

LENT

Mission Statement

Catholic Community of St. John Neumann

FOUNDED on the teachings of Jesus Christ,
NOURISHED by the hospitality of the Califon Christian
Communities,

FORMED with a commitment to Social Ministry, and
STRENGTHENED by the Holy Spirit

*The Catholic Community of St. John Neumann is
a jubilant people on a continuing spiritual journey of hope:*

TO CELEBRATE and **DEEPEN** our faith
TO SHARE our unique gifts, talents and treasures
TO CHERISH all life
TO LIVE in openness, acceptance and love.

Annual Parish Goal

**Growing in the Love of the Lord
Through the Faith Formation of Each Member,
We Will Give Witness To and
Welcome All Segments of Our Larger Community**

A Christian Community of the Catholic Tradition

Diocese of Metuchen
Most Rev. Paul G. Bootkoski, Bishop
www.diometuchen.org

Trustees:
Mary Connolly
Lyle Garcia

Our Parish

Rev. Abraham Orapankal, Ph.D. Pastor
Rev. J William Mickiewicz..... Founding Pastor Emeritus
Earl Roberts Deacon

Mailing Address:
PO Box 455
Califon, NJ 07830

Office Center:
398 County Route 513
Califon, NJ
908-832-2513
908-832-7618 fax
www.ccsjn.org

Worshipping at:
398 County Road 513
(Church Center)

Saturday Vigil Mass5:30 p.m.
Sunday8:00 a.m.
Sunday 10:30 a.m.
First Friday Holy Hour7:00 p.m.

Worshipping at:
Check the bulletin for any changes
390 County Road 513
(Neumann Residence)

Weekday Masses:
Tuesday7:00 a.m.
Friday7:00 a.m.

Reconciliation:
Saturday..... 5:00-5:25 p.m.

This Week at Saint John's

Mass Intentions

Tuesday, February 16

7:00 a.m. Intention of the Celebrant

Friday, February 19

7:00 a.m. Intention of the Celebrant

Saturday, February 20

5:30 p.m. Ricky Martinez, req.
Roger and Marie Malone

Sunday, February 21

8:00 a.m. Marianne Bennett, req.
Jim and JoAnn Murray
10:30 a.m. Charles Hnatt, req.
Marie and Roger Malone

**The Office is closed on
Monday, February 15th
for President's Day.**

Parish Calendar

Sunday, Feb. 14 - First Sunday of Lent /Catholic Press Coll.

8:00 a.m. Mass (Church Center)
10:30 a.m. Mass (Church Center)
10:30 a.m. Children's Liturgy of the Word (Narthex)
3:00 p.m. Rite of Election (Cathedral)

Monday, Feb. 15 - Presidents Day / OFFICE CLOSED

Tuesday, Feb. 16 - Weekday

7:00 a.m. Mass (Neumann Residence Chapel)
11:00 a.m. Faith Group (Church Loft)
7:00 p.m. Property Management Meeting (Drexel Room)
7:00 p.m. Faith Group (Houses)
7:30 p.m. Faith Group (Houses)
7:30 p.m. R.C.I.A. (Upper Room)

Wednesday, Feb. 17 - The Seven Holy Founders of the Servite Order

10:30 a.m. Faith Group (Church Loft)
6:30 p.m. REAB (Drexel Room)
7:00 p.m. Bereavement Session (Upper Room)
7:00 p.m. Faith Group (Office Center Kitchen)
7:15 p.m. Faith Group (TBD)
7:30 p.m. Book Club (Seton Room)

Thursday, Feb. 18 - Weekday

7:30 p.m. Music/Bells (Church Center)

Friday, Feb. 19 - Weekday

7:00 a.m. Mass (Neumann Residence Chapel)
5:00 p.m. Cleaning (Church Center)
6:00 p.m. Soup & Stations (provided by Religious Education)
7:00 p.m. Stations of the Cross (Church Center)

