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Say Something Theological: The Student Journal of Loyola Marymount University Theological Studies

“How Are We Refocusing Our Lives on God?”: Implementing the Lenten Vision of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* on a High School Campus

By Michael Ashley-Mennis

Abstract: In many Catholic high schools, students discuss Lent with a focus on their actions associated with penance, fasting and almsgiving as a self-denial Olympics without understanding the true purpose. This causes students to robotically move through the motions of Lent instead of internalizing it as a period of preparation for Baptism and penance. This paper will propose a program, for the Catholic high school setting, on how to implement the Second Vatican Council’s vision of Lent, as outlined in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. The paper begins by exploring the history and development of Lent throughout the centuries. It then examines the twofold characteristics of Lent as outlined in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* as preparation for Baptism as well as a period of penance. After analyzing the two characteristics in the constitution, I examine how they are operationalized in the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) into the presentations and Scrutinies. Next, I propose a seven-week Lenten program on how to better implement the Council's vision of Lent at a Catholic high school. This will be implemented by discussing a different theme every week based on the order and content of the presentations and Scrutinies as outlined by the RCIA. This program will refocus students’ Lenten observance as a period of preparation and calls for more research into how to bridge the program into the celebration of Easter. This will lead conversations in the classrooms and halls away from “What are you giving up?” to “How are we refocusing our lives on God?”

Keywords: Catholic Education, History of Lent, Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA), *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Lent

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Every year, in preparation for the annual Lenten Penance service or Ash Wednesday service, the same question comes up in class: “Mr., what are you giving up for Lent?” With an internal groan but an outward smile, I respond with something like junk food or dessert. In the small conversations that immediately pop up after my answer or in the halls, you hear the more pious students asking each other the same question, with answers such as candy and soda being mentioned, or even the bold offering of giving up video games or social media! This type of modern, self-denial Olympics speaks to a theology of Lent that focuses more on what am I giving up to please God than the twofold characteristics of Lent the Church outlines in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy), which are preparation for baptism and penance. While some may argue the self-denial Olympics is penance, this theological understanding of penance does not fit the vision of penance outlined within the Church’s liturgical celebrations during Lent. This leads to the questions of why Lent is celebrated in this satisfaction mindset, how the Church is truly calling us to celebrate Lent, and how that vision can then be operationalized within a Catholic High School setting.

To explore these questions, I will analyze the development of Lent over the centuries and its movement both towards and away from being a period of penance and preparation for Baptism. I will then examine the twofold characteristics of Lent, as outlined in the Second Vatican Councils' constitution, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, of Lent as preparation for Baptism as well as a period of penance. Lastly, taking the themes and insights from this exploration, I will propose a program for how to implement the Council's vision into a Catholic High School’s celebration of Lent.

The History of Lent

Like a vine looping and wrapping around itself, the Lent we recognize today has grown and morphed over the centuries. “Lent,” as a specific forty-day span of preparation for Easter, did not begin until the fourth century and did not become a nearly universal practice until the end of the fourth century.¹ This may appear odd as the centrality of the Easter celebration within current liturgical celebrations of Christianity reigns paramount in the minds of many Christians. It would therefore

¹ Martin Connell, “Lent,” in *Eternity Today on the Liturgical Year, Vol. 2: Sunday, Lent, The Three Days, The Easter Season, Ordinary Time* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 60.

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surprise many to discover that the celebration of Easter as a separate anniversary of the Passion and Resurrection of Christ marked out with fasting and prayer did not begin until the second century.² Prior to this, the liturgical scholar, priest, and Second Vatican Council consultant, Adrien Nocent, argues that Christians of the first century, “did not see the need for a special celebration of Christ’s Passover [...] since the rite of the Last Supper, renewed each Sunday [...] made the mystery of death and resurrection an ever-present reality.”³ As the annual celebration evolved in the late second/early third century, Easter was prolonged into a fifty-day celebration with a “final upsurge on the fiftieth day.”⁴ Moving into the fourth century, the feast of Pentecost developed and “focused attention on this final upsurge of Easter spirit.”⁵ With the development of Easter came a parallel development of a desire to prepare for the Easter period of celebration.

