

LENT IN A BOX

For such a time as this

Dear Ministry Leaders,

The irony isn't lost on us that this Lent, we are continuing to fast from our normal way of doing things. A year of masks, social distancing, and forced innovation has left us tired and longing for redemption and freedom. These 40 days leading up to Easter, we bury our hallelujahs and look with hope toward the resurrection.

During such difficult times, it has become crucial for us to rely on our toolbox of spiritual practices. During Lent, we invite you to explore the various ways you can experience and practice prayer in your daily lives. Prayer can engage all the senses as you connect with God, and our prayer is that you experience prayer anew using the suggested practices in this resource.

As we embark on this new season, be encouraged! Church certainly looks different this year, and the beautiful thing about it is we can share the Good News in new and fresh ways with our communities!

This Lenten resource is for you, Ministry Leaders. You will find a guide to help you plan Ash Wednesday, along with weekly prayer practices to share with those in your church and community. The next page offers three ways you might utilize this resource, and you may adapt as you see fit for your ministry context. Additionally, you may want to combine this resource with the upcoming "Holy Week in a Box" for more activities to last through Easter!

Blessings in your ministry!

-Rev. Kathy Pittenger

Children's Initiatives Coordinator
Michigan UMC Conference

-Rev. Melissa Collier Gepford

Intergenerational Discipleship Coordinator
Great Plains UMC Conference



Option A: Digital Format

Email a digital version of the [Devotional Booklet](#) to your email list. Share on social media.

Option B: Printed Format

Print off the Devotional Booklet and mail to your mailing list. Leave copies in communal spaces like coffee shops, libraries, and other places that allow.

Option C: Lent in a Box

Assemble boxes that include the Devotional Booklet and all items for the activities. Either deliver to households or invite them to pick up a box at the church. Each box should contain (links are for bulk items, but we encourage you to purchase local when possible):

- Ash Wednesday materials, based off your planning (see planning guide for details)
- Small package of [crayons](#) (to cut costs, send home lightly used crayons from the Kids and Youth ministries)
- [Clear jar with lid](#)
- One 6-8 oz. container of [glitter glue](#)
- A few [building blocks](#)
- 1 package of yeast
- Baggie with 1 Tablespoon sugar and 1 teaspoon salt
- Baggie with 4 cups of flour (be aware of gluten allergies, and take necessary precautions)

Assembly:

Aesthetics matter! Assemble this box as if you're wrapping a Christmas gift. Unboxing should be exciting! Consider adding a bow on the outside or some nice crinkle paper inside to place the items on. Label each item with which devotion activity it relates. Place the Devotional Booklet and a personalized letter from you on top so that it's the first thing they see when they unbox.



ASH WEDNESDAY

A Ministry Leader's Guide to Planning the Imposition of Ashes during a Pandemic

Ash Wednesday is a somber and holy day, during which we remember our human mortality. The central practice during an Ash Wednesday service is the imposition of ashes, which requires human contact. As ministry leaders during a pandemic, we are tasked with offering a meaningful Ash Wednesday experience while recognizing the necessity to socially distance. What a dilemma!

How you "do" Ash Wednesday will be determined by your answers to the following questions:

- Is it safe to gather in person?
- What are your State Guidelines? Local Guidelines? Church Policies?
- What's your theological stance on who can impose ashes upon others?
- What's your theological stance on how ashes can be made and with what materials?
- How creative are you willing and able to get? (This seems like an on-the-nose question, but really, ministry-in-a-pandemic fatigue is real. Check in with yourself.)

Once you have your answers to these questions, use the next page to Choose Your Own Lent Adventure! Feel free to use the included liturgy and ritual for whichever adventure you embark upon.

Adventure A: Traditional Ashes

Pastor or ministry leader imposes ashes on participants. Possible scenarios:

- Drive through service. Require masks. Ministry leader wears gloves and changes between cars OR use a cotton swab to apply ashes (throw away after each use).
- Schedule times for prayer and ashes in Sanctuary. Allow time for sanitation between time slots. Require masks. Soft music played all day, OR guided meditations by ministry leaders or recording. Ministry leader wears gloves and changes between households OR use cotton swab to apply ashes (throw away after each use).

Adventure B: Virtual Ashes

Pastor or ministry leader offers virtual blessing over the ashes.