Mass Schedule—February 20/21

Saturday	Youth and Welcome Mass	5:30 p.m.
Celebrant	Fr. Abraham Orapankal	
Reader	Youth Mass Reader	
Altar Server.....	Youth Mass Altar Servers	
Ministers of the Eucharist	Mary D'Avella Lyle Garcia, Bonnie Garcia	
Sunday		8:00 a.m.
Celebrant	Fr. Abraham Orapankal	
Reader	Chris Bitters	
Altar Server.....	Stanski Family	
Ministers of the Eucharist	Joe Sima Dorothy Sima, Sharon Janks	
Sunday	3rd Grade Class Mass	10:30 a.m.
Celebrant	Fr. Abraham Orapankal	
Reader	Steve Gemma	
Altar Server.....	Religious Ed Class	
Music Eucharistic Minister	Bob Sobey	
Ministers of the Eucharist	Marlene Milko, Kristin Gemma Donna Torczon, Sheena Carew, Debbie Kelemen	

Saturday, Feb. 20 - Weekday

11:00 a.m. Communal Prayer (Upper Room)
3:30 p.m. 1st Eucharist-Session #3 (Church Center)
5:30 p.m. Youth Mass - Welcome (Church Center)
6:30 p.m. Youth Group Gathering (Church Center)

Sunday, Feb. 21 - Second Sunday of Lent /Snow & Heat Coll.

8:00 a.m. Mass (Church Center)
9:00 a.m. K-6 Catechesis (Office and Church Centers)
9:00 a.m. 1st Eucharist Parent Meeting (Narthex)
10:30 a.m. 3rd Grade Class Mass (Church Center)
5:30 p.m. K of C 8th Grade Spelling Bee (Church Center)
6:00 p.m. Jr. High Catechesis (Church Center)



Remembered at Mass

We stand together in the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. The following will be remembered in the Eucharistic Prayer: **Brian Travis, Dana Tyrell, Peter Abeles, and Earl Carvatt.**

Deceased: **Brian Travis**, nephew of Eileen McCabe, **Dana Tyrrell**, cousin of Phyllis Baker, **Peter Abeles**, father of Dave Abeles, and **Earl Carvatt**, friend of Charles Fortenbacker. May they find peace and comfort in the embrace of the Lord and may their families find strength in the Lord & comfort & support from family & friends.

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Dear Friends,

I'm very glad to resume this column after a month away on my home-visit. I salute our parishioners who took up the challenge to write reflections in my absence. As I read what they wrote, I am truly humbled to see the simple and yet profound thoughts that are of great witness value. Thank you to those who wrote and may their example encourage others to do the same.

With the smudging of ashes on our forehead, we have officially entered the holy season of Lent. The Gospel reading for Ash Wednesday (Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18) reminded us of the three traditional pillars of Lenten observance. Let's reflect briefly on each of them:

Prayer: More time given to prayer during Lent should draw us closer to the Lord. This can happen not only when we sit quietly in silent prayer or reading Scriptures, but also in sharing faith with others in small groups. It is truly astonishing that we have so many groups meeting at different times and days of the week for this purpose. Are you in one of them? If not try it out!

Fasting: Fasting is one of the most ancient practices linked to Lent. We Americans seem to like the word 'dieting' rather than fasting! No matter what word we like, it is more than a means of developing self-control. It is often an aid to prayer, as the pangs of hunger remind us of our hunger for God. Fasting should be linked to our concern for those who are forced to fast by their poverty, those who suffer from the injustices of our economic and political structures, those who are in need for any reason. Abstaining from meat traditionally also linked us to the poor, who could seldom afford meat for their meals. It can do the same today if we remember the purpose of abstinence and embrace it as a spiritual link to those whose diets are sparse and simple. That should be the goal we set for ourselves—a sparse and simple meal. To forego a hamburger on a Lenten Friday and feast instead on lobster seems a bit hypocritical as the U.S. Bishops point out: *"While fish, lobster and other shellfish are not considered meat and can be consumed on days of abstinence, indulging in the lavish buffet at your favorite seafood place sort of misses the point."*

Almsgiving: Almsgiving is a sign of our care for those in need and an expression of our gratitude for all that God has given to us. Works of charity and the promotion of justice are integral elements of the Christian way of life we began when we were baptized. We can be grateful to God that our Parish has the best track record on this - not only during Lent but throughout the year - thanks to our robust Social Ministry and the practice of solidarity of our parishioners with those in need.

