

COMMUNITY & CONVERSION



THE SPIRITUALITY
OF LENT
AT
THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
2019 LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

*This year at The Congregational Church,
UCC, we hope to recapture the communal
nature of Lenten practice as a
congregation.*

*This booklet provides a description and
schedule of what we will do together
during this holy time.*

*What shape will Lent take in your life
this season?*

COMMUNITY & CONVERSION

Introduction

Lent, the forty-day period between Ash Wednesday and Easter (Sundays are excepted), was historically a period of preparation for “catechumens,” those persons seeking baptism into the life of the church at Easter. Quite soon, however, it became and it continues to be a time of self-examination, penitence, and special devotion for all Christians as they prepare for the celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus.

Lent is more than just a season of fasting and abstinence; it is a positive opportunity for significant spiritual growth. The writer Jan Richardson, wrote that “Lent begins with ashes and invites us into a time of stripping away all that distracts us from recognizing the God who dwells at our core. Reminding us that we are ashes and dust, God beacons us during Lent to consider what is elemental and essential in our lives.”

Lent reminds us of the essential aspect of what it is to be a Christian: repentance, *metanoia* in Greek, turning one’s life around, the putting off of the old self and the putting on of the new. It is an intensification of the movement which is the spiritual rhythm of our lives: a continuous turning away from distractions and sin, and reorientation toward God.

Lent is about *conversion*.

The traditional practices of Lent, prayer, fasting, and giving to the poor, invite us to be reformed and renewed as believers and strengthen our faith. As Christians, we assume a variety of spiritual disciplines so that we will better follow Jesus - we go to worship, say our prayers, study the Bible and other spiritual readings, and devote ourselves to discipleship and reaching out to serve others. During Lent, we are invited to re-dedicate ourselves to these disciplines and make them a bit more intentional as a means to restore vibrancy, life, and passion in our relationship with God. In short, we are hoping to make our hearts and souls bigger, to create more space for God in our lives.

In Lent, we follow Jesus into the wilderness where he was tempted, and we attempt through spiritual discipline to confront our own wildernesses to enter a deeper relationship with God. We pray and proceed with Jesus on the way to Jerusalem and to his Cross on Good Friday. We make this journey, all the while keeping an eye toward the Resurrection.

A church theologian, Fr. Schmemmann, wrote that Lent is a time of “bright sadness.” *Sadness*, because we focus on the passion and death of Jesus and on the brokenness of us all. And *bright*, for the promise of Lent is the glory and joy of the Christ’s Resurrection at Easter.

One aspect of Lent which is rarely mentioned nowadays is the communal. In earlier times, Lent was a discipline taken on by the entirety of a community or even a

society. It was something which everyone did together, and the rhythm of life in society was adjusted to support this common discipline. One might think of this as a kind of spiritual teamwork, and like anything done as a team it bound people together and helped create community.

In the 21st century world we live in, this emphasis on community, during Lent, has diminished. This year at The Congregational Church, UCC, we hope to recapture the communal nature of Lenten practice as a congregation. Where will you find depth and faith in the spirituality of this Lenten Season? This booklet provides a description and schedule of what we will do together during this holy time.

- The Rev. Meghan D. Young

THE SHAPE OF LENT

Weekly Fasts

Fasting is linked with repentance throughout the Scriptures. When we fast we are reminded spiritually of our weakness, our finitude, and our need for God. Each week, we will fast from a particular pleasure. All Sundays are “feast” days when, in celebration of the Resurrection, we break our fasts. You may choose to do each of the suggested communal fasts for one week only; or you may let them build on each other, so that by the end of Lent you are doing all six weekly fasts at the same time.

Spiritual Discipline

For each of the 40 days of Lent, you are invited to take a spiritual discipline. We’ve listed suggestions, but feel free to take on your own as space opens for God in your heart. Pray, meditate, read scripture, walk, dance, help your neighbor, and sing, as you follow the way God is calling you to deepen your faith. Through these spiritual disciplines, our hope is that we will keep a more Holy Lent together as a community.