Possible scenarios:

- To create a more intimate feel, host a Zoom meeting. This can be informal, like a small group gathering, more traditional, like a worship service - or anywhere in between. Offer a blessing over the ashes, then households impose ashes upon each other.
- Livestream a traditional Ash Wednesday Service, and treat the imposition of the ashes in a similar way to virtual communion.

Adventure C: House Church Ashes

Families, households, or small groups celebrate together in a more intimate setting. Possible scenarios:

- Families participate in provided Ash Wednesday ritual
- Small groups gather, remain socially distant, and participate in provided Ash Wednesday ritual

Next: What about the ashes?!

How you make and distribute ashes depends on the adventure you've chosen.

- Adventure A: Ashes are made traditionally, by burning last year's palm branches.
- Adventures B and C:
 - Ashes are made either traditionally, by burning last year's palm branches and distributed ahead of time to participants OR
 - participants use the DIY Ashes handout included in this packet.
- Reminder: Never use water with palm ashes - can cause skin burns!

DIY ASHES RITUAL

Set the tone by playing soft and meaningful music. Invite participants to write down things that make them feel sad, broken, or hopeless on strips of paper. Spend the necessary amount of time to do this. Place the strips of paper in the large fireproof container outside in a well-ventilated area.

Pray: God, we give to you all that makes us feel broken, afraid, sad, and hopeless. You are God, we are not, and we remember that today.

Set the paper on fire, and watch the paper burn into ash. As the ashes cool, mix in a few drops of olive oil and mix with a fork.

Pray: God, we thank you for these ashes. May they remind us that from dust we came, and to dust we will return.

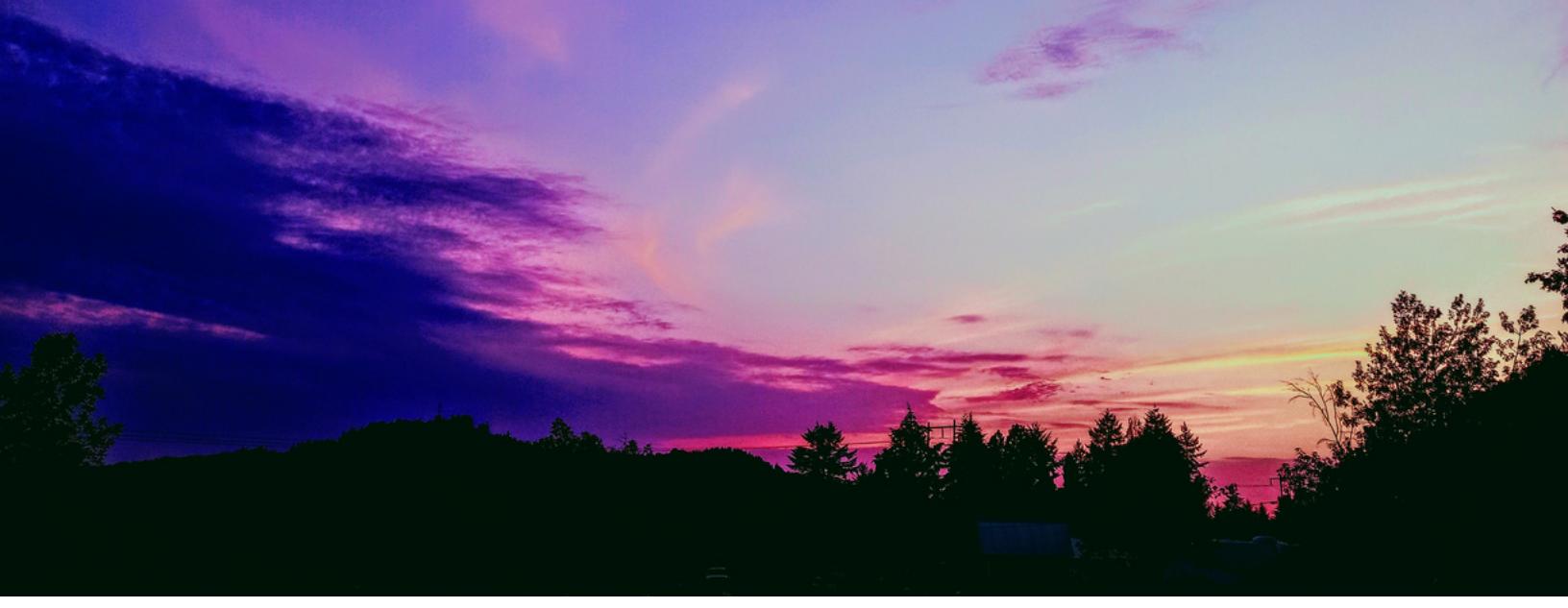
Impose ashes upon foreheads or hands.

