



Michigan Conference

The United Methodist Church

ASH WEDNESDAY WORSHIP RECOMMENDATIONS

In anticipation of the beginning of Lent on February 17, the following recommendations are offered for safe Ash Wednesday services.

Traditionally, Ash Wednesday worship includes the imposition of ashes as a symbol of repentance of sin and an acknowledgment of human mortality. While safety precautions may necessitate some changes this year, the significance of this ritual does not need to be diminished.

For those congregations conducting in-person worship, care should be taken to avoid physical contact between those distributing and those receiving ashes. After all of the ashes are blessed, the worship leader may address the congregation with the words traditionally spoken to individuals: “Repent, and believe the Gospel” or “Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.” At that point, the leader should clean his/her hands, put on a face mask (if it is not already on), and distribute the ashes by silently sprinkling them over each person’s head or hands. Alternatively, individual cups could contain small amounts of ashes and after being blessed could be available for participants to impose the ashes themselves.

For those congregations offering online worship, worshippers at home may mark themselves and household members with material other than ashes, such as soil or any form of cooking oil. The worship leader may speak the traditional words or home worshippers may offer the words as they mark themselves or household members with the sign of the cross on the forehead or the back of the hand.

Another option for home worship is to use temporary tattoos. Congregations can purchase temporary tattoos in bulk and distribute them in advance. Custom and pre-designed temporary tattoos can be purchased in bulk online. Worship consultant Dr. Marcia McFee recommends <https://www.customtattoonow.com/tattoos-order.php>

Given the human condition, repentance is always appropriate. Given the difficult time in which we find ourselves, we need to be sensitive to the reality that a reminder of human mortality may be particularly painful for some. We are reminded of it every day when we hear the statistics around the coronavirus. As Christians, we mark repentance trusting in the power of God’s redeeming love. We acknowledge our mortality knowing that God continues to fill our mortal lives with love and grace, and surrounds us with love and grace when this mortal life ceases.