A period of fasting in preparation for Easter grew parallel to the development of the Easter celebrations. Nocent states, “The paschal festivities required preparation [...] from the very beginning, there was a fast [...] in preparation for the annual observance. Soon this fast became longer and longer and acquired a great importance.”⁶ At first, this fast was a few days, then a week, and then expanded into three weeks of preparation. The French Catholic priest, liturgist, and Second Vatican Council consultant Aimé Martimort in his text *The Church at Prayer: An Introduction to the Liturgy*, points to Egypt as being where the first forty-day fast, independent from Easter, developed around the end of the third and beginning of the fourth century with its primary purpose of celebrating Jesus’ time in the desert during the weeks after his baptism.⁷ As stated, around the period of the fourth century, this practice began to spread and became nearly universal, with the historical and liturgical scholar Martin Connell positing that this was with imperial support in order to unite eastern and western practices within the Church.⁸ With this development and the parallel organization of the catechumenate,

² Adrien Nocent, *The Liturgical Year, Volume Two: Lent, The Sacred Paschal Triduum, Easter Time*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2013), 53.

³ Nocent, *The Liturgical Year*, 53.

⁴ Nocent, 54.

⁵ Nocent, 54.

⁶ Nocent, 54.

⁷ Aimé Georges Martimort, ed., *The Church at Prayer: An Introduction to the Liturgy, Volume IV: The Liturgy and Time* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1985), 66.

⁸ Connell, “Lent,” 72.

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Martimort states, “Lent offered an appropriate framework in which to conduct the final preparation of the catechumens for their Baptism during the Easter Vigil.”⁹ With the Vigil also symbolizing the reconciling of God and humanity through the Paschal Mystery, the Vigil became the event of final reconciliation and readmission of sinners to communion after their period of canonical penance.¹⁰ This meant that Lent became the period of final preparation for this reconciliation.¹¹ Lent’s focus then primarily became one of preparation for baptism, renewal, and repentance. Nocent asserted, “this intense preparation of the catechumens and the organization of Lent for the purpose evidently shaped not only the Lenten liturgy but the Lenten spirit as well. The whole community fasted in union with both the public penitents and the catechumens soon to be baptized.”¹² This focus unified the community during this period, and shaped the very spirit of Lent. It remained central to Lent until around the sixth century.

During the sixth century and lasting until the Second Vatican Council, the focus of Lent moved away from baptismal preparation of the elect and renewal to one emphasizing the sinfulness and fault of humanity. At the beginning of the sixth century, adult baptism began to become infrequent, with an uptick in presenting children being baptized. This began to change the organization of the catechumenate and the movement of the focus of Lent away from baptismal preparation.¹³ Connell argues that this developed as part of the acceptance and promulgation of the theology of original sin, leading to parents baptizing infants as soon as possible. This led to the growing focus on the penitential nature of Lent. Connell states, “as Lent lost its hinge to initiation, the meaning of the penitential practices was lost as well.”¹⁴

Also during the sixth century, the desire for a full forty days of fasting (Sundays were non-fast days) led to the Lenten fast moving from 7th Sunday before Easter to the Wednesday before the 7th

⁹ Martimort, *The Church at Prayer*, 66.

¹⁰ Martimort, 66. Martimort notes that in Rome, this reconciliation took place on Holy Thursday. (It should be noted that this current treatment of Lent provides what appears to be a unified narrative to the development of Easter and Lent. This is done primarily as a broad generalization or brush stroke of the development.) As Martin Connell makes clear in his study: “The origins of Lent are difficult to reconstruct for a number of reasons. First, the development is not a straight line, but an amalgamation from a variety of places, times and traditions. Next the terminology and dating references are foreign and sometimes difficult to translate.” See Martin Connell, “Lent,” 60.

¹¹ Martimort, 66.

¹² Nocent, *The Liturgical Year*, 56.

¹³ Nocent, 56.

¹⁴ Connell, “Lent,” 73.

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Sunday.¹⁵ During the first Lenten Mass that was celebrated on this day, the chant of “let us don sackcloth and ashes” was sung during the procession. Although this passage remained primarily spiritually interpreted in Rome, Martimort illustrates that the Rhenish countries took this more literally and desired to show this physically through instituting a rite of imposition of ashes.¹⁶ This practice slowly spread into Italy, and in 1091, the council of Benvento decreed that “on Ash Wednesday everyone, clergy and laity, men and women will receive ashes.”¹⁷ This penitential development focused the act of redemption exclusively on Jesus' suffering and death on the cross, leading penance to be oriented no longer toward baptismal renewal, but toward individual satisfaction for sins.¹⁸ This focus calcified and remained the practice of the Roman Church until the reforms of the Second Vatican Council.