Daily Readings

During Lent we will be reading a common set of Scriptures together. Each week we will read, pray, and meditate on the scripture passage for the upcoming Sunday. Read it daily, exploring it in different ways. Focus on a word, a verse, or an image. What is new? What is familiar? What brings you hope? What brings you fear? What is the challenge of this passage? What is the Good News proclaimed? You are invited to reflect on the questions provided, and others that come up for you.

Easter Rejoicing

Our Lenten journey together will culminate in the celebration of Jesus' Resurrection on Easter at 10:30 AM on Easter Sunday, April 21st. You are encouraged to join us for our Holy Week services (Maundy Thursday, Good Friday), so that you might more deeply feel the conversion of Easter upon you.

OUR JOURNEY

ASH WEDNESDAY

March 6 - 9

Fast on Ash Wednesday

The Spirituality of Mercy, Matthew 18:15-35

WEEK 1

March 10 - 16

Fast: Sweets & Treats

The Spirituality of Grace, Matthew 20:1-16

WEEK 2

March 17 - March 23

Fast: Television/Media

The Spirituality of Saying Yes (to God), Matthew 22:1-14

WEEK 3

March 24 - 30

Fast: Social Media

The Spirituality of Faithfulness, Matthew 25:1-30

WEEK 4

March 31 - April 6

Fast: Unnecessary Spending

The Spirituality of Hospitality, Matthew 25:31-46

WEEK 5

April 7 - 13

Fast: Alcohol, Coffee, or Soda

The Spirituality of Shouting, Matthew 21:1-17

HOLY WEEK

April 14 - 20

Fast: Food or Meals

The Passion of Jesus

ASH WEDNESDAY

MARCH 6 - 9

SCRIPTURE

Scripture for the Week: Matthew 18:15-35

Questions to Consider:

- 1) How do you practice healthy communication and address conflict?
- 2) Is there a place in your life God is calling you to offer or seek forgiveness?
- 3) How do you show mercy?
- 4) How has God shown you mercy?

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

- Day 1:** Pray for your enemies.
- Day 2:** Walk, carpool, bike, or bus it.
- Day 3:** Don't turn on the car radio.
- Day 4:** Give \$20 to a non-profit of your choosing.

THE ASHES

Lent begins with the imposition of ashes as a sign of our mortality and penitence for our sins. As we receive the ashes, we hear the words “turn away from sin, and believe in the good news.” The ashes are imposed in the form of a cross, pointing to our great hope in the grace of God through the Cross of Christ which grants us a sharing in the power of his Resurrection.

THE ASH WEDNESDAY FAST

Traditionally, the church has fasted from all food on Ash Wednesday to remind us that our physical hunger for food points to our greater spiritual hunger for God. At The Congregational Church, UCC, we combine Fat Tuesday with Ash Wednesday, so we can witness the transition from joy to the wilderness in stark contrast. We watch as Ash Wednesday arrives like a summer rainstorm, inviting us into a place of spiritual preparation. Consider fasting for part of the day.

WEEK ONE

MARCH 10 - 16

SCRIPTURE

Scripture for the Week: Matthew 20:1-16

Questions to Consider:

- 1) When have you received or offered God's grace? How do you practice Grace?
- 2) Christ shares a vision of just economy, offering a community where the last will be first, and the first will be last. How do you practice the generosity of just economy?

FAST: SWEETS & TREATS

This week, resolve to deny yourself any type of sweets or dessert (if that's your go-to). This could mean no latte in the morning or no chocolate in the evening. Notice what happens inside when you are denied something you've become accustomed to or something you really want.

