

Area faith communities get ready for Easter

Living into Lent

Feb. 2, 2008

BY LEE A. DEAN
Special to the Gazette

Christians across the world will observe the season of Lent this year in a variety of ways but with one purpose: to reflect on the meaning of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Six Kalamazoo-area groups reflect this unity in diversity as they prepare for the 2008 Lenten season, which begins next week with Ash Wednesday.

Roman Catholic Diocese of Kalamazoo

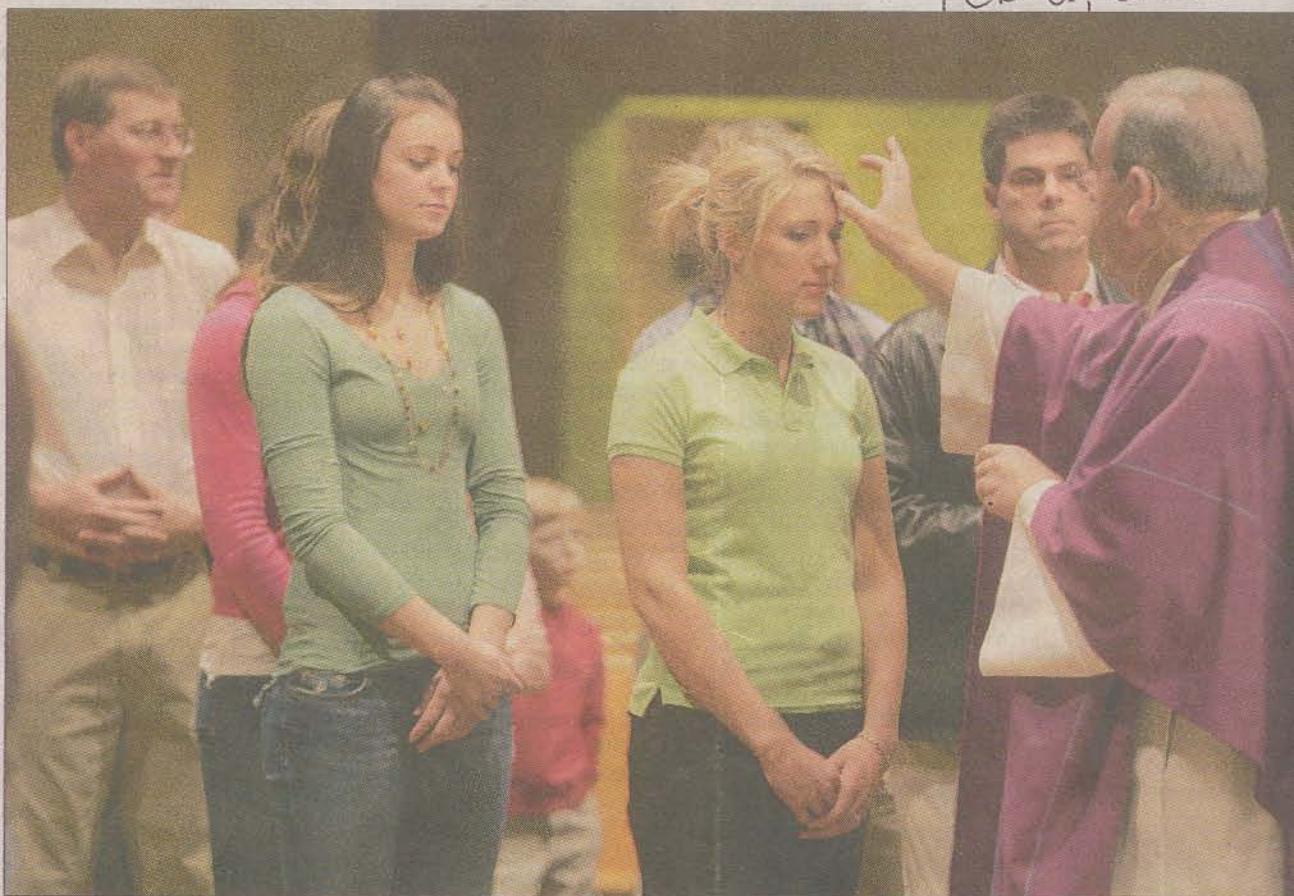
The Catholic Church instructs its members to observe Lent by focusing on prayer, fasting, and acts of service, said the Rev. Michael Hazard, vicar-general for the Diocese of Kalamazoo and pastor of St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Kalamazoo.

Kalamazoo Catholics are being encouraged to eat less and donate the money they would normally have spent on food to world-hunger efforts such as Operation Rice Bowl, a campaign of Catholic Relief Services. Local activities include the Rite of Election on Feb. 10 and 17 at St. Augustine Cathedral, to officially welcome people entering the Catholic Church; a Chrism Mass on March 18, at which Bishop James A. Murray will consecrate holy oils; Holy Thursday on March 20; and Good Friday the next day.

"Lent is a time for all of us in the diocese to renew our baptismal promises and draw closer in our relationship with God and his only son, Jesus Christ," Hazard said. "We recall Christ's suffering for us, but also, as Christians, we are hopeful because of our belief that our lives do not end here on earth."

