

Our 2016 Lenten Challenge



Dear Friends in Christ,

During the season of Epiphany, we meditated on baptism — both Jesus' in the Jordan River and our own where He adopted us into His family and joined us to His death and resurrection. Our baptism is a significant part of our faith journey as we emerge from the baptismal waters to live new lives as children of God. Marked with the cross of Christ and sealed by the Spirit, each of us receives a new identity as a follower of Jesus — and His story becomes our story. We become life-long disciples of Jesus Christ.

And what does the disciple's life look like? The best way to describe it might be to look at the promises we made during the rite of Confirmation, our Affirmation of Baptism:

You have made public profession of your faith. Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in Holy Baptism: to live among God's faithful people, to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's Supper, to proclaim the Good News of God in Christ through word and deed, to serve all people following the example of Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?

Our baptism sets us on a lifelong journey that is marked by our relationship with the Triune God and with our brothers and sisters in Christ — as well as relationships within our families, our places of employment, our neighborhoods, our communities, and our world. So then, how do we live out this lifelong journey with God? What are the distinguishing behaviors, disciplines, and practices of lives lived in and through the crucified Christ?

During the upcoming season of Lent, we are challenging every family/every person in the congregation to a deeper relationship with our Lord and Savior through growth in five spiritual disciplines:

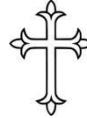
- Pray: The Lenten challenge is to deliberately set aside time to pray each day.
- Learn: The Lenten challenge is to be actively engaged in the Bible through daily Scripture reading and/or participating in a weekly Bible Study Group.
- Love: The Lenten challenge is to intentionally nurture relationships within and beyond the walls of Holy Cross
- Give: The Lenten challenge is to generously give of our first-fruits, working toward a tithe or beyond.
- Worship: The Lenten challenge is to attend worship every Sunday.

This five-point Lenten challenge goes from Ash Wednesday to Easter; I invite you to join me and the rest of the Holy Cross family on this Lenten journey.

Your servant in our crucified and risen Lord,



PRAY



“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.” 1 John 5:14

THE CHALLENGE: DELIBERATELY SET ASIDE TIME AND PRAY DAILY

Pray with A.C.T.S.

The acronym A.C.T.S is an easy way to remember key elements of prayer. It's simply prayer in four parts:

Adoration – *“Praise be to God!” -Psalms 68:35*

Tell God how much you appreciate Him. Express your love for Him. Praise His power and majesty. This is a great way to begin your prayer time. If you see a sun rise ... or flowers poke through the ground, praise God for the beauty of His creation. We'll never run out of praise if we just look around us. “How awesome are your deeds!” -Psalms 66:3

Confession – *“If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just, and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” -1 John 1:9*

Tell God where you have fallen short. Be specific. Thank God for the forgiveness you have in Christ, and ask for help and strength to turn away from future temptations.

Thanksgiving – *Always “glorify God with thanksgiving” -Psalms 69:30*

You have plenty of reasons to be thankful. Thank God for God's love, faithfulness, patience and a million other things. Express gratitude for what God's doing in your life. Thank Jesus for dying on the cross for you. Thank the Holy Spirit for indwelling you and never leaving you. Thank God for being your conscience, your counselor and that “still small voice.”

Supplication – *“Make your requests known to God.” -Philippians 4:6*

Tell God what you want, no matter how small it seems to you. Do you really think any of your requests are too big for God our Creator? Jot down people and situations that the Holy Spirit brings to mind. Use the prayer list in our bulletin. And, beginning on Ash Wednesday and then every Sunday in Lent, we'll provide you with an additional list of people, organizations, and situations to pray for, too. These lists will also be on our website (www.holycrosstowson.org), facebook page (www.facebook.com/hclctp), and twitter (@HLCTowson). That should give you lots of items for your intercessory prayers. Pray each one slowly and place them confidently in the Father's loving hands.

Now be still – *“Be still, and know that I am God!” -Psalm 46:10*

After you've finished your part of the prayer, be still and listen. Listen for God's assurance, guidance and love. Feel God's presence around and within you.



LEARN



***“For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”
Romans 15:4***

THE CHALLENGE: ACTIVELY ENGAGE THE BIBLE THROUGH DAILY READING AND/OR PARTICIPATING SUNDAY BIBLE STUDY

On Transfiguration Sunday, each family unit will receive a copy of this year’s devotions from the Lutheran Hour Ministries: *Love’s Greatest Sacrifice* to use as your Scriptural guide through Lent. As an added reminder and for your convenience, each reading will be posted on our website (www.holycrosstowson.org) and our facebook page (www.facebook.com/hclctp) around noon each day during Lent. Feel free to post comments or thoughts on each day's reading to spark conversation among others here at Holy Cross ... and/or to share the devotions with those on your “friend” list. We encourage you to make use of your *Portals of Prayer* as well. In addition, we invite you to join our Adult Bible Study of the Book of Acts held each Sunday at 11:30 am in the library. There’s room for YOU!