Say together: *In Jesus' name, we are forgiven. Amen.*

YOU WILL NEED:

- Strips of paper
- Pen
- Large fireproof container
- Lighter or match
- Olive oil





A LENTEN JOURNEY

Prayer practices, rituals and activities for
faith formation, wherever you may be



For additional resources
and playlists to engage in
these prayer practices, visit
the Michigan UMC
Conference website:
michiganumc.org/resources/childrens-ministry-tool-box/faith-family-playlists/2021-lent-at-home-playlists/

WEEK ONE

5 Finger Prayer

Using the handout as a guide, pray for different groups of people as you touch each finger.

- Thumb: pray for those closest to you, your family and friends.
- Index finger: pray for people who give direction like teachers, coaches, health care workers, therapists, first responders, etc.
- Middle finger: pray for leaders in governments, businesses, the church, etc.
- Ring finger: pray for those who are sick, vulnerable, and most in need
- Pinky finger: pray for yourself and your own needs

Finger Labyrinth

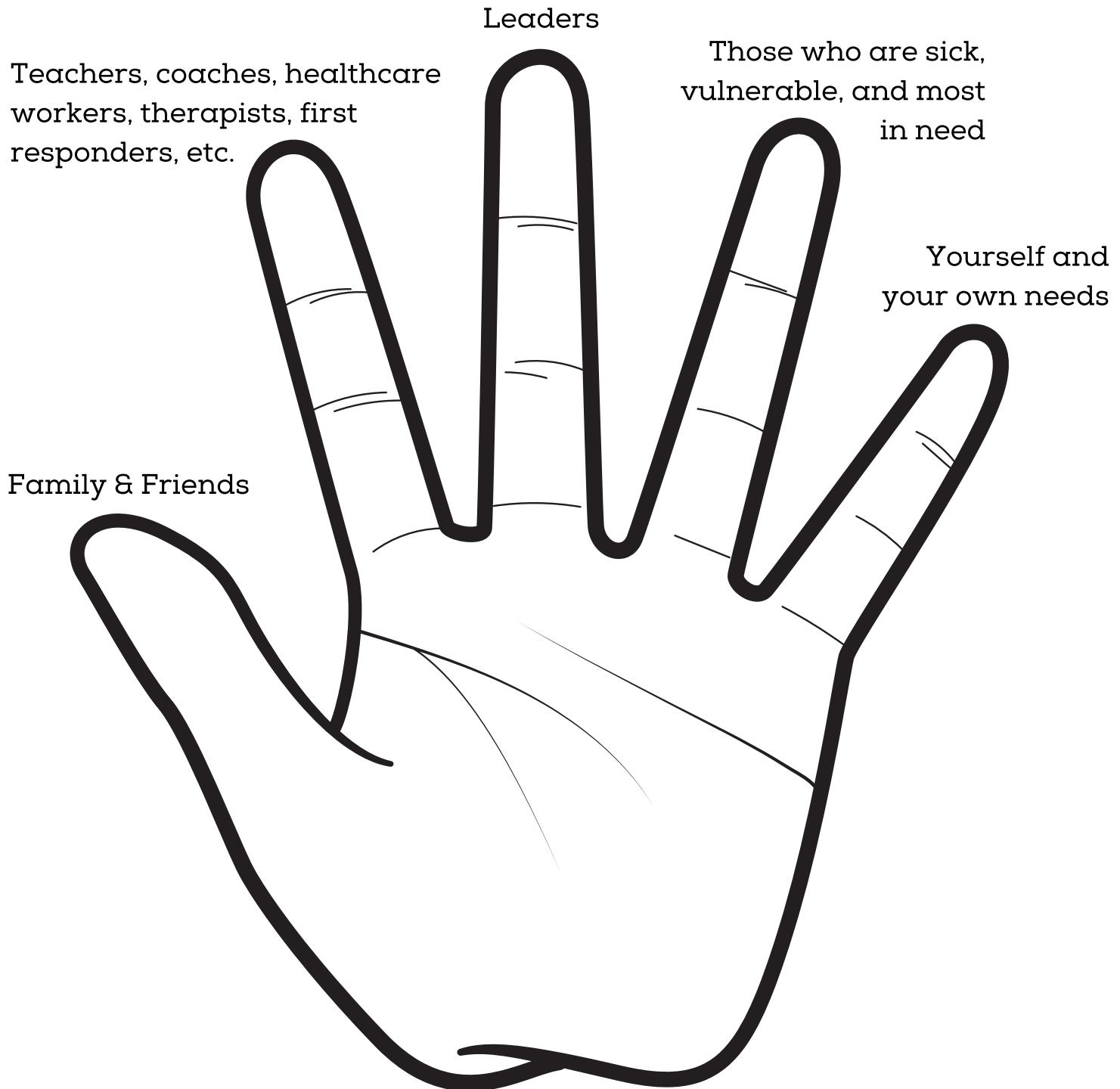
Using the handout as a guide, print the finger labyrinth. If you want to make it more tactile, print it on heavy paper or cardstock. Glue yarn or string or use puffy paint and allow it to dry. Use your finger to trace the path slowly and pray quietly or out loud as you go. You can pray for others or yourself. You can pray with words or without words.

