Meeting Minutes

The Annual Meeting was called to order by President Keith Nelson at 10:00 AM. There were 37 people in attendance either in person or virtually on Google Meets.

Devotions & Prayer

Pastor led us in devotion and prayers with a reading from First Thessalonians 1 : 2 - 5. In this reading, early Christians were reminded that prayers were constantly offered for them, their churches, and for all those who love God and who are loved by God. He encourages us to realize that this also applies to Christians and the ministries of today. Although during this past year we have all been challenged, he is thankful that we have been able to continue to work together faithfully and that we will continue to do so.

Pastor's Report was presented by Pastor Ahles

- Just weeks after last year's annual Meeting, COVID-19 turned our lives upside down. This resulted in discontinuing in-person worship services and encouraging members to watch the live-stream services which were broadcast from Immanuel. During July - September, services were held from the balcony at the back of the building. When the weather got colder, services were moved indoors with masks, sanitizing, and social distancing.
- In-person worship was only discontinued for a few weeks in October and November when someone who attended a worship service tested positive for COVID-19. Unfortunately, almost all extra services and activities had to be cancelled.
- In April, Pastor began posting Daily Devotions from Tuesday - Saturday on Elk Creek's private FaceBook page.
- While Confirmation classes were delayed, they were made up during the summer.
- A First Communion Workshop was held in September and the first communion for these students will be held in 2021.
- Three Baptisms were celebrated.
- Funerals were held for 3 members and a Graveside service was held for 1 nonmember.
- He extended a big thank you to Crystal Johnson for her work as the Church Secretary in managing the daily affairs of the church and preparing the bulletins for the worship services.
- He thanked Keith and Nicole Nelson and Allen and Becky Rongstad for organizing and setting up each Sunday for the outdoor services.
- A Thank You was given to Becky Rongstad for using her musical talent on the organ and piano for worship services.
- Keith Nelson was thanked for completing the Parish Paycheck Protection Program loan application for both churches.

- Kellen and Lindsey Nelson were thanked for providing the radio transmitter which allows members to listen to and participate in services from the parking lot.
- He noted that Ash Wednesday will be celebrated with an in-person service and that he will be participating in the Round Robin of pastors conducting live-stream Lenten Services.
- Pastor indicated that he has been using the phone to contact people on the Congregation's Membership List, although not all of the information is accurate. He requested that the information be updated.

Secretary's Report was not read aloud. Tammy Danenberg proposed not reading the Minutes from 2019's Annual Meeting aloud and made a motion to accept the Report as it was printed in the Annual Report. Crystal Johnson seconded the motion and it passed.

Treasurer's Report (General Fund / Building Fund) was presented and reviewed by Keith Nelson. He explained specifics and answered questions.

Total Income for 2020 -- \$ 96,552.53

Total Expenses for 2020 -- \$ 90,512.48

Ending Balance for 2020 -- \$ 17,014.89

Building Fund Checking -- \$ 9,410,31

2050 Fund -- \$ 38,523.53

CD 4145 -- \$ 10,269.85

Memorial Fund -- \$ 3,542.24

Keith indicated that we have contracted with Haukeness Financial Services to handle the accounting for Elk Creek Lutheran Church. Karen Black handles Elk Creek's accounts, as well as the accounts for the Immanuel / Elk Creek Lutheran Parish. Becky Rongstad and Anson McCune are authorized to sign checks on the Church's accounts.

Congregational President's Report was presented by Keith Nelson

- Keith thanked Tom Johnson and Tim Radatz for their years of service on the Church Council.
- He thanked Amber Radatz and LaYona Manke for their years of service on the Board of Education.
- He indicated that the tuck pointing project went well and that at the instruction of the Council an Energy Efficiency Audit had been conducted and the results are being studied.
- He thanked all of those who worked to set up and participate in the outdoor services and other activities.

WELCA Report was resented by Becky Rongstad

- Becky praised everyone for embracing their ability to adapt so that the Outdoor Bazaar was such a success. It was noted that Mother Nature also helped!
- She explained details of the financial report and identified the many donations made by the group.

Elk Creek Choir Report was presented by Lynn Nelson

Income \$ 100.0; Expenses \$ 0.00; Ending Balance \$ 897.77.

Memorial Committee Report was furnished by Roseanne Thompson

Memorials were given to various church organizations including the cemetery, in memory of the following individuals: Eric Rumstick, Roger Rumstick, Bob Nelson, Laila Pederson, Ruth Fischer, and Yvonne Monson.

Sunday School Report was furnished by Crystal Johnson

Checking account Beginning Balance - \$ 2,372.85 ; Deposits - \$ 533.70 ; Expenses - \$ 220.20 ; with the Ending Balance for 2020 - \$ 2,706.35.

Youth Group Report was presented by Jessica Berg

Jessica indicated that she and her husband Kevin had chosen to become leaders of the group. She thanked the parents, grandparents, and church leaders who helped them get organized. They hosted a Bonfire before helping the teens with the Chicken-Que at the Bazaar and the yard clean up of a church member. They also collected and distributed food items during the holidays.

