

**M**y dear friends,

On Wednesday, Feb. 25 we celebrate Ash Wednesday which marks the beginning of the Lenten season, a penitential season that helps us prepare for the great celebrations of the Pascal Mystery and the Sacred Triduum including Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter. Our reception of ashes is a sign of our willingness to undertake the journey that will bring us to Easter with hearts and minds renewed by the word of God, by our own penitential practices and those asked of us by the church. Lent is also the special time when those preparing for Baptism at the Easter Vigil and those being welcomed into the church receive a much more intense preparation.

Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are days of universal fast and abstinence in the church. Those who are age eighteen (18th birthday) to the beginning of their sixtieth year (59th birthday) are bound by the law of fasting. Fasting means simply that a person partakes of only one full meal on a fast day. The obligation to fast allows for the two smaller meals that ordinarily would not exceed the main meal.

All who have completed their fourteenth year (15th birthday) are obligated to abstain from meat on days of abstinence. Abstinence from meat is also to be observed on the Fridays of Lent. There can be reasons to be excused from these obligations such as health or other circumstances. It is important to look to the intent of these regulations and see them as a concrete way to live the penitential season of Lent.

These acts of self denial as well as others that we may undertake are to be done in remembrance of the passion of Christ as well as a continual reminder to ourselves of our need for repentance and conversion. I encourage your participation in the Eucharistic celebrations in your parishes throughout Lent as well in the special devotions that will be available including the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

All of our Lenten efforts should lead us to Holy Week when we will gather on Palm Sunday to celebrate the triumphant entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem followed by the Passion account. In the Diocese of Grand Rapids, the priests, deacons and representatives of all our parishes will gather with me on Tuesday evening to celebrate the gift of the priesthood and bless the Sacred Oils that will be used in our parishes throughout the year for Baptisms, Anointing of the Sick and Confirmations. On Holy Thursday



► Bishop Hurley greets students from schools throughout the diocese following the Catholic Schools Week Mass at the Cathedral of Saint Andrew on Tues., Jan. 27.

parishioners will gather to celebrate the Mass of the Lord's Supper marking the institution of the Eucharist. On Good Friday we will remember the death of the Lord and on Easter His triumphant victory over sin, darkness and death. It is at Easter that we welcome new members of the church through Baptism and formal reception. I encourage you to enter into these sacred mysteries by participating in all the celebrations of Holy Week. Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter are the great holy days of the church. Once we begin the Sacred Triduum our focus should be on the liturgical celebrations. No other parish activity should interfere with these holy days.

As I reflect on Lent, it is from a much different perspective than when I was young. Lent seemed like a dreaded time

during which many of the things I liked to do were prohibited. As an adult, however, I see Lent as an opportunity to draw closer to the Lord, examine my life, and put some things in order that need attention.

I invite the people of the diocese to begin a Lenten journey by receiving ashes on Ash Wednesday as a mark of a commitment to live Lent on a daily basis. I invite everyone to use this grace-filled time as an opportunity to draw closer to the Lord and to one another.

Throughout January important efforts were taking place in our diocesan community focusing on Sanctity of Life, service to others and Catholic education:

**Sanctity of Life:** During the month of January, it was wonderful to see the expanded involvement of young people from our Catholic high schools, Aquinas College and Grand Valley State University as well as individuals and members of various parish pro-life groups from the diocese as they participated in the Annual March for Life in Washington, D.C. I am grateful to all who work so tirelessly to uphold and defend the dignity of life at all stages.

**Catholic Charities West Michigan (CCWM):** In late January, several hundred supporters of the work of CCWM gathered for the "Soup's On" event in Grand Rapids, which raises funds for God's Kitchen to provide thousands of meals throughout the year to those in need. Catholic Charities West Michigan provides assistance to those in need through a variety of services and outreach rooted in the heart of Christ showing forth the love of God. In late February "Soup's On Along the Lakeshore" will be held to provide funding for Muskegon's Loaves and

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**Semana de las Escuelas Católicas:** El mes de enero también presencié nuestra tercera misa anual de la Semana de Escuelas Católicas en la Catedral de San Andrés. Más de 700 personas entre personal administrativo, profesorado y estudiantes representando nuestras escuelas diocesanas vinieron para dar gracias a Dios por las bendiciones que nos llegan a través del ministerio de la educación católica. Posiblemente les interesará saber que en nuestra diócesis, así como en la mayoría de las diócesis del país, no tenemos un sistema escolar sino una federación de escuelas individuales. Nuestras escuelas primarias son parroquiales, por tanto la responsabilidad de su funcionamiento es de la parroquia local. La diócesis provee ciertos servicios—programa escolar, cuestiones de leyes (estatales, federales y eclesiales), supervisión de credenciales del profesorado y coordinación del calendario. Además de los \$18 millones en subsidios que proveen las parroquias, sin contar las cuotas, la diócesis también ofrece algunas becas a nivel primario y secundario.

