

On Ash Wednesday I was watching the news on television; an expert was interviewed about some headline of the day. He had ashes on his forehead. While many viewers probably had no idea what was on his forehead, to me he had obviously been to worship earlier in the day. That Ash Wednesday evening I took part in a service, in a congregation of a denomination without a significant Ash Wednesday tradition, and received the sign of the cross in ashes on my forehead, with the words “Dust you are, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19). On few occasions are we so clearly reminded of our own mortality. I found this biblical word grounding for me as the next day I received troubling news of serious illnesses of a friend and of a family member.

This tradition of ashes, from the first centuries of the Christian church, while now associated primarily with the Roman Catholic Church, has become part of the life of many congregations, including some Moravian churches.

In the United States and Canada the Roman Catholic tradition of fasting from meat on Fridays is now limited mainly to Fridays in Lent. In the Catholic parish in my neighborhood the Lenten Friday fish dinners have become a major social event—a tradition that is shared with the community and makes the parish much more visible to those outside the church.

The Moravian Church has two particular Lenten traditions. One is the Easter sunrise service, concluding in the church graveyard. This was first observed in Herrnhut, Germany, in 1732, a decade after the founding of the town. (Of course there is the much older tradition, from the early centuries of the Christian church, of the Easter vigil.) At that time most people lived in small towns, and most churches had a graveyard. The Easter sunrise service is now part of the life of many Christian groups. While the message of resurrection is clearer when the service concludes in the adjacent cemetery, the early hour of the service still tells us of God’s surprise in the raising of Jesus.

Another special Moravian tradition is services in Holy Week that involve simply reading, with interspersed hymns, all that the four Gospels tell us about the week of Jesus’ crucifixion. While in reading from this harmony of the Gospels we lose the special emphases of each of the four Gospels, we do gain contact with all the stories of Jesus in that week.

These quiet services do not appeal to everyone, but they are an important part of our Moravian tradition and perhaps worth sharing. I like to compare them to the Roman Catholic tradition of daily mass, a tradition maintained in many parishes, but one that few Catholics take advantage of. If you have never participated in this unique Moravian tradition, I urge you to do so this year.

Jesus, our crucified and risen Lord, through the words and actions of your ministry, especially of your last week, fill us with an understanding of your love for us, your children, and challenge us anew to give of ourselves for the benefit of your whole human family. Amen.

Hermann Weinlick

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The Mission of our Ministry

Our mission states: “**Good Shepherd Community Church is a family of faith where God loves, Christ leads and people serve.**” The purpose of this mission statement is to be a reference for our ministries. Throughout the year, we will highlight one ministry in each monthly newsletter to educate our readers and invite them to pray and participate in the work we do for God’s glory. This month we are highlighting the Good Shepherd Prayer-Chain Ministry.

The Prayer Chain is one way our congregation remains grounded in faith as a church family. The Prayer Chain is made up of church members with a passion to pray for others. Originally, this ministry was called a Prayer Tree. It began with Isabelle Elliott as the “trunk” who received the prayer requests of individuals. She then called a few people on the team (branches) who in turn called others (twigs). This was before computers became a regular part of communication. Justin Narum then took over and eventually passed the leadership on to Helen Norton who brought this work into the computer age. Currently Joan Altenhof receives prayer requests and passes them on to the prayer team. Her email address is, altenhof@shaw.ca. Prayer requests can be as detailed or as simple as desired and all requests are considered confidential unless otherwise indicated.

Prayer is a witness to the presence of God’s love. As Joan indicates, “I found the prayer chain a blessing and a comfort. I do get feedback from some of the people that have requesting prayer giving thanks for all the prayers that have gone out on their behalf.”