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

- Sunday:** *Today is a little Easter. Rejoice!*
- Day 5:** Take 5 minutes of silence at noon.
- Day 6:** Look out the window until you find something of beauty you had not noticed before.
- Day 7:** Give 5 items of clothing to Goodwill.
- Day 8:** No complaining/whining day.
- Day 9:** Do someone else's chore.
- Day 10:** Buy a few \$5 fast food gift cards to give to homeless people you encounter.

GOING DEEPER

As a church, part of our vision is to create God's beloved community by caring for creation. Change your impact on the climate during Lent. Take up the challenge at LivingLent.org.

This week take up alternative forms of transportation. Carpool, walk, or ride a bike. There are many options.

WEEK TWO

MARCH 17 - 23

SCRIPTURE

Scripture for the Week: Matthew 22:1-14

Questions to Consider:

- 1) Where in your life do you need to say yes and accept God's invitation?
- 2) Are you nurturing the gifts God gave you?
- 3) God invites us to the banquet and out of love sets some high expectations. How are you called and preparing to show up?

FAST: TV & MEDIA

This week, forego your usual television shows. Try to turn off the TV altogether, drive without the radio on, leave your iPod at home. What does it feel like to increase the silence in your life? Ask yourself what silence does for you, and spend time listening for the voice of God.

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

- Sunday:** *Today is a little Easter. Rejoice!*
- Day 11:** Call an old friend.
- Day 12:** Pray the Paper (pray for people and situations in today's news).
- Day 13:** Read Psalm 139.
- Day 14:** Pay a few sincere compliments.
- Day 15:** Bring your own mug.
- Day 16:** Educate yourself about a social justice cause.

GOING DEEPER

As a church, part of our vision is to create God's beloved community by caring for creation. Change your impact on the climate during Lent. Take up the challenge at LivingLent.org.

This week give up single use plastics. Use paper or reusable bags, refuse disposable cups and utilize travel mugs, or do a plastic audit of your home and research 'greener alternatives'.

WEEK THREE

MARCH 24 - 30

SCRIPTURE

Scripture for the Week: Matthew 25:1-30

Questions to Consider:

- 1) What can you do to better cultivate and deepen your faith?
- 2) What are the ways God is calling you to practice stewardship of your time, talent, and treasure?
- 3) How do you risk for your faith?

FAST: SOCIAL MEDIA

This week, turn off Facebook, Twitter, blogs and internet news. Do your best to check and respond only to necessary work emails. What does it feel like to unplug and disconnect, not to obsessively check email, Facebook, etc.? Do you feel cut off...or free?

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

- Sunday:** *Today is a little Easter. Rejoice!*
- Day 17:** Forgive someone.
- Day 18:** Internet diet.
- Day 19:** Change one light in your house to an LED.
- Day 20:** Pray with someone else.
- Day 21:** Ask for help.
- Day 22:** Tell someone what you are grateful for.

GOING DEEPER

As a church, part of our vision is to create God's beloved community by caring for creation. Change your impact on the climate during Lent. Take up the challenge at LivingLent.org.

This week live locally. Do your best to travel and buy food and products that originate within a 30 mile radius of where you live. Consider the carbon footprint of your food as well as the other products your purchase.

WEEK FOUR

MARCH 31 - APRIL 6

SCRIPTURE

Scripture for the Week: Matthew 25:31-46

Questions to Consider:

- 1) How can you welcome the stranger?
- 2) How can you feed the hungry and offer drink to the thirsty?
- 3) Who do you need to show care?
- 4) Who do you need to visit that is imprisoned?
- 5) What is your experience of offering and receiving hospitality? When were you a stranger?

FAST: UNNECESSARY SPENDING

This week, resolve to spend nothing on yourself except what is absolutely necessary. Buy no new clothes or gadgets, books or music; don't go to movies or buy coffee or snacks. Eat cheaply and save money. Live simply.

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

- Sunday:** *Today is a little Easter. Rejoice!*
- Day 23:** Introduce yourself to a neighbor.
- Day 24:** Read Psalm 121.
- Day 25:** Bake a cake.
- Day 26:** No shopping day.
- Day 27:** Light a candle.
- Day 28:** Sit somewhere new (decide to continue the practice and sit in a different pew on Sunday).

