I don’t want to get weird about numbers, but something special about 40. Turning 40 (like Emily) a big deal: “Oh, this is what I’m going to be like when I grow up!” And, “Hmm...mathematically, this is half-way mark.” Gets us thinking/assessing/reflecting

In Bible, 40 is significant. After deliverance from bondage in Egypt, Israel sojourned in wilderness for 40 years. Jesus spent 40 days in Judean desert on a vision quest—during which he came to grips with power of evil known is the Bible as “the slanderer” or “the accuser”—a familiar enough voice in our own heads, and something we often battle at the 40 year mark.

In physiology class at Nursing School, professor said on day 40 of fasting, body draws energy from burning brain cells. A hard-stop.

40 days (or 6 weeks) is roughly equivalent to the time it takes to turn a new behavior into a habit.

Lent, which begins Wednesday, is 40 days long: 40 days, minus Sundays, between Ash Wednesday (Feb. 14) and Easter (April 1). Sundays aren’t counted as part of 40 days of Lent.

So Lent is a spiritual retreat time for the church—a time to focus on connecting with God, ourselves, each other, wide world. Making a more room for these things—which usually means a little less time on time sucks—smartphones, social media, etc.?

If raised Catholic, associate Lent with giving up chocolate or some other treat. Fair enough—if you want to give something up for Lent, suggest limiting one of your time-sucks. (Leave iPhone downstairs when go up for bed, give myself an hour in morning before picking it up; took FB off iPhone). Feels really good!

Limiting time sucks can facilitate connecting more with God, self, others, wide world, in more creative, life/joy-giving ways.
In past we’ve done a set of connection-enhancing practices called “Leap of Faith.” Given volatility of life around us this past year we’re renaming it: **Lenten Experience: A Peaceful Prelude.**

If you want it, leverage Lent to enhancing your connection to God/others. We’ve worked up an orientation to Lent—hard copies available today and sending it out via email as a pdf. Check it out.

Here’s what we’re featuring for Lenten Experience this year:

**SUNDAY SERVICES—IN REAL TIME**

Best time to focus on making it to church (or catching up online)
Each Sunday focus on a specific spiritual practice in a series titled, Prayer: The Shaping of Desire. Next week, start with a session featuring 3 simple prayers time-tested by Alcoholics Anonymous.
Instruct on a given practice, then practice the practice during Quiet Reflection Time. Also lining up stories—wanna give one?

**HOSTING SEVERAL LENTEN DINNER GROUPS—IN REAL TIME**

9 of us are hosting 3 sessions each—dinner at someone’s home for express purpose of meeting others, enjoying a simple meal (soup-bread-cheese), conversation, simple prayer (no one asked to pray aloud, if that’s a concern). Not to late to offer to host.
(half-sheet)
Sign up today at back table or check box on half-sheet for invite.
Especially helpful if you like Blue Ocean but would like it better if you knew some people better.

{IRT—people realizing that with so much social interaction online, many of us are missing IN REAL TIME connections. These are 2}

**DAILY SARUM PRAYER EMAIL**
If you are on our weekly update list, next Tuesday receive the first of 41 morning emails (6am). Joan Miller working on illustration. I’m preparing a daily reflection and coaching on use of Sarum Prayer. If dealing with anxiety, learning how to engage a prayer meditatively has enormous calming benefit. For five weeks leading up to Palm Sunday—focus on one of five lines of prayer every day. Set aside five minutes—2 to read, 3 to practice.

KIDS DAILY PSALMS JOURNAL (5+)


FEATURED BOOK

Phyllis Tickle: A Life; An important figure in our church. A dear friend, beside my late wife Nancy, main influence in my change of heart. Probably tell some PT stories on Sundays. Dramatic life: 7 kids (many more miscarriages); an NDE that forever changed her, one of two most prominent women in field of religion over last 30 years, and a flaming mystic. Bio loaded with surprises, author will be here in April to speak. 8 copies for sale. (2 lending copies)

MY BIG REQUEST

Encourage all of us to see if there’s something God might want to prompt us to ask for that’s personal—a desire we have for something we think is good. This year, doesn’t have to be super-specific, it could be for God to watch over a loved one, but something between you and God that you want. Ask for it daily. Emily wrote a super-helpful orientation to this in booklet.