The Second Vatican Council shifted the focus of Lent back to preparing for baptism and communal penance with the promulgation of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. Published in 1963, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* professed, “The season of Lent has a twofold character: primarily by recalling or preparing for Baptism and by penance, it disposes the faithful [...] to celebrate the paschal mystery.”¹⁹ The Council returned the focus of Lent to preparing the elect for Baptism and penance. Penance was also refocused, as the council moved it from a solely individual focus to reminding the faithful of the communal need for penance. The Council stated, “during Lent penance should not be only internal and individual, but also external and social. The practice of penance should be fostered in ways that are possible in our own times and in different regions, and according to the circumstance of the faithful.”²⁰ This shift back to the Lenten focus of the fourth through early sixth centuries now fights against the dominant focus of individual penance for satisfaction that reigned for over a millennium. Much of the Church, even nearly 60 years after the Council, continues to be influenced by the satisfaction sense of

¹⁵ Martimort, *The Church at Prayer*, 68.

¹⁶ Martimort, 68.

¹⁷ Martimort, 69.

¹⁸ Joyce Ann Zimmerman, “Fasting as Feasting,” *Liturgical Ministry* 19 (Spring 2010): 74-75.

¹⁹ Second Vatican Council, “*Sacrosanctum Concilium* [Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy] promulgated by his Holiness Pope Paul VI on December 4, 1963,” Accessed April 13, 2023, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html, 109.

²⁰ Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 110.



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Lent. This inspires to the need to unpack what walking with those preparing for Baptism and penance means before moving into how the Council's intentions can be operationalized into practically being implemented on a High School campus.

Two-Fold Character of Lent: Preparing for Baptism and Penance

The First Characteristic: Preparing for Baptism

In order to best understand how to walk with those preparing for baptism, one would need to look at the ordinary way in which the Church initiates those interested in becoming baptized, the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA).²¹ The RCIA declares,

The rite of Christian initiation [...] is designed for adults who, after hearing the mystery of Christ proclaimed, consciously and freely seek the living God and enter the way of faith and conversion as the Holy Spirit opens their hearts. By God's help, they will be strengthened spiritually during their preparation at the proper time and will receive the sacraments fruitfully.²²

The rite itself comprises not just the sacraments of initiation (baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist) but also the different preparatory rites for those who wish to receive full initiation into the Church. The RCIA is broken into four periods: a period of inquiry or pre-catechumenate, a period of catechumenate, a period of purification and enlightenment, and a period of post-initiation mystagogy.²³ Of most interest to this study is the period of purification and enlightenment, as it ordinarily coincides with Lent.

²¹ CNA Staff, "Forget RCIA, meet OCIA: U.S. Bishops Approve Big Name Change," *Catholic News Agency*, accessed April 20, 2023, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/254142/breaking-vatican-blames-communication-error-for-anglican-service-in-pope-s-church-in-rome>. While it is to be noted that on Nov 17th, 2021, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops renamed the RCIA to Order of Christian Initiation for Adults (OCIA), both for the purposes of clarity and continuity with research, I will be using the term RCIA.

²² International Commission on English in the Liturgy, "Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults," in *The Rites of the Catholic Church: Volume One* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990), sec. 1.

²³"Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults," sec. 2, 7.

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The third period, in which those to be initiated are referred to as the elect, is the final and most intense period of preparation which falls during Lent. This period, which starts with the Rite of Election, is one of purification and enlightenment. It is seen as a “period of more intense spiritual preparation, consisting more in interior reflection than in catechetical instruction, and is intended to purify the minds and hearts of the elect as they search their own conscience and do penance. The period is intended as well to enlighten the minds and hearts of the elect with a deeper knowledge of Christ the Savior.”²⁴ The two rites belonging to this are the Scrutinies and Presentations.