Beginning Balance - \$ 4,986.73 ; Income - \$ 3,238.82 ; Expenses - \$ 1,333.60 ; Ending Balance - \$ 6,891.95

Cemetery Report was furnished by Allen Rongstad

The cemetery association and report is from May 2019 -- May 2020.

Beginning Balance [5/23/3010] - \$ 5,443.43 ; Inflows - \$ 10,981.49 ; Outflows - \$ 9,604.08 ; Ending Balance [5/20/2020] - \$ 6,825.84

Immanuel / Elk Creek - United Lutheran Parish Financial Report was presented by Keith Nelson

Keith shared a categorized report of the Parish Shared Expenses including Pastoral compensation, operating (home-related bills), benefits, ministry aid, and Pastoral contracts (supply pastors).

Operating Budget and Building Fund Budget for 2021 were presented by Keith Nelson

It was noted that a line item for a \$400 donation to the Youth Group had been added. Tammy Danenberg asked that the donation for the Choir be raised in future budgets. A discussion of the Pastor's Compensation package followed. Tammy Danenberg made a motion to approve the General Fund and Building Fund Budgets as presented; Allen Rongstad seconded; Motion passed.

Election of Officers -- the following were presented for election for 2021:

Council Positions:

Stephanie Rumstick (1 yr.) Anson McCune (1 yr.) Lori Nelson (2 yrs.)
Keith Nelson (1 yr.) Rhonda Koval (2 yrs.) Brian Christopherson (3 yrs.)
Cedric Anderson (1 yr.) Lindsey Nelson (2 yrs.) Ryan Johnson (3 yrs.)
WELCA Rep. Becky Rongstad / Jan Berg

During the February Council Meeting, all office positions will be voted on. Officer positions including President, Vice-President, Secretary, Financial Secretary, and Treasurer. All other members will be Members at Large.

WORSHIP Appointed Positions

Memorial Secretary : Roseanne Thompson (3)

Memorial Committee : Deb Ebert & Barb Nelson

Head Greeter / Usher : Church Secretary Crystal Johnson

Auditing Committee: Shelly Stenson (1), Tammy Danenberg (2), Brittany Franson (3)

Stewardship Committee : Jan Berg, Steve Johnson, Bill Danenberg

Music Committee : Tammy Danenberg, Bonnie Johnson, & Becky Rongstad

Nominating Committee : Bill Danenberg (1), Allen Rongstad (2), & Steve Johnson (3)

Worship Ministry : Stephanie Rumstick (1), Roberta West (1), Sherri Maug (2), & Tyson Hammer (2)

Board of Education : Nicole Johnson (1), Tammy Danenberg (2), Lori Nelson (3), & _____

Joint Parish Board : Pam Johnson (1), Henry Filla (2), _____, & the Council President

Bonnie Johnson made a motion to name Pam Johnson as the fourth member of the Board of Education; Lori Nelson seconded; motion passed.

Kellen Nelson made a motion to name Lindsey Nelson as the fourth member of the Joint Parish Board; Pam Johnson seconded; motion passed.

CHANGES to Ballot

Board of Education : Nicole Johnson (1), Tammy Danenberg (2), Lori Nelson (3), & Pam Johnson (3)

Joint Parish Board : Pam Johnson (1), Henry Filla (2), Lindsey Nelson (3), & the Council President

With all of the blanks filled in, Lynn Nelson made a motion to cast a unanimous ballot for the corrected ballot; Anson McCune seconded; the motion passed.

Old Business

- Louvers / Tuck Pointing

Keith noted that the Tuck Pointing is finished and has been paid for. He indicated that workers from R J Jurowski will paint the Louvers in the spring and they will be paid upon completion of the project.

- Carpet in Narthex, Sanctuary, & Stairs

Members of the WELCA are currently investigating carpet options for the narthex, sanctuary, and the stairways to the balcony and the basement.

New Business

- **Room-divider Curtains** in Sunday School Rooms

Keith Nelson indicated that the Council has been looking into replacing the 3 Room-Divider Curtains currently in use in the Sunday School rooms. Several companies have been identified. The possibility of using the already installed hardware and the need for sound proofing materials was discussed. It was suggested that possibly money from the Memorial Fund could be used to pay or partially pay for the dividers. Council will contact the Memorial Committee.

- **Energy Audit Results**

Lindsey Nelson explained that problems had been identified during the Energy Audit. It was noted that the attic area over the back pews of the balcony and the door to the attic had little or no insulation. In addition the door which leads outdoors from the Pastor's Dressing Room is an uninsulated interior door even though it leads to the outer unheated stairway.

- **Paycheck Protection Program [PPP]**

Keith indicated that while the Immanuel / Elk Creek Lutheran Parish did qualify for the first Paycheck Protection Program [PPP] Loan; we would not qualify for a second loan. He also noted that he had been informed that we do not need to repay the original PPP Loan.

