

**ASH WEDNESDAY
HOUSEHOLD KIT**



ASH WEDNESDAY

Hello, Pastor!

I'm a Pastor on staff at Brookhaven Wesleyan (Marion, IN), and I love, love, love, to write, especially about Advent and Lent. Most of what I write is posted at <https://resources.wesleyan.org/?s=emily+hines>.

As part of a church staff, I know things get busy and your resources (including time) are limited, so I'm delighted to share this with you. I'd love your feedback, too! This is the first time we have hosted Ash Wednesday this way, and I'm a perpetual student and life-long learner. Help me, help you!

Here's how we are using this at our church:

- Offering these to households and small groups for use at their own time on Wednesday.
- Advertising that these **Ash Wednesday Kits** are available for pick up. Make sure to say when and where. We will deliver some on a limited basis, per request.
- Including in the Ash Wednesday Kit:
 - **A small baggie with a small amount of palm ash** (found on Amazon and some Christian book stores -- I recommend buying ahead so you have plenty. You can also burn ashes from last year's Palm Sunday. I have done this in our completely dry stainless steel kitchen sink -- be careful!)
 - Amount of Ash = ½-1 teaspoon -- it does not take much!
 - **A slightly larger envelope to hold the baggie.** The papers will either be folded and inside this envelope, too, or paper clipped to the outside.
 - **A printout** of the following four pages (not this page). If you have larger households or small groups, consider including 2 copies of the responsive reading pages. We will be printing double-sided to save on paper being attached to or stuffed inside of the small envelopes.

I'd love to hear how this goes! Thank you & may the Lord bless you and your Church!

Rev. Emily Hines

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ASH WEDNESDAY

We Journey Together

Welcome to Ash Wednesday - the start of Lent. As we journey together today, gather all those who are with you - either your household, your small group, your friends, or just yourself. If you are doing this alone, grab a mirror, and occasionally look into the mirror at your reflection as you read. If you are reading with at least one other person, read through this together, out loud, and participate with one another. Be courageous to share, to lean into this time of reflection, and to welcome and discuss the emotions and feelings brought to the surface. Be gracious with one another. Spend some time at the end talking and reflecting. Pray for and with one another.

Everything written on these pages is designed to be part of the reading. You may take turns reading, or have a designated reader. For the responsive reading time, share the pages so that everyone can see. Supplies needed are listed below.

Introduction: What is Ash Wednesday?

To talk about Ash Wednesday, we have to also talk about Lent and fasting. Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent - a season in the Church leading up to Easter. Lent lasts 40 days - but is counted as Monday-Saturday, with Sundays as a "rest day." Lent is traditionally a time of introspection, repentance, fasting from food, but many choose to fast from a food group instead of a complete fast, or choose to fast something else entirely. However, fasting isn't about giving up something bad for us, like smoking, because a fast is meant to be broken and the fasted item(s) are meant to be participated in and enjoyed again. If we choose to fast, we are encouraged to choose a *good* thing that we will miss for this time. And when we are missing this thing, turn our hearts and minds towards God in prayer. Fasting points out our utter need for God.

On Ash Wednesday, we start our season of fasting and introspection. Often on Ash Wednesday, we spend some time in prayer, in repentance, and in asking forgiveness and reconciling with God and one another. A major symbol of this day is the "imposition of ashes" - placing an ash mixed with oil mark, often in the shape of a cross, on our hands or foreheads. We take time to wrestle with the concept of our own mortality, and of the fact that we all desperately need the grace of God.

ASH WEDNESDAY +

Supplies Needed:

- **Container** (small glass bowl or single-use plastic cup)
- **Bag of ashes**
- **Pencil** (throw away afterwards) or metal spoon (wash well afterwards)
- **Olive oil** or melted and cooled coconut Oil
 - Only use oil. Do NOT use water.
 - Ash + Water = Lye, and lye burns skin.
- **½ teaspoon measuring spoon** (not pictured)
- **Ash Wednesday Packet** (what you are reading, not pictured)
- optional: **Baby wipes** or damp paper towel for clean-up



Preparing the Ashes

You can do this step ahead of time, or do it with those gathered with you.