The Scrutinies are meant to “uncover, then heal all that is weak, defective or sinful in the hearts of the elect [and] to bring out, then strengthen all that is upright, strong and good.”²⁵ Jesuit priest and liturgical scholar Bruce Morrill argues that the purpose of the Scrutinies is to bring to mind what “God is saving them *from* and saving them *for*.”²⁶ This would bring to light a full and complex understanding of sin, not just as specific wrongs but, “whatever deals death in a particular person’s life, whatever burdens the person, weighs him or her down, impeding their walking in the light.”²⁷ The Scrutinies take place ordinarily during Mass on the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent.²⁸ They take place during the Liturgy of the Word, occurring after the homily, including the elements of silent prayer, special intercessions for the elect, and a prayer of exorcism before dismissal.²⁹ The three Scrutinies pull from the imagery and text of the Gospel of John, focusing specifically on John 4 (The Samaritan Woman/ First Scrutiny), John 9 (Healing the Man born blind/ Second Scrutiny), and John 11 (Raising of Lazarus/ Third Scrutiny). Scholars John W.B. Hill and D. Jay Koyle see the choice of these three narratives as part of the larger story of “Jesus’ work in liberating those who are enslaved to the rule of ‘the prince of this world.’”³⁰ In their analysis, they state that the purpose of the Scrutinies “is the discernment of those elements of bondage from which the elect still suffer (rather than convincing them of unacknowledged

²⁴ “Rite of Initiation of Adults,” sec. 139.

²⁵ “Rite of Initiation of Adults,” sec. 141.

²⁶ Bruce Morrill, “The Paschal Mystery Personified: A Commentary on the Rites of RCIA,” *Liturgical Ministry* 15 (Spring 2006): 84. (emphasis in original text).

²⁷ Morrill, “The Paschal Mystery Personified,” 84.

²⁸ “Rite of Initiation of Adults,” sec. 146.

²⁹ See “Rite of Initiation of Adults,” sec. 150-156, 164-170, and 171-177 for the first, second and third Scrutiny.

³⁰ John W.B. Hill and D. Jay Koyle, “A Perspective on the Scrutinies of the RCIA,” *Liturgical Ministry* 15 (Spring 2006): 106.

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sins they have committed), trusting that, through this act of prayer, they will be delivered.”³¹ The Scrutinies, while focusing on the reality of evil and sin in the world and its presence in our lives, are not meant to be seen as condemning but point to our liberation from sin and death through Jesus’ Paschal Mystery. These rites of hope pointing to liberation are paired with the Rites of Presentation, which also occur during this period.

The Presentations are celebrations in which the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer are presented to the elect. The introduction to the Presentations states,

These texts are presented in order to enlighten the elect. The Creed, as it recalls the wonderful deeds of God for the salvation of the human race, suffuses the vision of the elect with the sure light of faith. The Lord’s prayer fills them with a deeper realization of the new spirit of adoption by which they will call God their Father, especially in the midst of the eucharistic assembly.³²

These two texts provide the core tenants of the faith as well as the prayer given to the faithful by Jesus in order to teach us how to commune with God. The Rite of Presentation comes during the Liturgy of the Word. For the Rite of Presentation of the Lord’s Prayer, after the first reading, psalm, and second reading, the elect are called forward.³³ The celebrant instructs the elect to “listen to the Gospel reading in which our Lord teaches his followers how to pray” and then reads the section of the Gospel of Matthew in which Jesus teaches his disciples the Lord’s Prayer.³⁴ After the Gospel, the celebrant proclaims a homily, there is a prayer over the elect, and they are dismissed. The Presentation of the Lord’s Prayer symbolically hands over to the elect the Lord’s Prayer the same way as the baptized had learned it, from Christ himself as passed on by the Church. The Presentation of the Creed is similar, yet the presentation of the Creed is not until after the homily. In this Rite of Presentation, the Elect are called forward, and the whole assembly then recites either the Nicene Creed or Apostles Creed.³⁵ The Elect receive the faith from the community, having that one faith that unites the faithful into a

³¹ John W.B. Hill and D. Jay Koyle, “A Perspective on the Scrutinies of the RCIA,” 106.

³² “Rite of Initiation of Adults,” sec. 147.

³³ “Rite of Initiation of Adults,” sec. 178-184.

³⁴ “Rite of Initiation of Adults,” sec. 180.

³⁵ “Rite of Initiation of Adults,” sec. 157-163.

