

Planning Ashes to Go:

Choose a place that allows you to meet people where they already are on a Wednesday.

Where are the people who are not in church on Ash Wednesday? On trains and buses? At the store? Doing shift work? Having lunch on the run? Shuttling the kids to school? Where else?

Places with a lot of pedestrian traffic and an opportunity for drivers to pull up are ideal for brief Ashes encounters. You are looking for a place where people can pause for a few minutes without blocking traffic. If your church opens onto a busy sidewalk, you are in luck. Public sidewalks near transit or shopping might be good options. If you are on private property (such as shopping centers) you may be asked to leave, unless you make arrangements with the property owner.

Ashes to Go can also mean encounters at the tables of a coffee shop or somewhere people have to stand and wait. Do you and your congregation have a good relationship with a coffee shop or local business?

Choose a liturgical option that fits that place.

The liturgical action can be as simple as offering the ashes themselves ("Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return."). A prayer (the Collect of the Day works nicely, or the prayer over the ashes from the Ash Wednesday liturgy) before imposing ashes, and a simple "Go in peace," give the symbol a toe-hold in our common prayer.

This option can go nearly anywhere, from transit stops to McDonalds to hospitals. You can do it with a small group of people, or one-on-one. If you wish to use the Lord's Prayer, remember that different traditions learn it differently!

In a location where you may encounter people in groups, or with more leisure, you can use more of the day's liturgy and enrich the symbol. Several forms of suggested liturgy are available on the Ashes to Go website at: <http://www.ashestogo.org/resources/>

Recruit a team

Ashes to Go is a ministry that lay people may lead as well as bishops, priests and deacons. It's great to have teams that include both clergy and lay people not only to offer ashes, but also to engage in conversation – about Lent or about life – with people who receive ashes and those simply passing by.



Let people know what you're up to

In addition to recruiting in the congregation, let local media know that you'll be doing something new and interesting. Ashes to Go is photogenic, and makes great copy for local papers. Chicago congregations found themselves in the traffic and transit reports and on the evening TV news in 2011, as well as in local papers.

Equip your team

Dress for the weather and dress for the liturgy. For liturgy on street corners and transit stops, it's probably a good idea for at least half of your team to wear vestments. This makes you stand out in the crowd, and gives passers-by a sense that something special is happening.

A sign isn't usually necessary, but consider your location, the style of your congregation, and what will help make you visible. If you use incense every Sunday, take a thurifer as part of your team. For a rainy transit platform, our team borrowed patio umbrellas from a parishioner, which doubled as shelter and a way to locate us.

It's good to bring ashes in a sealable container, especially if the weather is windy or wet. You can often find small screw-top jars sold for travel toiletries which work great for ashes.

Give people a take-away

The liturgical moment speaks for itself. But participants may want to find a way to reflect on the encounter, or know who it was who met them with a moment of grace in a busy weekday.

Prepare a give-away. Consider Lenten reflection booklets from Episcopal Relief and Development. Or create a prayer card or leaflet that includes prayers for Lent and information on your congregation's Lenten program. Make sure to include your contact information and weekly service times!

Pray

Pray for the people you will meet, for your team, and for all God's people looking for a moment of grace.

