



INSTRUCTIONS FOR PREPARING ASHES (in advance)

Friends in Christ, every year before the Christian Passover we celebrate our redemption through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Lent is a time to prepare for this celebration and to renew our life in the paschal mystery. We begin our journey to Easter with the sign of ashes. This ancient sign speaks of the frailty and uncertainty of human life, and marks the penitence of this community. We thus begin this holy season by acknowledging our need for repentance, and for the mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ. You are invited to observe a holy Lent by self-examination and penitence, by prayer and fasting, by works of love, and by reading and meditating on the Word of God.

Here's how you can prepare your heart and ashes to enable you to participate in the celebration of Ash Wednesday:

1. Spend time in personal reflection, prayer and penitence before God of your prior year, noting any iniquity of which you wish to be forgiven (see the list below as a starting place).
2. In prayerful repentance, write on a small piece of paper those sins for which you are acknowledging the need for forgiveness
3. In a safe container – preferably outside – burn these pieces of paper until they are reduced to ash.
4. Mix in a very tiny drop of olive oil.

In periods of silence and prayer, think through:

- **YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR LORD - what do you need forgiveness for?**
Pride, self-satisfaction, self-righteousness, hard-heartedness
Worship: more performance than true devotion
Controlled by fear and anxiety rather than by faith
- Holding back our money in fear of not having enough in the future
- Too little time spent one-on-one with my Lord
- Neglect of prayer, the Word, spiritual direction
- Idolatry—gaining meaning from things instead of from God
- Hypocrisy, inauthenticity
- Joyless labor in God's house instead of joyful work by God's side
- Allowing the world to change us instead of our changing the world
- Not giving God first consideration in all decisions
- Slowness to acknowledge and confess my sins...

YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH EACH OTHER – what do you need to consider?

- Lack of love for each other; little true connection between us
- Demanding total agreement; allowing others to be demonized for holding different opinions
- Judgmental spirit, lack of grace, rigidity, being overly demanding
- Talking more than listening
- Gossiping
- Complaining
- Not taking in what the other is saying and weighing it in Holy Spirit and instead reacting immediately against it
- Leaders not bringing prophetic challenges to people ...

YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH THOSE OUTSIDE THE CHURCH - what could change?

- Lack of sacrificial service to the poor and oppressed
- Separating ourselves from the world so that we don't see social problems that keep people oppressed and captive
- Weak engagement with those who set social policies
- Lack of passion for those who don't know Jesus; failure to build bridges of relationships through service
- Failure to call others to live in accord with God's sovereign rule as characterized by love and justice and shalom for all
- Lack of vision for the church in our city/region
- Weakness in intercessory prayer for others and our ministries
- Lack of equal respect for all cultures, and between each
- Consumer mentality, allowing our possessions to own us instead of investing in Kingdom work
- Laziness – "Let someone else do it."
- Failure to live as good stewards of the earth and all God has provided for us to share with one another
- Acceptance of and acquiescence to social sins that enslave and hurt others— pornography, slave labor practices, domestic violence, genocide, war, limiting access to food, housing, healthcare, etc.
- Refusing to blow the whistle on social and personal sin so that others may know God's love for all ...

Almighty God, You love us, but we have not loved You; You call, but we have not listened. We walk away from friends and family and neighbors in need, wrapped up in our own concerns. We have gone along with evil, with pride, quarrelling, and divisiveness. Holy God, help us to face up to ourselves, so that, as You move toward us in mercy, we may repent, turn to You, and receive mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.