



MEDIA RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CATHOLIC BISHOP OFFERS OPTIONS FOR ASH WEDNESDAY *Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the holy season of Lent, is February 17*

The Roman Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Sault Ste. Marie, Thomas Dowd, is inviting Catholics across Northern Ontario to celebrate Ash Wednesday this year, regardless if churches are permitted to reopen in time.

“We do not want to let the COVID-19 pandemic to get in the way of this important day” said Bishop Dowd, “Ash Wednesday remains a very popular day of devotion among Catholics.”

Ash Wednesday takes place February 17 and is the beginning of the Christian period of Lent which marks 40 days of prayer, fasting and charitable works leading to the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday. The ashes, usually marked by tracing a cross on the forehead, are meant to publicly signify the spiritual journey Christians begin together on this day.

With churches hoping to reopen next week in time for this celebration, there are still capacity restrictions in place and parishioners who are hesitant to return right away. “I want to make sure everyone has the chance to participate in this day” said Bishop Dowd, “so, our churches will provide the option to celebrate Ash Wednesday at home.”

After the ashes are blessed by a priest at each Catholic parish on Ash Wednesday, parishioners are welcome to take home a small container of the blessed ashes along with a short prayer service to pray together with their family or those in their household. The short prayer service includes short readings from the Bible, and instructions on how

to distribute the ashes.

“Making sure everyone is included and encouraging our families to pray together on this holy day is quite significant” explained Bishop Dowd, “it’s an opportunity for families to begin Lent together, to share with one another the importance of this time of year.”

While the pandemic has presented difficulties and challenges for many people, Bishop Dowd expresses the hope that is found in the season of Lent: “When we set aside time to grow in faith, especially in the time we are in, we begin to see God’s boundless love for each one of us, despite the personal challenges we are facing.”

“Ash Wednesday for our family is the day where we know we are starting Lent, and we’re trying to take on a new rhythm of prayer, a new rhythm of life, really” said Jessica Fournier, a parishioner of Holy Name of Jesus Church in North Bay, “so to be able to have this option to still celebrate Ash Wednesday even though not everyone can be at church will be special for us.”

The preparation and distribution of the ashes and prayer service will follow public health regulations.

“There may be the case where someone can’t get to their church on Ash Wednesday, or maybe even learns of this a little late,” Bishop Dowd adds, “so I am giving permission to celebrate the distribution of ashes at any time until the end of February, so as many people can participate as possible.”

Catholics are encouraged to check with their nearest Catholic church to see available times to attend Mass or to pick up the blessed ashes and prayer service on Ash Wednesday. For more information, to see a copy of the prayer service, or to watch a tutorial video, visit: www.dioceseofsaultstemarie.org

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Additional Information for Media:

Why options for Ash Wednesday?

Bishop Dowd is encouraging as many as possible to participate, rather than miss the celebration of Ash Wednesday. This allows for those not prepared to return to church and option to pray together with their families at home, and still begin the season of Lent in the proper way.

How will families receive the blessed ashes?

People are invited to pick up a printed prayer service brochure along with a small sample of blessed ashes from their nearest Catholic church. They are invited to check available times for pick up from their nearest church.

What is Ash Wednesday?

Ash Wednesday is a holy day that begins the 40-day period of Lent. Catholics usually attend a Mass or prayer service to receive the blessed ashes on their foreheads. Ashes are made from burnt palms used at the previous year's Palm Sunday celebrations. Ashes are used to remind Christians that they now begin a period of self-reflection and penance, and are encouraged to revitalize their spiritual devotion to God.

What is Lent?

Lent is a holy season of 40 days leading up to the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday. The 40 day period marks the 40 days that Jesus spent in the desert. Christians typically use this period to renew spiritual practices they have fallen out of practice with, and fast or refrain from habits that have prevented them from focusing on their spiritual life. Lent begins February 17 on Ash Wednesday, and ends on Easter Sunday (April 4).

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See attached photos available for use.



Caption:
Chrissy Sullivan places ashes on her son Isaiah, 9, using
the at-home prayer service for Ash Wednesday.