- Empty the bag of ashes into the container. Don't let the small amount fool you - it will be enough.
- Add oil, ½ teaspoon at a time.
 - If you don't have a ½ teaspoon measure, use the smallest spoon in your drawer, and gently add a quarter or half a spoonful of oil at a time.
- Gently stir the oil and ashes, with the eraser end of the pencil or the spoon, after adding each ½ teaspoon of oil.
- Add additional oil if necessary. A clumpy texture needs a little more oil, but only add ½ teaspoon at a time. The goal consistency and texture is similar to an almost-melted milkshake.
- Set ashes aside, and throw away baggie and pencil, and wash the spoon(s). Be careful - ashes and oil can cause a mess if spilled on a non-wipeable surface or on clothing.

ASH WEDNESDAY

Responsive Reading

Leader: The grace of the Lord be with you!

Response: And also with you.

Leader: We have gathered today to truthfully examine our inner souls and outer lives. We have come to declare our need for God.

Response: Lord, we pause in your presence. We stand in awe of you.

Leader: God has drawn and invited us here, to this place, to have an honest conversation. We confess that our lives, our attitudes, and our actions have not always pleased God.

Response: Christ have mercy.

Leader: We come in repentance – crying out to God for our need for salvation, for hope, for freedom, and for transformation.

Response: God, be at work in our lives, in our hearts, in our church, in our community, in our country, and in our world.

Leader: We confess our sins personally, but also corporately. Let us confess our sins to the Lord: of times of personal failings and selfishness,

Response: Lord, we confess.

Leader: Of systemic injustice, unfair judgments, and negligence to act,

Response: Lord, we confess.

Leader: Of greed, rage, pride, hatred, and bitterness,

Response: Lord, we confess.

Leader: Of succumbing to temptation and choosing to do wrong to self, loved ones, neighbors, strangers, and God,

Response: Lord, we confess.

Leader: We are imperfect, fallen, broken, and in need of the grace of God.

Response: Christ have mercy.

Leader: Jesus, we are here, offering ourselves to you, in humble surrender and submission.

Response: Heal us, Lord. Christ have mercy.

Leader: Let us reflect for a moment in silent prayer.

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ASH WEDNESDAY

Leader: Friends, we are not bound by our sin and stuck in what has happen. By the power of Christ's Resurrected Name and his atoning blood on the cross, we are forgiven!!

Response: In Christ, we are forgiven!!

Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord for the forgiveness of sins!

Response: It is good and right to praise and thank God!

Leader: Yes! We praise and thank the Lord our God for forgiveness in Christ. And yet, we know we do not live in a perfect world. Jesus told us, "In this world you will have trouble."

Response: And Jesus also said, "Take heart! I have overcome the world!" (John 16:33)

Leader: We mark heads or hands today with ash and oil as a reminder of our humanness.

Response: The mark of the cross is the mark of Christians.

Leader: The ash of palms – a connection back to last year's Palm Sunday – reminds us of our own mortality - that we are dust, and to dust we will return. (Genesis 3:19).

Response: The oil, a balm used for healing, reminds us that Christ heals our souls.

Leader: Lord, we need you.

Response: Christ, we need you.

Leader: Before we end this time together, we are invited to partake in a Christian ritual called the "imposition of ashes," the traditional occurrence on Ash Wednesday, a day that starts the 40-day season called Lent, leading up to Easter Sunday. Lent is a season for inward examination of self, of repentance of sin, and of fasting and abstinence from good things, for the sake of pursuing better things – of pursuing God. We have before us a bowl of ashes mixed with oil. We will ____ (*each take turns putting the mark of a cross on one another OR have one person put the mark of a cross on everyone else*).

*Take your time marking the cross on each person's forehead or hand. Dip one finger into the bowl of oil mixed with ashes, to get just a little bit on your fingertip. Make a cross symbol on the person's forehead or back of their hand. As you do so, say, "**Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return.**" If you are doing this alone, look at yourself in the mirror as you say these words out loud.*

Leader: When we are finished with the ashes, we can spend some time talking and reflecting, then, we will pray together.

Leader: Go in the blessing of the Lord. Amen!