Mt. Zion Baptist Church

At Mt. Zion Baptist Church, 120 Roberson St., Kalamazoo, the Rev. Addis Moore is making Lent part of a yearlong theme, "Responding to the Kingdom's Agenda." The object is to ask people to give up their personal agendas and adopt the



Laurel Mulder receives ashes on her forehead during an Ash Wednesday service on March 1, 2006, at St. Monica Catholic Church on West Kilgore Road in Kalamazoo. Ash Wednesday, celebrated this week, begins the 40 days of Lent.

MARK BUGNASKI / GAZETTE



The Rev. Michael Hazard



The Rev. Addis Moore



The Rev. Keith Platte



Sister Betsy Meagher



The Rev. Paul Nuechterlein



The Rev. Dave Johnson

agenda and lifestyle of Christ. Moore is encouraging members of Mt. Zion to examine the purpose for which Christ lived. "We use it as a time of commitment to practice being obedient to the reason he came," Moore said. "We really want to make his death worthwhile by doing what he said."

Some people at Mt. Zion will practice fasting and denying themselves for the season, but Moore is asking for a longer commitment.

"We make a ceremony out of Lent. We do well for 40 days and then revert to our old lifestyles. So we recognize a Lenten season where there's a

recommitment to live like Jesus wants us to live throughout the year. I don't want to make just those 40 days sacred. It's bigger than that," Moore said.

The River

The River, a church with three locations in Kalamazoo, is another congregation that is incorporating Lent into a year-long theme.

"Our annual focus this year is becoming all that Jesus has called us to become — or better yet, has made us to become," said the Rev. Keith Platte, pastor of The River's Burdick Street location and

small-group pastor for all sites.

"We don't handle the 40 days that strictly. We deal with it more holistically."

Through the Lenten season this year, pastors at The River will be teaching about prayer, who God is, who God made people to be and how God is calling people to serve others.

Where other churches may focus on fasting as part of Lent, The River will not, because it already dedicated the month of January to a "Daniel fast" of eating only fruit and vegetables.

To commemorate the Last Supper of Jesus, The River will

conduct a single Maundy Thursday service this year, of a number of services that gather people from all the sites to one place for worship.

The Sisters of St. Joseph

For the Sisters of St. Joseph Nazareth, the focus of Lenten year will be reflection and contemplation, said Sister Betsy Meagher, worship coordinator and outreach pastor for the community's Transformation Spirituality Center.

"Because we're part of a community (the Congregation of St. Joseph), we are celebrating the season with deeper reflection on who we are," she said. This reflection will be expressed through special prayer and music in a simple environment.

"Lent is really very special. It is a preparation of our hearts to celebrate even more fully the resurrection of Christ that we rely on to carry us in our lives," she said.

See AREA FAITH

children ages 4 to 10. Children 3 and younger will be served for free. Funds raised will benefit the church youth groups' summer mission trip to West Virginia.

PARCHMENT UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, 225 Glendale Blvd., Parchment — A slow-roast-chicken dinner will be served from 5 to 7 p.m. The cost is \$7, or \$3.50 for children 12 and younger. Proceeds will benefit the building fund, as the church continues to make repairs to its building after extensive damage by arson.

Area faith communities get ready for Easter

The community will host a series of six Wednesday Lenten vespers from 6:30 to 7:15 p.m. at Holy Family Chapel, 3427 Gull Road. The opening vespers will observe Ash Wednesday, which has great significance, Meagher said.

"Ashing ourselves is a sign of our humility before God, to

know our place," she said. "It's not a degrading sign, but a true sign of how we're really connected to God and to each other."

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church

The focus this year at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, 1747 W. Milham Ave., Portage, is to make Lenten worship more relevant to children and families. The church will host soup suppers at 6 p.m. on Wednesdays, followed by worship services designed to have a different look and feel. The sanctuary will be darker than usual, and a wooden cross with small sandboxes and lighted candles at each end will be laid in front of the communion table.

"This will be more visual and hands-on for the kids," the Rev. Paul Nuechterlein said. "We will have simple songs, and prayers and our focus will be on using object lessons focused toward kids."

In his teaching, Nuechterlein said, he will stress that the crucifixion of Jesus did not take place as a way to appease the wrath of God.

"Christ does take our sins away, but a grieving God sends Jesus to do that, not an angry God," he said.

Kalamazoo Community Church

As a church targeted primarily toward seekers, Kalamazoo Community Church has been deliberately nontraditional regarding Lent. But that is changing, according to the Rev. Dave Johnson.

"Our assumption was that those kinds of things turn people off who don't know God. That's not the assumption anymore. Sometimes these religious things have meaning and do draw people," he said.

"We don't want to do religious stuff just for the sake of doing religious stuff. Our real stress is to be relevant today in your relationship to God."

Last Christmas, KCC observed Advent with a Christmas devotional and plans to observe Palm Sunday and Easter this year by emphasizing how Jesus taught about what he called the Kingdom of God.

"So we say, 'prepare for the kingdom,' but not through any kind of extra liturgy. We look at what Jesus taught and how radically different that was, and that it makes a difference today in our lives if we let it," Johnson said.

Come and join us as we explore the twenty-six word parade of hope.

3:16

THE NUMBERS OF HOPE



Sundays • 9:30am

"The Numbers of Hope"

February 10.....John 3:16

February 17.....He Loved

February 24.....He Gave

March 2.....We Believe

March 9.....We Live

Easter Sunday • March 23

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