OUR BIG REQUEST
This a prayer that we’d like ask you to offer up to God throughout this season of Lent that’s for us. Specifically, God would help us get the word out to people in the community who would love to part of a church like this, but don’t know we exist. Specific prayer to that end in booklet. Maybe we should add it to service plan?

*Lord, help anyone looking for a church like ours to find us. Inspire and empower us to get the word out that a Jesus-centered, fully-inclusive faith community exists in SE Michigan. And help us, especially, to welcome those who have been marginalized, embracing them with your love and light. Amen.*

**PRAY DAILY FOR SIX OTHER PEOPLE**

Could be people in your immediate circle, family, co-workers. I think it’s helpful to include some names beyond my inner circle—someone on periphery. But it’s entirely up to you. Like having your own daily “Prayer for Loved Ones” in which, if nothing else, you simply name them in prayer, “lift them up”

We will include a reminder about these daily practice suggestions

In the *Sarum Prayer* email.

**FOUR TIPS FOR ENGAGING LENT:**

1. **BE INTENTIONAL THIS LENT**

A certain brand of Christianity puts a lot of stock in making promises, resolutions to do better—often accompanied by an internal dialogue self-talk that is in the lecture format (inner Bobby Knight for you older basketball fans)

Sometimes Lent triggers this mode and I suggest you not cooperate with that. In it’s place, try something different—simply setting your intention. Studies show that if before you go to sleep at night you set an intention about the coming day in simple, kind-to-yourself language “I’m look forward to exercising tomorrow”, it increases your chances of doing that thing. If you don’t do that thing, and beat yourself up for it mentally, no benefit. But simply setting the intention—clear benefit.
The Hebrew term for our internal intention setter is the heart—the heart is what aims us in one direction more than another. To intend something is to choose among options so intending to do too many things weakens the effect.

During Lenten season, suggest that you mobilize your intention setting capacity. We’ll take time to do this in QUIET REFLECTION.

2. BE CONNECTIONAL THIS LENT

Why we do the things we do matters. If your intention is to get the most out of lent, the why matters. Suggest that a really powerful “Why” is connection. I intend to catch church as often as I can this Lent, in order to support my connection (with God others.) I intend to sign up for a Lenten Dinner Group to connect more with people. Life, including divine life, flows through connections.

3. LEVERAGE LENT TO START A NEW SUSTAINABLE HABIT

In our sermons, daily emails, we will sample different practices to connect with God/others/self/wide world. Brushing our teeth daily is a dental health practice. Took a while to get in the habit, now your body doesn’t fight you as much. (Oh, I see my body is having me brush my teeth! Creature of habit!) Same with practices that foster connection with God. Learning to take 5-10 minutes of quiet each day, say your prayers, calm-center yourself—that’s a habit.

It takes about 6 weeks to secure a new habit. If you think, wow, taking 5-10 minutes a day to say my prayers, to calm-center myself—would help me connect to myself, others, God...the Lent is the perfect time to form that habit. Support of some weekly coaching on Sunday, daily email...others doing same thing: that’s a fertile environment for new habit formation.

4. BE KIND TO YOURSELF
None of this will work unless you continually return to a posture of kindness toward yourself. At micro level—key skill in meditation, gently returning to your intended point of focus when you notice distractions taking over. Getting frustrated with yourself makes it worse—empowers the distractions. Being gentle-kind toward yourself—Oh, yeah, I get easily distracted! —much better. Pay attention to your inner dialog as you engage in these practices—and keep returning to a posture of kindness toward yourself. It will improve everything else.

QUIET REFLECTION

Minute to relax, collect our thoughts (verbal prompts)

Minute to settle on an intention for Lent (verbal prompts)

Minute to write Lenten intentions (one or two) down on half sheet attached to service program. As we come forward for communion soon, lay that sheet on the altar as a way of offering your intention to God for God’s blessing.