A meaningful and fruitful Lent to us all!

Your brother in Christ,
Fr. Abraham Orapankal

BISHOP'S ANNUAL APPEAL

Grace, Mercy Peace

Next weekend, our parish will be conducting an In-Pew campaign for the 2015 Bishop's Annual Appeal. If you have yet to contribute to the appeal, please take this opportunity to prayerfully consider a gift. If you have already given, please know how much your gift is appreciated.

To date, the Development Department has received pledges totaling \$31,656.70 and payments totaling \$29,866.70 from 98 parishioners. This represents 82% of your \$38,600.00 goal.

RCIA

Today (Feb 14) Mark Schenck and Nancy Bauernfeind will be at our Diocesan Cathedral to make their commitment to complete the final steps to become fully Catholic at our Easter Vigil. During Lent, the period of Purification and Enlightenment, they are fully engaged trying to hear God's call. Help them see what being Catholic means to you. We ask you, fellow parishioners, to pray for Mark and Nancy, and introduce yourselves to them. Let us all deepen our own faith as we strive to understand how Jesus is trying to call us to be active members of His church. Thus we can celebrate Easter joyously with Mark and Nancy.

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

February 14, 2016

"I have now brought you the first fruits of the products of the soil which you, O Lord, have given to me." (DEUTERONOMY 26:10)

This line from the Old Testament offers two challenges. First, do you give to God from your "first fruits", the best that you have to offer, or do you give from what is leftover? Second, do you remember that everything you have has been given to you by God? Ask God for a grateful and generous heart, every day.

SOUP AND STATIONS FRIDAYS DURING LENT



**Meatless Soup Supper,
6 p.m.
Stations of the Cross,
7 p.m.
Church Center**

Please join us for a simple meal of soup followed by the Stations of the Cross, as we embark on our Lenten journey together in prayer and fellowship. Soup, bread, salad and drinks will be provided by our ministries; however, you are welcome to bring a meatless soup to share. R.S.V.P. sin@ccsjn.org if you plan to attend.

A different Ministry will be providing the food for each week in Lent. We would like to thank the Religious Education for hosting this Friday, Feb 12th.

Parish Contact Information

Church Center (weekend use) .908-832-6343
Office Center908-832-2513

Fax..... 908-832-7618

Email..... sn@ccsjn.org

Rev. Abraham Orapankal Pastor

Email..... abraham@ccsjn.org

Earl Roberts..... Deacon

Email..... earlr1@verizon.net

Sharon Janks..... Pastoral Administrator

Email..... sjanks@ccsjn.org

France Kennedy Pastoral Associate

Email..... fkennedy@ccsjn.org

Kerri Caldaro..... Financial Administrator

Email..... kcaldaro@ccsjn.org

Wayne Infusino..... Maintenance

Religious Education908-832-2162

Renee Ciszewski .Director of Religious Education

Email..... renee@ccsjn.org

Jo Ann Jarvis..... Office of Catechesis

Email..... jjarvis@ccsjn.org

Social Ministry..... socialministry@ccsjn.org

Anne Germino and Greg Wilson

Bulletin bulletin@ccsjn.org

Youth Ministry sjnygroup@gmail.com

Christian Formation - Catechesis

FIRST EUCHARIST CLASSES

Sat., Feb. 20, 3:30 p.m.,
Church Center



The next session for the First Eucharist students will be on Saturday, February 20, at 3:30 p.m. in the Church Center. There will be a Parent Meeting held in the Church Center at 9:00 a.m. on February 21st.

3RD GRADE CLASS MASS



Please join us for our next Class Mass on Sunday, February 21, 2016, at 10:30 a.m. celebrated with the 3rd Grade students.

