



THE VOICE

FOR THE FULLER LIFE OF OUR ASCENSION FAMILY



LENT 2008 COME TO THE WATER

The key to understanding the meaning of Lent is simply BAPTISM. Preparation for baptism of the catechumens and renewing our own baptismal commitment lie at the

heart of the season of Lent. They prepare us to celebrate the Pascal Mystery by reminding us of our baptismal call and our need for repentance and conversion to live our lives more fully. And so our theme for Lent this year is "Come to the Water." As Ascension parish we are a community of the baptized living our baptismal call by striving to be a praying, caring, teaching, serving sign of God's presence to each other and to all we meet in our life's journey. All of our Lenten prayers and practices prepare us to COME TO THE WATER to repent, renew, refresh and recommit ourselves to the Risen Lord at Easter. Ascension provides many opportunities to respond more deeply to the redemptive love of Jesus through prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

Ash Wednesday is February 6. Mass times are at 9:00 a.m., noon, and 7:00 p.m. It is a day of fasting and abstinence. No meat and less food that day reminds our subconscious selves that our real joy comes not from stuff, but from more faith and more love.

"**Little Black Books**" will be available at all the church entrances. (They will no longer be mailed to each household). This year the "Little Black Book"

challenges us to spend six minutes a day with God reflecting on the **Passion according to John**. This is an ancient way of praying with the Scriptures—called *Lectio Divina*. God speaks to us "live" in the sacred word. We listen quietly allowing God's love to sink deep into our souls. Children in Ascension School and in our Religious Education program will receive a "Little Purple Book" to aid them on their Lenten journey. Additional children's booklets will be at the church entrances. The short scripture reading in either book could also be used as part of the evening meal prayer.

Evening Prayer will be prayed on Wednesday evenings in church on February 13, 20, 27, and on March 5. The Marianist Novitiate Community will again lead this prayer.

Stations of the Cross will be prayed each Friday evening of Lent in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation will be held in a communal setting on Saturday, February 23, at 3:00 p.m. and on Wednesday, March 12, at 7:00 p.m. The prayers and practices of Lent help us to call to mind our sins, assure us of God's forgiveness and encourage us to experience this forgiveness sacramentally. As we become more aware of the ways we have failed to live as we should, we also realize more intensely God's love for us.

Operation Rice Bowl, a program of Catholic Relief Services, is again our parish almsgiving project. The Rice Bowl collection represents our individual and collective efforts of almsgiving by which we use the money we save from our fasting for the world's hungry. Envelopes and Rice Bowl boxes for your alms will be at the church doors during Lent. They will also be distributed to children in our school and RE program. Receptacles to receive your alms will be at the church doors throughout Lent. Rice bowl returns will be presented

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in the Offertory procession of the Holy Thursday Mass. The Rice Bowl boxes can be used by every member of the family as we each remember the hungry of our own neighborhood, city and the world. 75% of the Operation Rice Bowl collection goes directly to Catholic Relief Services to help fund CRS's development projects overseas and activities in the USA. 25% stays in our own Archdiocese to support local hunger and poverty alleviation programs.

To enhance our Sunday participation, talk with your family and decide how you will change your routines as you journey together through Lent. Read and reflect on the readings for Sunday, or those in the black or purple books. Set up a symbol of the Lenten season in your home ...an open Bible with a purple ribbon, a small bowl of rice next to Rice Bowl box, a lighted candle during meal prayers, drape your crucifix with a purple ribbon... Let this symbol remind you each day of our journey as a baptized community to the Easter water.

LENTEN REGULATIONS FOR FAST AND ABSTINENCE

Fasting: Persons ages 18-59 fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, limiting themselves to one full meal and no more than two smaller meals with no snacking between meals.

Abstinence: Catholics age 14 and older abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday and all Fridays of Lent.

