

Ashes to Go Planning Checklist

Based loosely on the experience of [St. Paul's Parish, K Street](#) (Washington, DC) in 2013.

Developed for the [Diocese of Washington](#) by Kyle Matthew Oliver and Kyle Babin.

The [Ashes to Go](#) initiative changed (probably forever) our congregation's understanding of evangelism. The experience allowed us to meet literally hundreds of our neighbors. Those neighbors affirmed for us that we have something to offer them, not in spite of but because of our particular gifts (among them traditional worship in the Anglo-Catholic tradition and a passion for urban ministry). What an energizing encounter. So maybe our biggest lesson was this: be yourselves.

This document captures some of the wisdom of the process as it played out in our context. There are many other excellent resources available on the Ashes to Go [resource](#) and [FAQ](#) pages.

Decision Stage

- ❑ **Figure out who needs to be involved** in the decision-making and planning process in your congregation. This will depend on operative leadership styles; theological and cultural factors in your congregation; etc.
- ❑ Convene one or more conversations with the appropriate people. **The goal isn't total agreement but consensus as it usually forms in your context.** Understand who has the ultimate authority to make this decision, and don't be afraid of individual dissent. Many people with reservations will be won over by the experience if you treat the process with integrity.
- ❑ Don't make any decisions without a concrete location in mind. **Location is pretty much everything in this ministry.** Make it somewhere you'll meet your neighbors, somewhere they're likely to take the time to stop, somewhere they won't feel coerced or singled out. We chose a public area on street level outside our local Metro stop. Just to be prepared, we [filed an assembly permit](#) with the District of Columbia.

Logistics Stage

- ❑ As founder Emily Mellott puts it "[\[c\]hoose a liturgical option that fits \[the\] place.](#)" This is not the occasion for the Great Litany. **Choose short, prayerful words suitable for imposing ashes and vestments (or not) as seems right to you.** Let your words be quick and personal. We gave the ministers broad discretion. Kyle (Oliver) said, "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return, and remember that you are precious in God's sight." We used bright vestments and incense because that's who we are. It didn't hurt that they also got people's attention.
- ❑ **Decide when you'll offer ashes, how many people you need to help, and what roles they'll play.** Recruit and train your team.

- ❑ **Make a [big sign](#) that communicates what you're doing and who you are.**
- ❑ **Consider some inexpensive take-home materials** about Lenten practice (first) and your particular church (second). We made a brochure about Lent and also passed out our generic parish business card.
- ❑ **Spread the word** via [press releases](#), social media, and signs in your neighborhood. Get members of the congregation to help. Think local. Use check-ins, hashtags and other geo-location features. Jim Naughton and Rebecca Wilson's [Speaking Faithfully](#) will tell you all you need to know and more about how to reach out.

Action Stage

- ❑ Arrive on time in sunshine or rain. Have a plan for dealing with the latter (umbrellas? small portable canopies?). Remember that it can still be quite cold even when Ash Wednesday is late, so dress warmly. You don't want the weather to cause you to look like you don't want to be there.
- ❑ Perform a brief ritual action to get started. The prayer at the bottom of [BCP page 265](#) is probably plenty.
- ❑ Have a plan for how to keep the line moving and still allow for spontaneous and sacred conversation. The imposition of ashes is a sacramental action, but don't forget what that action communicates. This is an opportunity for people who wouldn't otherwise have an experience of the Divine today.
- ❑ You'll get a lot of thank-yous. Remember to return that thanks.
- ❑ Be ready to talk to any reporters. **That means thinking through why you're here on this particular day and what it all means.** It should have something to do with the love of God in addition to the day's themes of mortality and repentance. Don't be a curmudgeon.
- ❑ Use smart phones to tell this story online as well. Include words and pictures.

Reflection Stage

- ❑ Share stories of your experience with other parishioners in services on Ash Wednesday and the following Sunday. Help everyone understand that this was a corporate work.
- ❑ Share those stories with others by publishing online. The online tool Storify is a great way to bring together photos, videos, tweets, and other online records of the day (e.g., "[St. Paul's Parish offers 'Ashes to Go'](#)")
- ❑ Say thank you again, to as many people as you can think of, as publicly as you can.
- ❑ Discern what others ways the Spirit might be moving you to go out into your neighborhood.