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community presented to those who wish to join the community. The Rite of Preparation and the Scrutinies are the two primary ways in which the community walks with those preparing for baptism. While *Sacrosanctum Concilium* calls the primary purpose of Lent recalling or preparing for baptism, the secondary character of Lent is penance which traditionally is characterized by prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

The Second Characteristic: Penance

Many continue to carry the theology of penance as a form of satisfaction that was the dominant theology from the 6th century through the Second Vatican Council. This could not be further from the current intention and theology of penance that has grown out of and since the Second Vatican Council. In “The Confession of Our Lowliness: The Summons of the Lenten Presidential Prayers,” scholar Gerard Moore illustrates how the theology of penance can be understood through the Lenten liturgies. To start, he states, “Lent is the liturgical season in which we celebrate that before God, we are humble and guilty. In broad sweep, the prayers speak of the time as a period of inner reflection, self-denial, discipline and penance, yet marked by joy and tinged with cheerfulness.”³⁶ The focus of this humility and guilt is not on an irredeemable debt we owe God, but on the recognition that while we fail, God’s overabundance of mercy and love brings about our salvation.

Lent’s penitential character centers around our total dependence on God. This dependence is not based on an understanding of sin that tries to explain why sin exists, and due to that reason, we need salvation; but on an acceptance of the existence of sin and an understanding that due to its existence and our participation in it, we need salvation. Moore states how the liturgical prayers “are clear that sin is alluring, consisting of ‘harmful pleasures,’ ‘false joys,’ and ‘bodily delights’ that hinder. One aspect of this harm is that it leads the heart to ‘human excess,’ a point which underlies the importance of self-denial.”³⁷ Sin is seen to permeate our lives and earthly experience, yet “the response sought in the orations is not to eschew mortal nature or mother nature, but to imbue our mortal lives with immortal graces and the things of earth with heavenly gifts.”³⁸ Following this the Lenten liturgical prayers focus

³⁶ Gerard Moore, “The Confession of Our Lowliness: The Summons of the Lenten Presidential Prayers,” *Liturgical Ministry* 19 (Spring 2010): 67.

³⁷ Moore, “The Confession of Our Lowliness,” 69.

³⁸ Moore, 69.

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on healing, cleansing, and strengthening humans in order “for us to return fully to the life of grace.”³⁹ Healing and cleansing are found within the liturgical prayers asking for the healing of the soul and health of the mind and body.⁴⁰ Moore states, “Once cleansed, the faithful are better able to live holiness and attain the fullness of grace.”⁴¹ This cleansing and healing work with a strengthening which, while done by God, humanity participates in through performing acts of penance. This then brings into question what is meant by penance and how one participates in it.

Penance needs to be understood in its ancient context as one of conversion and not as repaying a debt. Moore points out the true sense of penance by analyzing the Latin term *paenitenti*; “We are used to its sense of difficulty and ‘doing’ penance; however, the ancient liturgical root refers to ‘change of heart’ rather than to feats of endurance [...] Prominent among the activities of Lent is fasting.”⁴² So how does one see fasting as a way of changing one's heart rather than acts of endurance or paying for one's sin?

The key to understanding fasting as changing one's heart is through understanding it in relation to prayer and almsgiving as well as seeing all three as bringing one into right relationships. In “Fasting as Feasting,” Joyce Ann Zimmerman points out that “if fasting is to fulfill its real purpose – to help us grow spiritually – it must be embraced as a good, as much more than a pious discipline, and as something positive and desirable that we embrace wholeheartedly.”⁴³ To accomplish this, she focuses on how within the Gospel from Ash Wednesday, prayer, fasting, and almsgiving are brought together and shown to be interrelated. She concludes that this interrelation is due to how each points us to being in right relationships. She argues that almsgiving puts one into right relationship with others, prayer puts one into right relationship with God, and fasting puts one into right relationship with oneself.⁴⁴ While these three can be seen as putting one into specific right relationships, they are all intertwined through a theology of the Church. Zimmerman brings this together by arguing that as all members of the Church are baptized into the Body of Christ, “we never again act in isolation.”⁴⁵ She states,

³⁹ Moore, 69.

⁴⁰ Moore, 69-70.

⁴¹ Moore, 70.

⁴² Moore, 70.

⁴³ Zimmerman, “Fasting as Feasting,” 72.

⁴⁴ Zimmerman, 73.

⁴⁵ Zimmerman, 73.