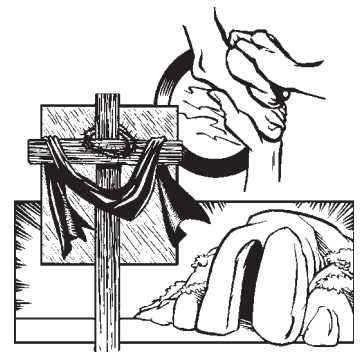
With regard to the obligatory days mentioned above, the obligation to do penance is a serious one as is the obligation to observe, as a whole or substantially, the penitential days specified by the Church. Failure to observe individual days is not considered serious. Rather it is the failure to observe a substantial number of these days. Observing these day should be seen as a minimal response to the Lord's call to penance and conversion, a minimal response to return love for love. We are not limited to these directives. Consider other things that you could refrain from, fast from, on this journey to the renewal at Easter of our baptismal promises. Sacrifice is part of our Lenten journey, as well.

RCIA RITES

During Lent the Ascension parish family prays in a special way with and for our Elect (RCIA Catechumens). As Ascensionites move to Easter to return to the font and experience the renewal of baptism, our Elect discover what it means to come to the water for the first time. All repent of sin; all find or rediscover the core of their relationship with Christ. Through the Rite of Sending at the 5:00 p.m. Mass on Saturday, February 9, the parish sends the catechumens to the Rite of Election and the candidates to the Rite of the Call to Continuing Conversion. Parishes from all the northern parishes of the Archdiocese come together to celebrate these two rites in the environment of the larger church community the next day. The Scrutinies, celebrated with the Elect on the third, fourth and fifth Sundays of Lent are a powerful reminder of this truth. Pictures of the Elect and candidates will be in the narthex during Lent as a reminder to pray for them. This is another way of fulfilling the responsibility of the whole parish in the initiation of new members. This year four adults will be baptized at the Easter Vigil. Three adults and one youth who were already baptized in another Christian tradition will be received into full communion with the Catholic Church. All eight of them will also receive the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist.

SACRED TRIDUUM

Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper (7:00 p.m.), **Good Friday** Services (1:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.) and **Easter Vigil** (8:30 p.m.) are high points of our church year.



EASTER VIGIL

The core of our celebration of the Easter Vigil is the baptism of the Elect. Four Elect will be baptized at Ascension this year. As we share their joy on this holy night, we are called to renew our own baptismal promises, to come to the water to renew ourselves in the baptism water and to live in the joy of life in the Risen Christ. Lent comes to fulfillment around the waters of the font at Easter. This year the Easter Vigil will be celebrated at 8:30 p.m. on March 22. Mark your calendars now.



LENTEN CALENDAR

Wed., Feb. 6	Ash Wednesday Mass Times 9:00 am, Noon, 7:00 pm
Fri., Feb. 8	7:00 pm Stations of the Cross
Sat., Feb. 9	5:00 pm RCIA Rite of Sending
Wed., Feb. 13	7:00 pm Evening Prayer
Fri., Feb. 15	7:00 pm Stations of the Cross
Wed., Feb. 20	7:00 pm Evening Prayer
Fri., Feb. 22	7:00 pm Stations of the Cross
Sat., Feb. 23	3:00 pm Reconciliation Service
Wed., Feb. 27	7:00 pm Evening Prayer
Fri., Feb. 29	7:00 pm Stations of the Cross
Wed., Mar. 5	7:00 pm Evening Prayer
Fri., Mar. 7	7:00 pm Stations of the Cross
Wed., Mar. 12	7:00 pm Reconciliation Service
Fri., Mar. 14	7:00 pm Stations of the Cross
Sun., Mar. 16	Palm Sunday Mass Times Sat 5:00 pm, Sun 7:00, 8:30 , 10:30 am & 12:15 pm
Thurs., Mar. 20	7:00 pm Mass of Lord's Supper
Fri., Mar. 21	1:00 & 7:00 pm Good Friday Services
Sat., Mar. 22	8:30 pm Easter Vigil
Sun., Mar. 23	Easter Sunday Mass Times 7:00, 8:30 , 10:30 am & 12:15 pm

FR. WITZMAN SCHOLARSHIP OFFERED BY ASCENSION PARISH

The Fr. Witzman Scholarship is available to any student from Ascension Parish planning to attend a Grade 9-12 Catholic High School next school year. Three (3) scholarships will be awarded for \$600 apiece. Application materials may be obtained by calling or stopping in the Parish, Religious Ed or School Offices. The application deadline is Monday, March 3.

