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Dear Parents,

Today is Ash Wednesday and the beginning of the season of Lent. Ash Wednesday is a date on the church calendar that has been celebrated for about two thousand years. Ash Wednesday is a time to grieve our sin and repent. The ashes symbolize our grief for our sin, much like the people in the Old Testament grieved their sins (Jeremiah 6:26) and repented. In some churches, ashes are placed on the forehead in the shape of a cross to symbolize grief for our sins. The cross symbolizes Christ's sacrifice on the cross that has paid the price for our sins.

The purpose of Ash Wednesday and the season of Lent is to prepare our hearts for Easter similar to Advent preparing us for Christmas. When we spend time preparing for the celebration of a day or event, that celebration typically takes on a new and deeper meaning. This is the intention of Lent. Easter is such an important event for us as Christians, and celebrating Lent is a tool that may help us celebrate Easter in a deeper way.

During the service tonight, I encouraged the students to participate in the season of Lent by committing to a "fast." I gave them a card on which they wrote down something that they would commit to abstain from for the next 40 days. As examples, I encouraged the students to give up things like texting, Facebook, soda, deserts, movies, television, or something else that could easily distract them and their relationship with God. I also encouraged them to write down something that they would do in place of the thing they decided to give up. The purpose of a "fast" like this is to actively seek a deeper relationship with God by abstaining from the things that distract us and focusing on the things that will promote a deep relationship with Him.

My intention during this service was to make it abundantly clear to the students that committing to a "fast" is not a way to earn anything from God. On the contrary, committing to a "fast" simply helps us to focus on God rather than ourselves. This is actually celebration of what Jesus has done for us on our behalf. We acknowledge that we are sinners who are constantly distracted in our relationship with God, and we desperately need God's forgiveness through Jesus.

Thank you for reading this letter. If you have questions or concerns regarding the events of this evening, please let me know so that we can talk more about it.

Peace,

Rev. Mike Fennema
Assistant Pastor – Youth Ministry
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