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Good toward others is good given to Christ. Right relationship with others is right relationship with Christ. And right relationship with Christ is right relationship with God. [...] We cannot separate our regard for each other and how that regard is expressed in good (or ill) toward the other from a strong (or weak) relationship with God. Fasting is a *religious* act binding [...] us more closely to God and others.⁴⁶

One cannot then take fasting in isolation, as through the imagery of the Body of Christ, prayer, fasting, and almsgiving are intricately intertwined. Fasting serves as a means of distancing oneself from sin and strengthening one's relationship with God. Prayer, in turn, facilitates this process by deepening one's close contact and loving relationship with God. As one's relationship with God continues to grow stronger, it naturally prompts outward expressions of this deepening love through almsgiving. While this analysis plays on the individual level, it must be noted that the Church, as seen in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, does not call for this to be only done alone but to be done in and by one's community and the entire Church. These penitential interactions of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving are individual and communal in nature, and the entire Body of Christ is seen to be taking part in this interplay as a whole. Through this lens of the right relationship, one can see how penance becomes more about the conversion of the heart and a redirecting of oneself toward deeper participation in the Body of Christ. Through and because of this, one's relationship with God is strengthened. So how can all this practically be brought into a high school community encouraging its members to live out the vision of Lent provided by *Sacrosanctum Concilium*?

Reimagining Lent on a High School Campus

In order to reimagine the observance of Lent on a high school campus, one would reorient the ritual and programmatic activities (both in-class activities and outside of class activities) to focus on preparing for baptism and penance. A way of doing this for the entire community would be tapping into the major themes and rituals from the period of purification and enlightenment of the RCIA to shape weekly themes that would lead to programs and activities that would take place on campus. This would mean breaking the seven weeks of Lent (starting with Ash Wednesday as Week One and Holy Week as

⁴⁶ Zimmerman, 73.

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Week Seven) into different themes. One way of doing this would be focusing Week One on leading the community into Lent through Ash Wednesday; Week Two focusing on the Lord's Prayer (in line with the first presentation), focusing Weeks Three through Five on the three separate Scrutinies; Week Six on the Creed and Week Seven on the final preparation for the Triduum. Interwoven within these weeks and themes would be opportunities for students to take part in individual and communal acts of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, focusing on bringing them individually and communally into right relationship with each other, God, and themselves.

Week One would begin with Ash Wednesday and focus primarily on leading the community into Lent. Morrill's text, "The Liturgical Spirituality of Lent," claims that the most appropriate way to celebrate Ash Wednesday is not with a Mass but with a penitential service. Morrill suggests, "Mass is not the optimal rite here; rather, the specific pastoral nature of the Lenten season logically turns us to the Rite of Penance and specifically to the model penitential celebrations in its Appendix II."⁴⁷ This would mean that the Ash Wednesday service would be a celebration of the Liturgy of the Word, a communal examination of conscience, an act of repentance, and a distribution of ashes before closing.⁴⁸ Depending on the time available, the size of the community, and the availability of priests, this celebration may also include an opportunity for individual reception of the sacrament of penance. This would have to be a pastoral decision based on the considerations above, yet it may also be more appropriate to make opportunities for individual confessions available throughout the period of Lent. This would allow penitents the ability to seek the sacrament when it feels most appropriate and they feel called to it, based upon how the Lenten spirit works upon each. Messaging during this week would focus on an introduction to what Lent is and upcoming programs and opportunities to participate fully in Lent within the community.

Week Two would focus on the Lord's Prayer. This would align with the theme of Presenting the Lord's Prayer to the elect as part of the Period of Purification and Enlightenment. This would be out of

⁴⁷ Bruce T. Morrill, "The Liturgical Spirituality of Lent," *Liturgical Ministry* 19 (Spring 2010): 64.

⁴⁸ Appendix II of the Rite of Penance provides two specific examples of penitential celebrations during Lent that would both work within the themes of preparation for Baptism and penance. The examples focus on "Penance leads to a strengthening of Baptismal Grace" and "Penance prepares for a fuller sharing in the Paschal Mystery of Christ for the Salvation of the World." Both examples follow the outline of the service above but without that distribution of ashes at the end that would be special to celebrating these on Ash Wednesday.

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order for the Rite of Presentation as it ordinarily should come the week after the Third Scrutiny. The reason for suggesting this be the theme of the Second Week of Lent is how the prayer calls us into total dependence on God, and its final petitions focus on forgiveness and preservation from temptation and evil, which would lead into the subsequent week's focus on the three Scrutinies. The prayer can also be used to introduce the community into an environment of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. This would be through using the different lines of the prayer to initiate community members into different programs. For example, using the line "hallowed be thy name" to invite community members to a liturgy that week celebrated around giving glory to God and focusing on our dependence on God. Another would entail using "Thy kingdom come" to focus on the building of the Kingdom of God through acts of almsgiving either through time, talent, or treasure. Lastly, fasting could be introduced through the line "give us this day our daily bread" by intentionally fasting in solidarity with those who suffer from food insecurity and then turning that which is saved through fasting into almsgiving to support those who are food insecure. This similar rhythm of interweaving prayer, fasting, and almsgiving will play out through each theme.