The Fr. Witzman Scholarship was founded in 1986 with the estate of founding Pastor Arnold Witzman. In addition to the winners of the high school scholarships numerous Ascension families have received elementary school and religious education tuition assistance for the 2007-08 school year through the Witzman Fund.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION NEWS

The anticipation builds as many of our students continue their preparation for sacraments. We have one child in the RCIA process who is preparing to receive the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil and will celebrate the Rite of Election with Archbishop Pilarczyk at Immaculate Conception Church on the First Sunday of Lent.

First Reconciliation will be celebrated on February 9. Twenty-nine children have been prepared for the sacrament by their parents. The children attended a Zacchaeus Day retreat. During the reconciliation service, they will light candles which they decorated at home.

Parents of children preparing for First Communion this year will meet on February 11 to receive the books and other materials that will be used to prepare the children at home for First Communion. The children will celebrate their First Communion with their families at weekend Masses during the Easter season.

Confirmation candidates are continuing their preparation by meeting with their sponsors and by doing acts of Christian service.

Early Childhood classes will celebrate Love Sunday in the School Cafeteria on February 10; their parents will join them after Mass to receive tokens of affection and to share refreshments.

Catechists are busy making special plans for their classes to observe Lent. "Little purple books" and rice bowl materials will be sent home in the Family Envelopes. Grades 2-5 will have a communal penance service during class time on March 3. Grades 6-8 will participate in the parish reconciliation service on February 23.

Congratulations to the "**Peacemakers of the Month**" for November: Marisol Perez (grade 1) and Jenna LaMontagne (grade 5); for December: Aaron Weiser (grade 1) and Alexis Davis (grade 3).

Just a reminder – for those of you who have been helping to raise funds for the RE program through the Meijer Community Awards program – Meijer has implemented some changes. We now receive 1% of purchases made with a Meijer Credit Card and .5% of purchases made with cash or debit card using the Meijer One Card. Either way – everyone is being asked to re-enroll at www.meijer.com/mcr/rewards.jsp. Our number for Ascension Religious Education is **571556**. Thank you for your continued support!

ANSWER THE CALL 2008

That is the title of the Annual Catholic Men's Conference, which will be held at Music Hall in Cincinnati, Ohio, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., on **Saturday, March 1, 2008**.

This is the fourteenth year in a row that the conference has been held in Cincinnati, and it will bring together men from across the area who are Seeking God's Face for a prayerful, spirit-filled, life changing day. We will hear a number of inspirational speakers who will talk about their faith and how we men can grow spiritually and enrich our relationships in family, marriage, parish and the workplace. There will also be time for fellowship, singing, confessions and Mass.

The outstanding line-up of speakers includes:

Brian Kelly: Winning football is not just what Coach Brian Kelly is all about. Kelly, the University of Cincinnati's head football coach, has established a reputation for building winning teams, having compiled a 147-54-2 record in 17 seasons. His special mission has him emphasizing a moral dimension that develops athletes beyond their football skills. A charismatic individual with an engaging personality, he is as comfortable involving himself in his community as he is giving orders on the sideline.

Tarek Saab is a 28 year old CEO, author and speaker. He is the CEO of Lionheart Apparel, the fastest growing Christian clothier. Tarek wrote *Gut Check* about young men's issues, to be available at the conference. He was a finalist on the television program, *The Apprentice*. Covering topics from ethics to pornography, Tarek is a big hit speaking to Catholic youth audiences and men's groups. He is very active in the Pro-Life movement and a member of Mensa.

Brother Loughlan Sofield, S.T., is a Missionary Servant of the Most Holy Trinity, and an accomplished speaker, author and professor. He is Senior Editor of *Human Development* magazine, been recognized for his work on the laity, and is co-author of numerous books. Brother Sofield has served on the faculty or lectured at many universities around the world, most recently in the area of clergy education. Brother Sofield has consulted with over 200 dioceses on five continents.

Fr. Phillip Chavez is a priest of the Society of Our Lady of the Holy Trinity. Holding graduate degrees in Theology, Philosophy, and Marriage & Family Studies, Fr. Chavez culminated his studies with a

doctorate in Rome. Basing his work on sound theological and human principles, he calls men to mentor young men, honor their commitments, and defend their family. Fr. Chavez has been involved in pro-life activities and has studied, written and consulted extensively about male spirituality.