MEALS ON WHEELS NEEDS YOUR HELP

Meals on Wheels needs volunteer drivers in your neighborhood. Many of our retired drivers are retired and during the winter head south. Please consider helping homebound seniors enjoy a hot noontime meal. The commitment to drive is only once per month during a weekday and will only take an hour or two. All new drivers are given an orientation and will be provided printed directions and maps. Call 908-284-0735 or visit our website mowih.org. Help us, help others. Many Thanks.



AUCTION

Time to start thinking of a theme and begin the preparations. Won't you consider co-chairing or chairing this year's Auction to be held on the first Saturday in June. You will not be left alone to figure it out, there are many people who are involved every year in the background who will continue to help with the preparations. It's not just work, it can be a lot of fun too.

We will need to decide on the 5 prizes for the Fab Five Raffle so we can get license approved and order the tickets. There have been some themes suggested in the past that still haven't been used. Please contact the OFFICE if you are even thinking about it. We will be happy to answer all of your questions.



HUNGERING FOR THE JOURNEY

"A little bit of mercy makes the world less cold and more just."
Pope Francis

Join our parish community—and nearly 14,000 Catholic communities across the United States—in a life-changing Lenten journey with CRS Rice Bowl. Throughout Lent we will pray, fast, learn and give as a way to reach out in solidarity with our brothers and sisters around the world. Rice Bowl packets are available in the Narthex and have been distributed at all catechetical gatherings. Visit crsricebowl.org to learn more.



KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS DIOCESAN SPELLING BEE



The students in the eighth grade religious education program will participate in the annual Metuchen Diocesan Spelling Bee, sponsored by the St. Joseph Council, Knights of Columbus. **The event will begin at 5:30PM on Sunday February 21 in the Church Center.** Pizza and refreshments will be served after the spelling bee.



THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION: EXPERIENCING GOD'S MERCY

Presenter: Rev. Thomas Walsh

Tuesday, February 23, 2016 - 7:00 p.m.

Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness."

(Misericordiae Vultus, 2)

Reconciliation is a sacrament of healing, not judgment, for an increasingly wounded world. How does our human understanding of divine forgiveness need to be re-imagined in order for us to truly celebrate the fidelity and mercy of a loving God? All are invited to this free event at the St. John Neumann Pastoral Center, 146 Metlars Lane, Piscataway, sponsored by the Dept. of Formation & Leadership.

Social Ministry

"LET US BE MERCIFUL AS MINISTERS IN THIS YEAR OF MERCY"

Two of our needy clients have employment needs and we have posted details in the Narthex. We will make copies of these notices and place them in the Narthex so that you can take one as a reminder. Keep in mind that many of those that seek help need help more than once and since we maintain contact between food drives we do get input from them as to how they may or may not be progressing. We have been assisting Rich now for a few years by providing food, emergency financial help and guidance in the direction of agencies that can help him. Reading the notices you will find that his work is such that he will end up at a low pay scale, but he is willing to provide help cleaning out basements attics, gardening etc. If you could use this kind of help, you may be blessed with getting help for less and will definitely be blessed by God for performing this Corporal Work of Mercy. Please consider David also, particularly if you are aware of a position that requires mechanical skills. Contact Greg at socialministry@ccsjn.org for further information.

Continue to use your shopping lists for our Easter Food Drive and we will have more available to hand out after Masses this weekend and the next. Thanks for showing Mercy through your good works.

Parish News

MERCY QUOTE FROM POPE FRANCIS

I am always struck when I reread the parable of the merciful Father. ... The Father, with patience, love, hope and mercy, had never for a second stopped thinking about [his wayward son], and as soon as he sees him still far off, he runs out to meet him and embraces him with tenderness, the tenderness of God, without a word of reproach. ... God is always waiting for us, He never grows tired. Jesus shows us this merciful patience of God so that we can regain confidence and hope — always!