GOING DEEPER

As a church, part of our vision is to create God's beloved community by caring for creation. Change your impact on the climate during Lent. Take up the challenge at LivingLent.org.

This week buy nothing new. We live in a throw away society. Excluding food, medicines and basic toiletries, could you spend Lent mending, borrowing, buying second-hand, or going without?

WEEK FIVE

APRIL 7 - 13

SCRIPTURE

Scripture for the Week: Matthew 21:1-17

Questions to Consider:

- 1) How do you practice discipleship?
- 2) How can you “shout” or proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ?
- 3) What do you need to name aloud? What can you no longer keep silent about?
- 4) What still speaking Word are you hearing from the mouths of the young?

FAST: ALCOHOL, SODA, OR COFFEE

Choose either coffee, soda, or alcohol and refrain from drinking it this week. If neither is something you regularly enjoy, choose another “staple” in your diet. Pay attention to what happens when you deny yourself something you routinely enjoy. Try to pray when you have the desire for the thing from which you are fasting.

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

- Sunday:** *Today is a little Easter. Rejoice!*
- Day 29:** Write a thank you note to your favorite teacher.
- Day 30:** Invest in canvas shopping bags.
- Day 31:** Purchase 5 non-perishable items for the food Sunday. Bring them to church on Sunday.
- Day 32:** Donate art supplies to your local elementary school.
- Day 33:** Read John 8:1-11.
- Day 34:** Worship at a friend's mosque, synagogue or church and look for the beauty.

GOING DEEPER

As a church, part of our vision is to create God's beloved community by caring for creation. Change your impact on the climate during Lent. Take up the challenge at LivingLent.org.

This week give up electricity for an hour every day. Turn off your electrical appliances (WiFi, TVs, heating, phones, etc.) and lights for an hour every day during Lent. Evaluate your energy use.

HOLY WEEK

APRIL 14—APRIL 20

SCRIPTURE

This week you are invited to walk through the last week of Jesus' life. In Holy Week, we experience the most solemn moments of the liturgical year, but our solemnity is transformed into jubilee as we enter into the fifty-day season of Easter. Take time to refocus and examine your life this week. Be fully present in this final week as the sadness meets the brightness. In this community, welcome the challenge, birthing pains, grieving, and joy of conversion.

Sunday	Matthew 21
Monday	Matthew 22:15-23:39
Tuesday	Matthew 24
Wednesday	Matthew 26:1-16
Maundy Thursday	Matthew 26:17-75
Good Friday	Matthew 27:1-61
Holy Saturday	Matthew 27:62-28:7

FAST: FOOD OR MEALS

Pick a type of food (like meat or carbs or even all “solids”) and fast from it for the week, or pick a meal to skip entirely on a daily basis. If you skip meals, spend the time you would have spent preparing and eating food to pray, read the bible or some spiritual classic, or serve others.

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

- Sunday:** *Today is a little Easter. Rejoice!*
- Day 35:** Confess a secret.
- Day 36:** No sugar day - where else is there sweetness in your life?
- Day 37:** Give \$20 to a local non-profit.
- Day 38:** Share with someone else your favorite scripture passage.
- Day 39:** Pray for peace.
- Day 40:** Pray for your enemies (you probably have new ones by now) then decide which of these exercises you'll keep for good.

A PRAYER FOR LENT

God of Eternal Love, we have made our commitment to you, and have started a new journey into purposeful growth. But we know that if we are to remain faithful we need your help and your strength. So we ask that you teach us to pray with faith and read your Word with understanding. Teach us to worship with passion and gather together with love. Teach us to give generously, serve compassionately and use our time mindfully. In all we say and do, may we reflect your goodness, and may others discover your grace through us. *AMEN.*

COVENANT

I, _____
covenant to join with fellow members and friends in taking upon myself this 2019 communal Lenten discipline in Lent at The Congregational Church, UCC. This involves fasting, daily worship, spiritual disciplines, meditation, and the study of Holy Scripture. I pray that the grace of God will enable me and those others who have taken on this discipline to grow spiritually and to be bound closer to one another in the community of Christ's Friends at The Congregational Church, UCC.