Week Three through Five would each focus on one of the three Scrutinies found in the RCIA. The Scrutinies focus on the woman at the well, the healing of the blind man, and the raising of Lazarus. Each of the Scrutinies are exorcisms in which an acknowledgment of evil and sin is made, and healing is asked for. Each Scrutiny or its associated Gospel story could then be looked at for specific themes, for example, the theme of living water from the story of the woman at the well may become a theme of what is needed to help us live. The week's focus would be on evil of how we as a world deny others what they need to survive (food, water, shelter, clothing), and focus then on ways in which both individually and communally we can help support and bring healing.⁴⁹ This would allow for the interweaving of individual and communal prayer, fasting, and almsgiving using the reflective themes drawn from the Scrutinies as foci.

Week Six would focus on the Creed. Here the primary focus would be on the community and the Church. This would be an opportune week to focus on evangelization and the message of the Church. With the penitential focus of Lent, one possible focus could be how the Church has failed in its

⁴⁹ This is only one of the possible multitude of themes that could be drawn from this particular Gospel passage. Adapting this idea over multiple years would be feasible as each year a different lens of interpretation could be used on the Gospel stories leading to different foci for reflection and action.

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evangelical mission and brought hurt to communities and ways in which healing can be brought toward those communities again within an atmosphere and methodology of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Another way could be focusing on how the faith can be passed on to younger generations by pairing with elementary and middle schools in the area and supporting activities of prayer and living out the faith with those communities.

Lastly, Week Seven will focus on the excitement of the community leading up to the mystery of the Triduum celebrations. This final week should focus on the story of the Paschal Mystery by grounding the reflection in the story of Jesus' Passion and death. The purpose is not to over-romanticize the Passion and death so as to focus on sacrifice but to ground the mystery within the narrative, person, and humanity of Christ. With the pastoral consideration that many High Schools will normally go on an academic break at the beginning of the Triduum to allow the community to take part in the celebration within their own communities, devotionals, and traditions that normally occur during the Triduum may occur during the beginning of this week in order to celebrate them within the school community. This could include devotionals such as a Stations of the Cross that would focus on the Passion and death of Jesus, and a foot washing service in order to reenact what is remembered during the Holy Thursday liturgy, among others. This week should also have messaging and images showing the association of the Paschal Mystery and baptism so that when either during the Vigil or Easter season baptisms are performed, the members of the community may see how the Lenten preparation helped draw them deeper into the mystery.

A limitation of this study and proposal is that it only explores a program of preparation for Easter during Lent. This program for Lent cannot be divorced from a program of exploring the symbolism and mystery of the resurrected Christ revealed during the Easter season. The study and development of a program in which the community enters more deeply into the Paschal Mysteries that is allied with the preparation done during the Lenten season would be necessary to successfully implement both programs. Possible ways in which continuity could be developed between the programs though would be that projects and acts of justice in response to themes explored during the Scrutinies could be executed during the Easter season. The deeper exploration of this thought must be left for future study.

One can see through examining the history of Lent how the question, "what are you giving up for Lent?" can be found as an outgrowth of the satisfactoral understanding of Lent held from the 6th century up until Vatican II. It also makes clear that Vatican II took its inspiration for refocusing Lent on

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preparation for Baptism and penance from the traditions of the fourth to six centuries. Through unpacking the period of purification and enlightenment, one finds that the rites of Scrutinies and presentations which prepare the Elect for Baptism can also prepare Christians for the renewal of their Baptismal vows. Through considering penance, one finds that the focus is on turning one's heart toward God, and through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving bringing one into right relationship with God, the other, and themselves. The program proposed here integrates the themes and elements of preparing for Baptism as outlined in the Rite of Initiation for Adults and refocuses Lenten Penance on establishing right relationships. This refocusing aligns with the vision and call of the Second Vatican Council in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and leads the conversations in the classrooms and halls away from "What are you giving up?" to "How are we refocusing our lives on God?"

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