ACQUIRE THE FIRE



Acquire the Fire, the combined young adult group of Our Lady of Lourdes and St John Neumann, will be attending the young adult Seekers Retreat on Sunday, Feb 21st from 2-7 PM at the Loyola Jesuit Center (161 James St Morristown, NJ). The retreat will consist of a talk, small groups, personal reflection, Mass and dinner. If you're looking to getting away and refocusing on God, this is a great opportunity. There is a \$10 free will offering suggested. For more information visit <http://www.diometuchen.org/seekers>. Save the date for our next meeting on Mar 6th at 7 PM in Old Church Hall of Our Lady of Lourdes (390 County Rd 523 Whitehouse Station, NJ). To join the list serve or to find out more information about our events, email Susan at acquirethefire@ollwhs.org.



REDISCOVER JESUS FOR LENT

Have you picked up the Rediscover Jesus book yet? Many parishioners have shared how excited they are about the book. Want more? Sign up for a 40-day spiritual journey using Rediscover Jesus. Each day you'll receive an email with a short video sharing simple ways to bring Jesus into your everyday life. Sign up at: DynamicCatholic.com/Lent

VALENTINE DINNER DANCE THANKS

My mother's "snowvena" must have been heard because we had a wonderful event without any weather concerns! Thank you to everyone who was a part of the fabulous fundraiser for Catholic Heart Workcamp! First, a special thank you to Wayne Infusino who saves us hours of set-up and clean-up time to prepare the worship space. He is the guru of table placement no matter how many changes are thrown his way. The spectacular set-up crew: Taylor Panzarino, Mark Winter and John Cresti. The awesome kitchen staff: Jim Simila, Tom Bennett, Fran Barbone, and Mike Connolly. The tireless dishwasher: Joe Huelsman and the plate scrapers: Jen Evanko and Mateo Cantelmi. The wait staff was so overwhelming that I did not write down everyone's name but there were almost 30 teens that assisted!! I apologize for my mistake on that account but please know I applaud you all. The late night clean-up crew: Alan and Sharon Janks, France Kennedy, Wayne Infusino, Fred and Kristin Heimall, and Alexa and Lynn Johnson. The brilliant band: Mike Griffin and the GB's. The sensational silent auction donors as well as the coordinators: Cathy Bennett and Regina DeStefano. The chocolate strawberry dip master: Barbara Pannone. The marvelous MC and finance guru: Jim Murray. I am also grateful to the office assistance from Sharon Janks, France Kennedy, Jo Ann Jarvis, and Kerri Caldero. To Fr. Abraham for his continued enthusiasm for CHWC and for braving about 10 time zones to be back with us from his vacation in India. But most of all thank you to the AMAZING guests who make this event a success as well as others who generously support our adventure! Your generosity of spirit and commitment to being our "brother's keeper" would warm anyone's hearts. If I have forgotten anyone please accept my apologies. The teens who will take the leap of faith and travel to Richmond, VA this summer will touch the lives and hearts of those in need. They will be someone's angels. Ever grateful ~ Mary Connolly

PRAYER MINISTRY

"I have been driven many times upon my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had no where else to go. My own wisdom and that of all about me seemed insufficient for that day."

Abraham Lincoln

Please join us for the next Communal Prayer Session
Saturday, Feb. 20, 2016
11:00 – 12:00 Noon
Office Center, Upper Room



WANT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT PRAYER?

Check out the information on the Prayer Ministry under Ministries. Interesting information and links to help with our personal prayer life. Send us your feedback! prayerministry@ccsjn.org

SHOP RITE & KINGS CARDS



Thanks to **15 families** who purchased Shop Rite and Kings gift cards the last week, totaling **\$2,275.00**. The stores gave us **\$113.75** Cards are available after Mass or at the office weekdays.

