

LENT

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in a hat and then each drew the name of another staff member to pray for throughout the Lenten season.

"It was a powerful experience, carrying somebody in prayer through that whole season," she said. "Lent is a time that we focus on our relationship with God, a time to start again or refocus our lives. We're dying to ourselves to bring about new life in ourselves; dying to our old self and rising to our new self."

Fasting from something that turns you away from God is one way to make a change in your life during Lent, Sister Treichel said. Choosing something realistic to focus on or change is key to making Lent more meaningful, she added.

Choosing a lofty goal may be admirable, but may also be setting yourself up for failure, Chesto said. She urges people to try to concentrate on the prayerful or positive, since the phrase "giving up" is also closely linked to failure.

Almsgiving is a popular way for people at Immaculate Conception Parish in Ithaca to sacrifice during Lent, said Sister Edna Slyck, RSM. The pastoral minister said that Immaculate Conception parishioners fill white bags with loose change to donate to Catholic Charities. The parish is also hosting a Lenten retreat as well as a Lenten program of welcoming back those who have drifted away from the church.

"I think people are looking for something concrete to do. We're trying to encourage a multilevel Lent," Sister Slyck said.

The elements of prayer, fasting



Nancy Wiechec/CNS

An image of Christ in sorrow appears on the glass of a votive candle at a church in Washington, D.C.

and almsgiving have been incorporated into several activities and programs at SUNY Brockport's Newman Center, according to Margot VanEtten, campus minister. Students and community members are currently raising money for Melita House, which provides emergency shelter and transitional housing for homeless, pregnant or parenting teens and their children, and Project Life, which brings war orphans to stay with a family in the Rochester area for up to a year.

Paper bags were distributed at the Newman Center and, once a week, participants give up one full meal and put the cost of that meal into the bag. The bags are returned to the center on Easter Sunday before being given to Melita House. Calendars were also available at the Newman Center, with an entry for each day

describing an activity that's commonplace in the United States, such as going to church and worshipping freely, but impossible in some other countries. Each day participants engage in the activity mentioned, they put a suggested amount of change into a bag or envelope. This money is also brought to the Newman Center at the end of Lent and sent to Project Life, VanEtten said.

The center also will host three sessions of "Believing in Jesus," a program on different types of prayer and meditation, including praying through the Scriptures, centering prayer and contemplative prayer. VanEtten also found an online retreat, "Journeying with Jesus," that she's encouraging people to try. The retreat, which can be found at www.goodgroundpress.com, incorporates a theme, Scripture readings,

prayer and reflection for each of the six weeks of Lent.

"So many of the students spend a lot of time online, and many of the students here at Brockport are working. (The online retreat) is perfect for people who might not have a chance to troop to the Newman Center," VanEtten said.

She said students in her community, especially the freshmen, have shown a tremendous interest in and hunger for spirituality. The activities the Newman community is involved in are an attempt to "provide a spectrum so that people with different temperaments and needs might find something," she said.

VanEtten said she encourages people to find little ways to bring God into their daily lives, especially during the Lenten season. If you're taking a walk, she said, say a "Hail Mary" or talk to God. Sister Treichel and VanEtten both said Catholics can also deepen their connection to God during Lent through spiritual reading, especially from the Gospels, and reflection. Sister Treichel recommends taking time to pray the Stations of the Cross, either individually or with a group.

The important thing, VanEtten said, is "trying to find a little bit of time for God each day, a little bit more than you usually do, and trying to bring God into your daily life."

Although some people might find the regulations of Lent an inconvenience, such as the one instructing Catholics not to eat meat on Fridays, VanEtten is grateful for them.

"It forces you to be conscious, and on that one day forces you to base your choices on something other than what's on the menu that day," she said.

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