The program will conclude around 4:00 p.m. following a Mass concelebrated by over 60 local Bishops and Priests. Ticket price is only \$40, including lunch. For more information please contact Ascension's Parish Conference Leader, Mike Wager, at 435-5974 or mwager@aol.com for more information. Please submit your ticket order forms by Sunday February 3, 2008 to be included in the block seating with Ascension. Plan to join men from our Parish and thousands of other Catholic men from all over the area to support one another and affirm their spiritual visions of Marriage, Families and Church.

NEW PASTORAL PLAN

It seems like just yesterday that Sr. Florence was leaving Ascension to begin her new role as president of the Precious Blood Sisters. Because Ascension was in the middle of a pastoral plan, we decided not to replace her until we had a clearer understanding of the job description for the new position.

After several months, we decided that we needed a person to oversee the implementation of the new pastoral plan. This new plan stresses the need for adult faith formation. It also focuses on forming the people in the parish to understand their baptismal call to discipleship both within and outside the parish.

In order to move the plan forward, **Jim Murray** has been promoted to the position of **Director of Ministry and Catechesis**. It will be his responsibility to develop a faith formation for the parish that covers everyone from cradle to grave. In addition, the new plan brings with it a new commission structure. Jim will also be working on a great deal of communication between these commissions and with the parish.

Since Jim Murray will be supervising the new youth minister position, he has begun a search and interviews should begin in February.

We will miss Jim's excellent service in the area of youth ministry, but we take comfort in the knowledge that he will be guiding the new youth minister.

Please pray for our staff during this period of transition.

YOUTH MINISTRY NEWS

NCYC HIGHLIGHTS

Parish youth that attended the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) in Columbus November 8-11, 2007 have had a couple of months to let the experience soak in. This biennial conference for high school age youth has drawn 20,000-25,000 teens in recent years. This was Ascension's largest group participating in NCYC with 34 youth and 6 chaperones attending. These youth were asked to share their highlights with Ascension parishioners.

When asked about the impact the speakers made on them, Meagan Niezgodski said, "I listened as they told us to look at our relationship with Christ and to identify the one thing that separates us from him and from having a deeper relationship with him. I decided to eliminate that thing and I have struggled with that thing, prayed to God for help in keeping to my choice, and have had to hold myself back so I didn't mess up. NCYC helped me to make a commitment that I've thought about making but had never taken the step."

Musician, speaker, and NCYC emcee Steve Angrisano was a favorite for many teens. Katie Ollier related that, "Steve reminded us that although it is easy to praise God in a "safe place" with other Catholics like us, it is much more challenging to go back to the "real world" and living out His Word back home. That is our job as disciples- to follow Jesus' path wherever we go." Emily Wilhelm agreed that Steve was her favorite speaker too. She told, "He was so comfortable talking to teenagers and his music was just so powerful to listen to. He wasn't afraid to just keep talking when he had a point he wanted us to understand. He has so many experiences to share and I learned a lot about what kind of person I want to be in the world."

For others, the experience of celebrating the Eucharist with each other was the highlight. Zach Niezgodski said, "Celebrating Mass, sharing in the Eucharist, and meeting 20,000 other young people gave me hope that my generation is not totally lost. But may even be growing stronger in Christ." When asked what the most powerful thing about NCYC was, Joel Wager shared, "It was being in a room with 20,000 other teenagers who believe in exactly the same thing I do. Sometimes it feels like you're the odd one out because you're Catholic, but to share in the Eucharist with 20,000 other youth and to know that you're not the only one was an incredible experience. It was a moment when I could really feel His presence and I will never forget it." Words like 'awesome' and 'cool' were common when teens

talked about the Mass. Caroline Heider noted that, "Celebrating Mass with 20,000 other youth was... AWESOME! Words cannot describe what that truly feels like. Taking in the Body of Christ while 20,000 other teens do the same is a life-changing experience. Worshipping, singing, praising and listening to the message of God in that setting was one of the best moments of my life because I felt truly happy and at totally at peace with the world. It moved me in a way I never thought possible". Jennifer Ackley described the Mass as, "really cool because it showed that over 20,000 teens wanted to receive Christ's body and blood and renew their faith."