COMMUNITY & CONVERSION

WORSHIP:

March 6, Ashes to Go

7-9 AM St. Luke's Plaza

Not able to go to church? Stop by for a brief imposition of Ashes.

March 6, Fat Ash Wednesday

5:30 - 7:30 PM, Fellowship Hall

An ALL Church Gathering.

Pancakes with celebration and music, followed by an Ash Wednesday worship service. Join us as we move from dancing to waiting.

March 10, 1st Sunday in Lent

Scripture: Matthew 18:15-35

Intergenerational Worship & 2nd Hour

March 17, 2nd Sunday in Lent

Scripture: Matthew 20:1-16

March 24, 3rd Sunday in Lent

Scripture: Matthew 22:1-14

March 31, 4th Sunday in Lent

Scripture: Matthew 25:1-30

One Great Hour of Sharing.

All Board's Sunday.

April 7, 5th Sunday in Lent

Scripture: Matthew 25:31-46

Communion Sunday. Super Sunday at Pearson's Falls following Worship.

OPPORTUNITIES:

Prayer Group

Mondays at 8 AM in the Parlor.

Join us as we pray for our church, community, and the world. We use scripture and a guide to help us focus our prayers. All are welcome.

Creation Care Initiative:

Faith Walk

March 9th, 9-11 AM. Wear appropriate shoes and clothing.

Join us as we connect our faith to creation and our call from God to show loving kindness to creation.

Meet first at the church for a time of sharing and grounding. Then we'll head out for a guided hike with prayer and fellowship in the beauty of creation.

Table Theology

March 20, 5:30 PM - 7:00 PM.

Rural Seed in Columbus

Join us for a conversation about God, theology, our faith, our lives, and current events.

Sunday Serenade:

Thomas Strauss

March 24th, 3 PM, Sanctuary

Join us for an organ concert with Thomas Strauss, an accomplished German organist who has toured throughout the United States and Europe. Free-will offering accepted.

Unafraid: Lenten Study

Sundays, March 10th - April 7th

9:00 am in the Fellowship Hall

Unafraid, by Adam Hamilton, offers an inspiring message full of practical solutions. Over the 5 sessions for all ages, children, youth, and adults will discuss the worries and fears that all of us experience. Breakfast will be provided. We hope you can join us for this meaningful multi-generational study.

HOLY WEEK SCHEDULE

April 14, Palm Sunday

An intergenerational festival of palms, remembering Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. Bring a coat to donate to our neighbors in need.

April 18, Maundy Thursday

6:00 PM - 7:30 PM, Fellowship Hall

A simple meal with communion in the Fellowship Hall, followed by a Maundy Thursday service in the Sanctuary.

April 19, Good Friday

12 PM, Tryon United Methodist Church

A Good Friday service hosted by the Thermal Belt Ministerial Association

April 20, Holy Saturday

10 AM - 12 PM, Fellowship Hall

An ALL Church Gathering.

Prepare for the risen Christ with special activities, an Easter egg hunt, and worship.

April 21, Easter Sunday

6:30 AM Sunrise Service

at TFAC Amphitheater

7:30 AM Breakfast

10:30 AM **ALLELUIA! Christ is Risen!**

Easter Sunday Worship in the Sanctuary

**This Lenten Devotional is based on resources developed by The Church of the Advent in Boston, MA, Living Lent.org, and House for All Sinners and Saints in Denver, CO.*

THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, UCC
An Open and Affirming Community



This booklet was produced by
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Join us for worship every Sunday at 10:30 AM.