



February 14, 2020

Friends,

The National Association of Episcopal Schools describes Episcopal Schools as institutions that *"...invite all who attend and work in them—Episcopalians and non-Episcopalians, Christians and non-Christians, people of no faith tradition—both to seek clarity about their own beliefs and religions and to honor those traditions more fully and faithfully in their own lives."* We embrace this sentiment at St. Michael's and strive to live into these ideals through the intentional design of our academic and chapel programs. With this ideal in mind, **we want to provide some more details and clarity regarding participation in two particular Lenten programs: Ash Wednesday on February 26 and the Maundy Thursday Eucharist on April 9.**

The liturgical season of Lent is a forty-day season of the church year starting Ash Wednesday and leading up to Easter. During this season, many Christians incorporate disciplines of prayer, almsgiving, and fasting (i.e., taking something on, or giving something up) in order to draw closer to God. As an Episcopal School, we feel it is appropriate to provide clarity around what this season means for the Episcopal tradition and encourage students and faculty alike to explore how it might fit within their own beliefs as they mature. Thus, we will hold two special all-school chapel services during Lent: Ash Wednesday (Feb. 26) and Maundy Thursday (Apr. 9) led by Christian Hansen and the Rev. Jeunée Godsey.

On Ash Wednesday, ashes are imposed on the forehead to remind us of our mortality and that "from dust we were created, and to dust we shall return". On Maundy Thursday, we will celebrate communion together, remembering Jesus' last supper and the institution of the Eucharistic sacrament. The Episcopal Church defines the Eucharist as "...the sacrament of Christ's body and blood, and the principal act of Christian worship. The term is from the Greek, 'thanksgiving.'" In the Episcopal tradition, Eucharist is open to all Christians no matter of denomination.

The Eucharist is an opportunity to give thanks for the blessings God has given us in our lives. As it became for the disciples following Jesus' death and resurrection, it also serves as a reminder that while Jesus is no longer here on Earth, He is always with us to guide us and help us.

What does this mean for my child?

- On **Ash Wednesday**, all will be invited to receive the imposition of ashes on their forehead, though no one is required. Children will all walk forward with their classmates, but if they do not wish to receive ashes, they may cross their arms over their chest to receive a simple blessing.

- ***Parents are invited to join us for an all school chapel at 8:20 a.m. in the Gym or are welcome to attend Ash Wednesday services at St. Michael's Episcopal Church at noon or 7 p.m. to receive ashes.***
- On **Maundy Thursday**, all are invited to participate in the sacrament of Holy Communion, though none are required to receive. You will want to talk with your child about your own faith tradition and how that informs your family's choice about how they will participate. During the time of communion, all students will walk forward with their class, and if they are not receiving, they will cross their arms over their chest and receive a simple blessing. Those receiving communion will do so by "intinction" meaning that student will receive the bread (*gluten-free wafers available*) and dip the bread into the consecrated grape juice. Alternatively, students may receive just the bread and not partake of the grape juice.
 - ***Parents are also invited to join us for chapel at 8:20 a.m. in the Gym or at 7 p.m. at St. Michael's Church for Holy Eucharist, Foot Washing, and Stripping of the Altar in preparation for Good Friday.***

One more invitation: The day before Ash Wednesday is Shrove Tuesday (or Mardi Gras) and St. Michael's Church will be hosting a Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper from 5:30 - 7 p.m. (2040 McRae Rd, Bon Air). All donations for the dinner will support the Impact Richmond mission trip which St. Michael's School students are invited to participate in this summer. Additionally, the Hale Stone Big Band will be playing during the dinner. It will be a festive time to celebrate before the more penitential season of Lent begins. You are invited to attend.

Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns about how we are planning to celebrate this season of the church year. We are also happy to provide any additional resources that might inform your discussions with your children or help clarify their questions. Above it all, though, we invite you to explore with your child(ren) your own faith tradition and what the season of Lent means for you.

Blessings,

Christian Hansen
Chaplain

The Rev. Jeunée Godsey
Rector, St. Michael's Church

Bob Gregg
Head of School