- **Tuck Pointing**

Several people asked about the next probable phase [side] for Tuck Pointing and the need to raise money to pay for this eventuality. The council will look into this.

Motion to recess was made by Tammy Danenberg; seconded by Jan Berg; motion passed. We recessed at 11:57 AM following Pastor leading us in "The Lord's Prayer."

Respectfully submitted by Lori Nelson, Recording Secretary



EASTER PLANTS

In **MEMORY** or **HONOR** of _____

From: _____

	How Many?		How Many?
Lily	\$13.00 _____	Tulips	\$12.00 _____
Daffodils	\$12.00 _____	Spring Garden	\$28.00 _____
Hyacinth	\$12.00 _____		

Plant orders are due by Sunday, March 21, 2021. You may put the order form along with payment (checks payable to Elk Creek Lutheran Church)

In the offering plate OR mail to:

Elk Creek Lutheran Church
C/O Jan Berg
W16316 CTH OO
Osseo, WI 54758

PLEASE REMEMBER TO TAKE YOUR PLANTS AFTER THE EASTER SERVICE

The Midweek Lenten Offering has been designated by the church council to go to "Feed My People" Food Bank of Eau Claire, WI. My Pastoral Lenten challenge for each family of the congregation is set aside \$2/day for the 40 days of Lent.

thrivent®



If you are a Thrivent member, don't forget the deadline to allocate funds for Thrivent Choice is March 31st. There are informational pamphlets available on the table in the Narthex. Help yourself!

FAQs About Lent

What is Lent? Learn about this 40-day season of the church year leading up to Easter

Q: What is the significance of Lent?

A: Early in the Church's history, the major events in Christ's life were observed with special observances, such as His birth, baptism, death, resurrection and ascension. As these observances developed, a period of time was set aside prior to the major events of Jesus' birth and resurrection as a time of preparation.

During Lent, the Church's worship assumes a more penitential character. The color for the season is purple, a color often associated with penitence. The "Hymn of Praise" is omitted from the liturgy. The word "Alleluia" is usually omitted as well. By not using the alleluia—a joyful expression meaning "Praise the Lord"—until Easter, the Lenten season is clearly set apart as a distinct time from the rest of the year. Additionally, it forms a powerful contrast with the festive celebration of Jesus' resurrection when our alleluias ring loud and clear.

Finally, the penitential character of Lent is not its sole purpose. In the ancient Church, the weeks leading up to Easter were a time of intensive preparation of the candidates who were to be baptized at the Easter vigil on Holy Saturday. This time in the Church's calendar was seen as an especially appropriate time for Baptism because of the relationship between Christ's death and resurrection and our own in Holy Baptism (see Romans 6:1-11). This focus would suggest that the season of Lent serves not only as a time to meditate on the suffering that Christ endured on our behalf but also as an opportunity to reflect upon our own Baptism and what it means to live as a child of God.

Q: Do Lutherans have to give up something for Lent as some other denominations require?

A: From the perspective of [The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod](#), "giving something up for Lent" is entirely a matter of Christian freedom. It would be wrong, from our perspective, for the church to make some sort of "law" requiring its members to "give something up for Lent," since the Scriptures themselves do not require this. If, on the other hand, a Christian wants to give something up for Lent as a way of remembering and personalizing the great sacrifice that Christ made on the cross for our sins, then that Christian is certainly free to do so—as long as he or she does not "judge" or "look down on" other Christians who do not choose to do this.

Q: What is the significance of Ash Wednesday and ashes on the forehead?

A: *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, a commentary on Lutheran Worship, one of our Synod's hymnals, says this about ashes on Ash Wednesday:

"Other customs may be used, particularly the imposition of ashes on those who wish it. This ancient act is a gesture of repentance and a powerful reminder about the meaning of the day. Ashes can symbolize dust-to-dustness and remind worshipers of the need for cleansing, scrubbing and purifying. If they are applied during an act of kneeling, the very posture of defeat and submission expresses humility before God."

The use of ashes on Ash Wednesday is a more recent custom among most LCMS congregations, although some have done it for decades. The ashes are usually derived from the burned palms from the previous Palm Sunday. Experience will show, however, that in obtaining ashes this way, it doesn't take many ashes to "ash" a whole congregation. Like sin, they are very dirty and go a long way. One palm leaf will produce enough ashes for several years. Usually the pastor takes the ashes on the end of his thumb and makes the sign of the cross on the forehead of each worshiper, saying these words: "*Remember: you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*" This follows most effectively prior (or as part of) the Service Corporate Confession and Absolution on pp. 290-291 of *Lutheran Service Book*.

Published by: LCMS Church Information Center ©The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295 888-843-5267 • infocenter@lcms.org • www.lcms.org/faqs

Source: <https://www.immanueljoplin.com/2021/01/what-is-lent/>

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