

Lenten Prayers of Confession

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The Lent 2007 worship resources suggest inviting individuals in the congregation to offer personal confessions as part of the response to the sermon each week. These responses can take a variety of forms, including poems, art pieces, stories, or musical selections. The purpose is to enrich the time of confession by including many voices and experiences in the congregation.

While some worshipers will be comfortable offering a personal response of confession during worship, others may be reluctant. What follows is a suggested approach which, in my experience, has made it safe for people to be both truthful and personal in their responses.

Before Lent begins, send the following invitation to a list of selected people in the congregation. Ask them to choose which Sunday they'd like to offer a personal confession in response to the sermon and the week's theme. When you receive responses, organize them so you'll have 2 or 3 responses for each service. At the end of the season, you may want to collect the prayers and keep them in a notebook in your church library.

Dear worshiper:

Each week during Lent we are inviting people to offer personal confessions in response to the sermon and the theme of the week. You are being invited to prepare one of those responses.

Although confession responses can take a variety of forms (a poem, a prayer, a story, a song, or piece of art), you may want to try writing a 100-word "haiku" which will be read as your response.

What is a "haiku" confession? In 100 words you will describe a significant personal experience related to the week's theme and focus statement (the experience may be big or small or anything in between). In the service you will read the item exactly as you've written it – without any words of introduction or explanation.

For examples of this style of writing, check out the "Haiku as Autobiography" column in the Sunday Washington Post Style Sections to get a better sense of the haiku idea. The form doesn't follow the 5-7-5-syllable Japanese haiku poem form; instead it imitates the simple, concrete and specific language of the haiku. An example of this style of writing can also be found on pp. 294-295 of Preparing Sunday Dinner: A Collaborative Approach to Worship and Preaching (Herald Press, 2005).

Here are the weekly themes and focus statements for Lent 2007:

Feb. 25: God's hand delivers us

When we enter the wilderness of wandering and temptation, God's hand delivers us. We confess our trust in a saving God.

March 4: God gathers us together in safe shelter

When dark fear overwhelms us, God gathers us together in safe shelter. We seek the light of God's face.

March 11: God pours out life-giving drink

When we become empty and weary from things that do not satisfy, God pours out life-giving drink. We turn from destruction to God's grace.

March 18: God reaches out with open arms

When we are lost and far from God, God reaches out with open arms. We get up and enter the feast of reconciliation.

March 25: God makes a way through mighty waters

When we are exhausted, God makes a way through mighty waters. We move forward in hope as God does a new thing.

April 1: God's steadfast love endures forever.

When our shouts of joy turn to derision and rejection, even in our anguish God's steadfast love endures forever. We are called to follow Jesus.

The Lent worship committee looks forward to receiving your response. If you have any questions, please let us know.