WEEKLY COLLECTION

For February 7, 2016

91 Donors Weekly.....\$5,743.00
53 Yellow Brick Road.....\$1,803.00

For February 8, 2015

89 Donors Weekly.....\$7,351.00
12 Yellow Brick Road.....\$425.00

VOLUNTEER SCHEDULES

Office Angels

Tues., Feb. 16 A. Sawczuk
Wed., Feb 17 M. D'Avella

Store Cards

Feb. 13 & Feb. 14

5:30 p.m. B. Cestone
8:00 a.m. V. Hoffart
10:30 a.m. D. Hunt

Feb. 20 & Feb. 21

5:30 p.m. C. Crescenti
8:00 a.m. K. Dabrowski
10:30 a.m. M. Kearns

Church Center Plant Watering

Week of 2/14 M. Proano
Week of 2/14 J. Sieber

Church Center Cleaning

February 12 Team F
February 19 Team A

REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

Virgilio Alves
Eugene Cifranic
Jean Crickenberger
John D'Almeida
Vicky Davids
Tino DeSantis
Sophia DeVita
Neil Ercolano
Paul Ferri
Gordon Furlong
Sophie Geist
Fred Holub
Frank Kostecki
Lou Livoti
Jan McLeavey
Christine Meyer
Fred Moser
Evelyn Murray
Fran Miceli
Beau (Bernice) Mills
Michael James Nonestied
Mary Lou O'Brien
Floyd Opdyke
Linda Owens
Nilsa Perez Parsons
John Pfeufer
Anne & Joe Sacco
Doris Semper
Theodore Semper
Noah Skinner
Michael Slivka
Julie Suplee
Madeline S. Vigilanti
William Weimer
Josh Wilkes
Caden Zane
Jill Zane
Joey Zieba

MILITARY PERSONNEL

If you have someone in the military that you would like us to remember in our prayers, call the office or drop the name into the collection basket. As military personnel leave the Service, please notify us so that we can remove them from the list. Please remember the following in your prayers:

Captain Baumann, Katherine, U.S. Army
HM Bullis, Christopher, U.S. Navy
Private, Linzer, Matthew, U.S. Army
Seaman, Linzer, Stephanie, U.S. Navy
SR O'Leary, Thomas, U.S. Navy
Captain Royal, Benjamin P., USMC
Ensign Simila, Nicole, U.S. Navy

SUNDAY REFLECTION: First Sunday of Lent: Fasting wisdom

The devil said to Jesus, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, One does not live on bread alone." **Luke 4: 1-13**

Giving up something for Lent is an admirable notion, a practice from our childhood that may have lost something of its hold on many of us now that we are over-extended and under-appreciated adults. But Mallory McDuff, a mom and a college professor, has rediscovered grace in the practice of self-denial. She writes in The Huffington Post [April 1, 2014]:

"As a Christian, I give up something for Lent because Jesus went into the wilderness to fast for forty days. I yearn to be part of something larger than myself, to sacrifice something small, recognizing that our world needs less consumption and more contemplation. "As a mother, I give up something for Lent because I want my daughters to know that I can survive six weeks without drinking a beer after work. And I want to remind myself that I can. "As a teacher, I give up something for Lent because I am weary of the dopamine hits from checking e-mail and Facebook and the headlines, as if I'm checking the pulse of a patient. For six weeks, I need to practice a pause. As a child of God, I give up something for Lent because I have experienced losses: a mother, a father, an unborn child, a marriage. "As a person of hope, I give up something for Lent because I want to prepare for a celebration."

Fasting is more than just about self-denial: it's about refocusing on what and who are most important in our lives; it's about re-claiming what we want our lives to be as we begin new chapters; it's about making time and space to "turn around" - the meaning of the word conversion - in order to find our way out of our winters of cynicism, our deserts of self-absorption, our wildernesses of despair and hopelessness. May this Lent be a time for discovering the sense of communion with God that we can experience through fasting - not only fasting from food, but fasting from media that is candy for the mind in order to experience words and images that nourish the soul; fasting from shopping for some new trinket in order to share our treasure with those for whom simple everyday survival is a constant struggle; fasting from an over-scheduled calendar in order to reconnect with family and friends; fasting from anger, impatience and our need to be in control in order to recognize our humbleness before God; fasting from whatever deters us from being centered fully in the great love of God that is especially present to us in this Lenten springtime.