The long, full schedule and short sleep time didn't get in the way of Jennifer's experience. Jennifer shared, "This was powerful to me because it showed that although we lost our sleeping time we usually got on the weekend, we were willing to lose it for the price of deepening our Catholic roots and joining others to show how we truly care that we are God loving teenagers. The workshops and especially the Eucharistic adoration helped me to grow in my relationship with God because it was so powerful to just be comfortable enough to kneel on a hard concrete ground, with strangers and pray." Chris Wager shared that he had drifted away from God, but that NCYC has changed that. He knows he has a place in the Church. "Twenty thousand teenagers sang and prayed in a space about the size of the UD Arena," Chris says, "and the Spirit was with us, its powerful presence permeating the stadium and the Convention Center. The young Church is alive and well. We look forward to take our place beside you, our parents and our friends and our elders, to uphold and strengthen the Church, to do God's will everywhere." Parish youth not only met teens from across the nation at NCYC, one joined our group from Michigan. Jim Murray's niece, Brittany Banaszak said, "The most powerful thing about NCYC was me being able to see my faith more clearly because before I didn't really understand it as much. NCYC opened my eyes in a fun way instead of just sitting and listening to a lecture. We did activities that were fun and educational at the same time." Brittany went onto say, "Thank you to the Church of the Ascension for letting me come from Bay City, Michigan, to join your youth group for the trip."

The next NCYC will be held in Kansas City in 2009. When the '07 participants were asked about why teens should attend the next NCYC, Chris Wager summed it up well saying, "I wish I appreciated it more now, because that was my first and last time attending the National Catholic Youth Conference. Teens: it is so worth it. Go to Kansas City in 2009. Parents: make your kid(s) go." So mark your calendars for November 19-21, 2009. Kansas City here we come!

WARM WELCOME TO FR. MAXIMO MESIA ALARCON, CPPS

The people of Nuestra Senor de la Luz have a new pastor as of April, 2007. This is his first assignment as a pastor. The following statement is his introduction to the people of Ascension:

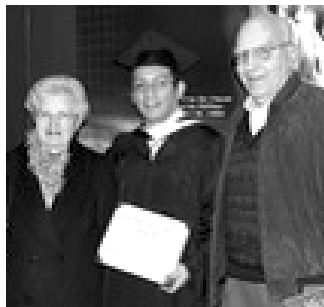
"I am Father Máximo Mesía Alarcón, Missionary of the Precious Blood. I started in the community of the missionaries seventeen years ago, and it has been seven years since I was ordained a priest. I am originally from the central mountain range in Peru, from a very small town called Mito. My town is located in a broad valley with a very temperate climate, very beautiful, that I hope you can get to know some day."

Father Chris sent a letter of greeting to Father Maximo as the new pastor inviting him to continue the twinning relationship. Father Maximo responded stating that he is eager to keep NSL involved in the twinning relationship with the parishioners of Ascension. He states that *"The relationship that our parishes have woven together has definitely been made stronger with the diverse shades and colors that every one contributes to build this beautiful tapestry that we have become. I am very happy because here we can appreciate the richness of our universal Church, without borders, without exclusion, being one."*

His ideas for continuing the twinning activities includes an invitation for the people of Ascension to come *"to these beautiful lands"* in Peru and visit the people of NSL. *"As pastor of this parish, I want to continue this relationship between our parishes. It is a*

richness to share.... It occurs to me that maybe we could write a monthly letter, in which we could inform (you) of the activities that we are accomplishing, committing to praying for their success. Also, we could send pictures to get to know the community, etc. For us, it would be a joy that you all could visit, and meet the diverse groups of the parish."

Johnson was able to visit the beautiful land of his home for the holidays. He gave himself this gift after "walking" for graduation in December and celebrating at a dinner with friends, which included twinning committee members.



**Bill & Claire Bell
congratulate Johnson**

The next day he flew home to Lima for the holidays. He was able to visit with family, relax a bit and share the joy of his accomplishment. Now he is back at work at U.D. and still a part of the Ascension and NSL Twinning Committees.

The Twinning Committee is always open to new members. The next meeting is Thursday, February 21 from 5:30 to 7:00 p.m. in the parish office building. Anyone who has an interest in relationships within the universal Church is invited to attend a meeting to see what the committee does on a monthly basis.

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