



Ash Wednesday 2021

Because infection and death rates from the novel Coronavirus continue to increase, in-person gatherings for worship on Ash Wednesday 2021 will not be possible. This includes Ashes to Go activities, since one cannot impose ashes in a public setting while maintaining six feet of distance.

Worshippers may receive the ashes, however, in their own household settings during a ZOOM, live-streamed or recorded church service. Any baptized persons, including older children and teens, may place the ashes on the foreheads of others in their households, or on their own foreheads. One does not have to be ordained or licensed to impose ashes on others or on themselves.

Guidelines

At home before the service

Gather ashes and place them in a small dish or bowl. Ashes may be from your own fireplace or fire pit, or from the burning of leaves. If you have palm branches or palm crosses from previous years, these are particularly appropriate to burn. Very little ash is needed. Some choose to mix a drop of oil with the ashes, but this is not necessary.

Determine which household member will place the ashes on the foreheads of others.

Have a Book of Common Prayer or a service bulletin available to ensure that the person imposing ashes will say the appropriate words.

At home during the service

Tune in to the ZOOM, live-streamed or recorded service.

Listen carefully to the explanation of the action offered by the clergy or other Officiant before the service begins.

After the readings, the homily and the call to a holy Lent, the Officiant who is leading worship via ZOOM, live-streaming or on the recording will say the prayer that references the ashes. The Officiant will then pause. The designated member of the household will stand before other members, dip a thumb into the ashes, then trace the sign of the

cross on the forehead of each family member with that thumb, while saying the words, “Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return.” Those who are alone in their household impose ashes on their own foreheads, saying the same words.

After each person in the household has received the ashes, the ZOOM, live-streamed or recorded service continues. Spiritual Communion may be a part of the service.

Notes:

Neil Alexander in his book, Celebrating Liturgical Time, writes “It is customary to impose the ashes in the form of a cross, but there is no need for excessive attention to artistic quality; a gracious smudge will do.” (p. 97)

The Prayer Book says, “If ashes are to be imposed....” These words make clear that this ritual act is voluntary.

Alexander goes on to write, “What the prayer book does not do is give any indication of how the rite should end in those rare cases when communion does not follow. In such cases, the default position for the prayer book is to end the rite in a manner similar to the end of the office. Following that lead, after the Litany of Penitence and the prayer for forgiveness, an appropriate hymn, one or more collects, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Grace many conclude the rite.”