SMILE WITH YOUR FAMILY



Getting Ready for Lent?

If you can start the day without caffeine or pills,
If you can understand when loved ones are too busy to give you time,
If you can take criticism and blame without resentment,
If you can face the world without lies and deceit,
If you can relax without liquor,
If you can sleep without the aid of drugs ...
If you can do all these things, then you are probably the family dog .

Meaning of Dust? A little boy came home from Ash Wednesday Service and went into his room to change his clothes. When he emerged he asked his mother, "Is it true we come from dust?" "Yes dear," replied mother. "Is it true that when we die we go back to the dust?" "Yes dear, that's right." The little boy ran into his room and came out all excited, "Mom, I just looked under my bed and there's someone either coming or going!"



Lent 2016

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

When Pope Francis announced in April 2015 there would be an Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy beginning December 8, he called Catholics across the globe to embark on “a journey that starts with a spiritual conversion.” As our Lenten journey begins, we, the baptized faithful, have a special opportunity to accept this personal invitation to join our Holy Father in responding to this constant call to conversion in our own lives.

Fortunately, there are many simple but impactful ways to foster this inner conversion, to draw nearer to the gift of our Catholic faith, to experience the infinite love and mercy of Christ and, in turn, to share his love and mercy with others whom we encounter. As we, the Church, enter into this most sacred time of penance, reflection and fasting, I offer the following suggestions for consideration:

Set aside time to pray. A good rule of thumb is to take fifteen minutes each day for prayer in a place free of technology and distraction. During that time, try to be open to the presence of the Risen Christ. Meditate on the gift of the breath of God's life in all of creation and offer God your thanks. Consider the depth of God's love. He became one of us, suffered, died, and rose from the dead so that we may live!

Plan a pilgrimage to a shrine or significant place that may lead to spiritual conversion. During this Year of Mercy, I have designated ten worship sites in the diocese as places of pilgrimage; each location has designated a Holy Door. Pilgrims who travel to these places will find a welcoming community and have prayerful opportunities to experience God's extravagant merciful love.

Acknowledge sins and seek forgiveness through the Sacrament of Penance. Whether you are a regular penitent or have been away from the Church or the Sacrament for a while, Lent is a perfect time to experience this very intimate encounter with God's mercy that is intended to lead to one's spiritual conversion. Every time we sin, we hurt ourselves, other people, and God. In the Sacrament of Penance, we acknowledge our sins, express our sorrow, receive the forgiveness of Christ and his Church and resolve to do better in the future.

Welcome the stranger. We are living at a time when many are fearful of the stranger. This very human response to world events is understandable; however, I encourage you, “Do not be afraid!” During Lent, let us consider the many strangers in our midst, locally and afar, and take time to reflect on how the Gospel calls each of us to respond to protect the life and dignity of the human person. This is an ideal time to find ways to advocate for refugees, migrants, unaccompanied children, and victims of human trafficking with a welcoming spirit, in unity with our Holy Father.

Demonstrate compassion for the outcast. Many are lonely, homeless and rejected. Do you know anyone who may be considered an outcast by society? How does the Gospel call you to respond to these individuals with compassion?

Bring hope to the poor. So many among us are not able to afford basic shelter, basic health services, and good nutrition. Where are the poor near you? How can you assist them? How does the Gospel call you to bring Christ our Hope to these poor?

And so, as we begin this season of Lent, I urge you to consider entering more deeply into the Jubilee of Mercy by opening your heart to experience the infinite love and mercy of Christ and by finding ways to express the same unconditional love and mercy toward others. Then, with spiritual conversion, your celebration of Easter will be filled with the joy of the Risen Christ.

Jesus Christ yesterday, today and forever!

Sincerely in the Lord,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Paul G. Bootkoski".

Most Rev. Paul G. Bootkoski
Bishop of Metuchen



CatholicMatch
New Jersey

CatholicMatch.com/dateNJ

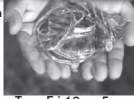
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