YOU WILL NEED:

- *5 Finger Prayer Handout*
- *Finger Labyrinth Handout*
- Optional: crayons, cardstock, glue, yarn, puffy paint



5 Finger Prayer



Hold out your hand, and follow the prompts to pray using each finger.

Finger Labyrinth



Use your finger to trace the path slowly. Pray quietly or out loud as you go. You can pray for others or yourself. You can pray with words or without words.

WEEK TWO

Coloring Prayer

Warm up by drawing some doodles, squiggles, lines, circles, dots, etc. on a piece of blank paper.

When ready follow these directions:

- Take a deep breath and slowly exhale. Repeat a few times. You may want to light a candle (or turn on a battery candle) as a visual reminder to be quiet and in prayer.
- Write God or a favorite name for God (i.e. Gracious God, Loving God, Creator, etc) somewhere on the paper and doodle around the name.
- Take turns sharing a prayer request or praise. Set a timer for about 3 minutes (you can adjust the amount of time depending on age or attention span).
- Write down the praise/prayer either with words or a picture and then doodle around it while praying or praising God for the request.
- Repeat step 3 as many times as desired.
- When you are ready to end, write Amen or your favorite prayer closing somewhere on your paper.
- To learn more about Praying in Color, visit prayingincolor.com

Praying with Photos

View the Photos Handout and choose one to look at while you listen to Psalm 23. Wonder together.

- I wonder what part of the Psalm you can relate with.
- How does your image relate to the scripture?
- How do you see God in your image?
- If you could choose a different image, what would it be?
- What do you learn about yourself in this scripture?
- What do you learn about God in this scripture?

YOU WILL NEED:

- *Coloring Prayer Handout*
- Crayons, markers, colored pencils
- Timer
- *Photos Handout*



Prayer: Dear God, thank you for Psalms that remind us that you are close to us no matter what is happening in life. Thank you for photographs that capture different emotions and scenes. Help us remember that you are close when we are feeling happy, sad, or afraid. Thank you for your goodness and faithful love. Amen.



WEEK THREE

Meditation Jar

To make a meditation jar: Pour an entire 6 oz container of glitter glue into a clear jar. Add any additional glitter, confetti, beads, or other waterproof craft supplies. Fill jar with hot water (not boiling, just hot). Twist the lid on tight (you might consider adding hot glue around the perimeter). While water is still hot, shake the jar vigorously until glue is dissolved.

To use the meditation jar: Shake it up! You can do this for as long as you need to shake out any extra energy, anxiety, frustration, or jitters. When you're ready, set the jar down and breathe deeply as you watch the glitter settle. Imagine that the glitter represents your thoughts, words, and actions, and remember that, just like Jesus calmed the storm, Jesus can calm our hearts.

Breath Prayer

Choose a word or brief phrase to repeat in one breath. If it is a phrase, say one part as you inhale and the rest as you exhale. You can say breath prayers out loud, in a whisper, or silently. Breath prayers are wonderful as a calming, meditative practice. See the prayer practice page for breath prayer cards that you can cut out and use.