LOVE



“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” John 13:35

THE CHALLENGE: INTENTIONALLY NURTURE RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN AND BEYOND THE WALLS OF HOLY CROSS

Who are the people here at Holy Cross ... and in your life ... that need encouragement or a listening ear? Who are the people you have difficulty getting along with? Who has hurt you that you can now forgive with Christ’s strength? Whom have you hurt that with Christ’s humility you can now seek forgiveness from?

This challenge asks you to reach out to others with the love of Christ. And meeting this challenge can be as individual as you and the people in your life are. Send a “thinking of you” card to the folks on our homebound list ... or a note of encouragement to the teachers in our preschool. Buy a cup of coffee for a stranger ... or someone at work. Sit with someone who seems alone. Bake a cake or bring a flower to brighten someone’s day. Tip the regular server at your favorite restaurant a little more generously. If you’re handy, offer to fix something of someone else’s that’s broken for free. Visit the residents at a veterans’ or assisted-living facility. Volunteer at an animal shelter. Just jot down your own thoughts on what you can do for others during this 40 day period, do them — and be prepared to give a reason for the hope that is in you when somebody asks! (1 Peter 3:15)



GIVE



“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Matthew 6:21

THE CHALLENGE: GENEROUSLY GIVE OF OUR FIRST-FRUITS, WORKING TOWARD A TITHE OR BEYOND

Giving is a by-product of faith. It is an outward expression of priorities and heart. If God is truly first in our lives, we acknowledge that everything we have and are is His. It means we trust Him when He says that He supplies all our needs (not our luxuries, not our wants, but our needs). How, then, do Christians give?

- **THEY GIVE FIRST FRUITS.** We give God the first portion of our income, not what’s left over after we’ve paid the bills and set aside some for personal pleasures . By doing that, we constantly remember not only God’s ownership (Proverbs 3:9) of all that we have and are ... but also God’s provision for all that we need.
- **THEY GIVE REGULARLY.** The Bible tells us to give “on the first day of every week.” Even if we’re not at worship, the work of the congregation goes on (1 Corinthians 16:2 and 2 Corinthians 9:8).
- **THEY GIVE CHEERFULLY.** We give, not out of obligation, but out of joyous gratitude in response to what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit uses our giving to deepen our faith in Christ (2 Corinthians 9:7).
- **THEY GIVE QUIETLY.** Our purpose in giving is to thank God, not to be seen by others. (Matthew: 6:1).
- **THEY GIVE SACRIFICIALLY.** At times God asks us to give until we can truly feel the inconvenient pinch of giving. Giving sacrificially usually includes one of the following: a rearrangement of priorities, a change in lifestyle, or a forfeiture of something valued. When we give sacrificially, we give our best, just as our Father did (2 Corinthians 8: 2-3).
- **THEY GIVE PROPORTIONATELY.** We give in proportion to the income we receive, not a specific dollar amount (1 Corinthians 16:2), working toward a Biblical tithe (10%) — or beyond.

This Lent, we challenge you to look at your giving through new eyes. When you look at your monthly budget, where is your “heart”? What kind of change would happen in your life if you reprioritized and placed God at the top of your list? The worksheet on the following page has a chart that can help you see where you currently give in relation to your income and how you can grow a few steps during Lent to give with a sacrificial and thankful heart.

GIVING TO HOLY CROSS:

- **GENERAL FUND** (white envelope with logo - weekly) supports the week-to-week work of the congregation (salaries of church workers, worship necessities, etc.) as well as the regular upkeep of the building (repairs, custodial service, lawn care, utilities and insurance). Please give to this fund regularly, and, if possible, increase your giving during the Lenten challenge.

If able, please consider giving to any or all of these as well:

- **LAZARUS PROJECT** (white envelope - monthly) helps people in need both within and outside of congregation
- **BENEVOLENCES** (pink envelope - monthly) supports ministries outside of the congregation: Augsburg Lutheran Home, Lutheran World Relief, Lutheran Mission Society, Concordia Preparatory School and the Southeastern District, etc.
- **MINISTRY AND MAINTENANCE** (buff envelope – monthly) replenishes Lutheran Church Extension Fund to handle unforeseen expenses not covered in the budget; contributions also provide continuing financial support for Holy Cross' mission in the future.



WORSHIP



“I rejoiced with those who said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD.’ ” Psalm 122:1

THE CHALLENGE: FAITHFULLY ATTEND WORSHIP EVERY SUNDAY

Worship is a foundation of faith for everything we do. It centers our life of discipleship. And there is also a basic pattern for worship among Lutherans. We gather. We encounter God's *word*. We pray for and with each other. We share a meal at the Lord's Table. And then we are sent into the world to serve God by serving our neighbor. But we do not think about worship so much in terms of what we do. Worship is fundamentally about what God has done and is continuing to do — and our response to God's action. Worship is an encounter with God, who saves us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This Lenten season we invite you to attend worship in order to connect with both your Savior and with the members of your Holy Cross family. Covenant with God and those close to you to attend Sunday services, the special services in Lent — Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday — and maybe even Wednesday Lenten services.

For your convenience, our worship schedule for Lent is printed on the following page. It will also be available on our website. Please note the theme and times for mid-week and Holy Week services, as well as those for Sunday services.