La crisis económica, los costos de la educación, los cambios demográficos y la falta de deseo de parte de algunos padres de familia para enviar a sus hijos a nuestras escuelas, han creado una grave situación en todo el país. Tanto *The Wall Street Journal* como *The New York Times* informaron recientemente sobre dicha situación. Debemos asimismo afrontar la realidad que otros factores como las escuelas “charter”, escuelas alternativas y educación en casa están impactando las decisiones de muchos padres de familia acerca de donde educar a sus hijos.

Nuestras escuelas deben ser académicamente excelentes, sostenibles y viables, igualmente deben tener una fuerte identidad católica todo lo cual exige que haya suficientes estudiantes para hacer que los costos para las familias y los subsidios parroquiales sean razonables en relación a todas las necesidades de la parroquia. Generalmente es difícil contar estas capacidades. El Espíritu de Dios está vivo en nuestras parroquias. Necesitamos mirar juntos a modos nuevos y creativos de hacer todo lo que esté a nuestro alcance para que, donde posible, haya escuelas católicas de calidad. Estoy muy agradecido con los padres de familia, el profesorado, el personal administrativo, los párrocos y los benefactores que capacitan nuestras escuelas para hacer tan buen trabajo.

Que la bendición de Dios esté con todos ustedes mientras seguimos adelante en la fe durante la temporada Cuaresmal y Pascual.

Sinceramente suyo en el Señor,

**Muy Reverendo Walter A. Hurley**  
**Obispo de Grand Rapids**

that they “intentionally” keep each other special in their day. Plan for time together and do something special each day for each other no matter how small; i.e. a note in the lunch box, a bouquet of flowers from the grocery store or cook a special dinner and eat it in candle light. Joe and Cathy would do

Fishes Food Pantry and the Christian Community Center. In these difficult economic times this work becomes ever more important. I am grateful to all the supporters of CCWM, to the staff and hundreds of volunteers that carry out the Lord’s command to love one another.

**Catholic Schools Week:** January also saw our third annual Catholic Schools Week Mass at the Cathedral of Saint Andrew. Over 700 administration, faculty and students representing our diocesan schools came to give thanks to God for the blessings that come to us through the ministry of Catholic education. You may be interested in knowing that in our diocese, as in most dioceses throughout the country, we do not have a school system but rather a federation of individual schools. Our elementary schools are parish-based and the responsibility for their operation rests with the local parish. The diocese provides certain services – curriculum, compliance (state, federal and church law) issues, oversight of faculty credentials and calendar coordination. In addition to the \$18 million in subsidies provided by parishes over and above tuition, the diocese also provides some scholarships at both the elementary and secondary levels.

The difficult economic times, educational costs, changing population patterns as well as a lack of desire on the part of some parents to send their children to our schools, have created a serious situation throughout our country. Both the *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* have recently reported on this situation. We must also face the reality that other factors such as charter schools, schools of choice and home-schooling are impacting many parents’ decisions about where to educate their children.

Our schools must be academically excellent, sustainable and viable, and have a strong Catholic identity which requires having enough students to make the costs to parents and parish subsidies reasonable in relation to all parish needs. It is often hard to quantify these qualifications. The Spirit of God is alive in our parishes. Together we need to look at new and creative ways to do all we can to make quality Catholic school education available where possible. I am grateful to parents, faculty, administrators, pastors and benefactors for enabling our schools to do such good work.

May the blessings of God be with all of you as we move forward in faith through the Lenten and Easter seasons.

Sincerely yours in the Lord,

**Most Reverend Walter A. Hurley**  
**Bishop of Grand Rapids**

well to remember that the love that brought them together and produced baby Kevin is a dimension of God’s unending love for the two of them. God will help them keep their coupleness at the center of their family unit if they ask him.

– Tom and JoAnne Fogle