YOU WILL NEED:

- Clear jar with lid
- Hot water
- Glitter Glue
- Optional: more glitter, confetti, beads, etc.
- *Breath Prayer Handout*
- Scissors



Breath Prayers

Psalm 23

Inhale: I will not be afraid
Exhale: for You are
with me

Psalm 46:10

Inhale: Be still
Exhale: and know that
you are God

Psalm 56:3

Inhale: When I am afraid
Exhale: I will trust you

Romans 8:38-39

Inhale: Nothing can
separate me
Exhale: from God's love

2 Corinthians 12:9

Inhale: Your grace
Exhale: is enough for me

Psalm 46:1

Inhale: You are
our refuge
Exhale: and our strength

Inhale: Come

Exhale: Lord Jesus

Philippians 4:7

Inhale: Peace of Christ
Exhale: guard my heart
and mind

WEEK FOUR

Nature Prayer Walk

There are many ways you can go on a nature prayer walk - choose one that works for you. As you begin your walk, say a prayer. Ask God to show you the unique and ordinary in creation.

Quiet Walk - ask everyone to walk in silence, saying their own quiet prayer as they walk.

Pray As You Go - Walk together, when you come to something that catches your eye, say a prayer. It could be as simple as "Thank you God for this thing" or "Thank you God for this thing because it reminds me of _____."

Finding Objects - Use the Prayer Walk Handout to pray for specific things upon finding objects in nature. For younger ones, collect leaves, sticks, and other nature objects by sticking them on a piece of tape around their wrist. Instant prayer bracelet!

Can't go outside? Check out one of these virtual hikes in nature: buzzfeed.com/laurynkeary/virtual-hikes-visit-national-parks-online-quarantine

Shouting Prayer!

We often associate prayer with being quiet, but we can use our big voices too! You can Shout for Joy! You can Shout a Praise! You can Shout a Sadness. You may want to use instruments like a tambourine or shakers or drum. Example: Thank you, God! I love you, God! You could shout a Psalm: "Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth" Psalm 98:4, NIV

For more examples: <https://buildfaith.org/a-prayer-you-must-try-the-shouting-prayer>

YOU WILL NEED:

- *Nature Prayer Walk Handout*
- *Optional: loud instruments of any kind*



Nature Prayer Walk



Bird: Pray for someone important to you



Flower: Pray for those who care for others



Evergreen Tree: Pray for leaders



Grass/Snow/Sand: Pray for teachers



Leaves: For your family



Bug: Pray for whatever - you choose!

What else can you find in nature?

WEEK FIVE

Pretzel Prayer

Make pretzels (or purchase the frozen pre-made ones that you just bake). Refer to the handout for recipe.

To learn more about the connection between Lent and pretzels, read *Pretzels by the Dozen* by Angela Elwell Hunt!

Building Block Prayer

Use building blocks (like Lego or wood blocks) to build a prayer. Each brick or block represents a prayer request or praise.

Body Prayer

Take 3 deep breaths.

God, you are above (reach toward the sky),

below (touch your toes),

inside (hands to heart),

and all around (big arm circles).

I worship you (reach toward the sky),

and give my life to you (touch your toes).

And I love you (hands to heart)

with all that I am (big arm circles).

Take 3 deep breaths.

From

www.illustratedministry.com/2017/ways-to-pray-with-kids/

YOU WILL NEED:

- *Pretzel Prayer Handout*
- *Ingredients listed on handout*
- *Building Blocks*



Pretzel Prayer



"A young monk baked the first pretzel - making a Lenten bread of water, flour, and salt, forming the dough into the prayer position of the day and baking it as a soft bread. These little breads were shaped in the form of arms crossed in prayer and were called bracellae (Latin, 'little arms'). Among the Germans the word became 'bretzel.' These pretzels were a common Lenten food throughout the Middle Ages in Europe, and became an all year round snack, in its original shape only in the last (19th) century."

(from bustedhalo.com/life-culture/pretzels-and-lent)

Make Pretzels!

Make your own pretzels or purchase them pre-made

Ingredients:

1 package of yeast
1 ½ cups of warm water
1 Tablespoon sugar
1 teaspoon salt
about 4 cups of flour
1 egg (optional)
Extra salt for the tops - large salt works best

Steps:

Mix the yeast, water, sugar and salt in a large bowl. Stir in the flour and knead the dough until it is smooth. Shape into the form of arms crossed in prayer and place on a baking sheet.

Brush the dough with a beaten egg to give it a shiny finish (optional).

Sprinkle the top with salt and bake in a 425 degree preheated oven for 15 minutes.

(recipe from catholicicing.com/pretzels-for-lent/)

As you enjoy your pretzels, fold your arms in the shape of a pretzel and say a prayer, thanking God for everyday things in our lives that remind us of God!