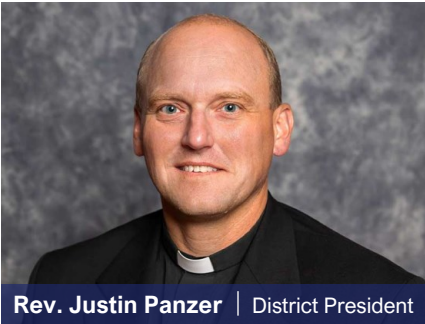


PRESIDENT'S OFFICE



Rev. Justin Panzer | District President



“Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.”

(Joel 2:12)

“Return to the Lord Your God” (v. 13). God’s people are not to just go through the motions of repentance. The prophet expects that they will let the Word sink into their hearts and consciences. He expects that the visible signs, fasting and weeping and mourning, will follow. Joel takes the very core of our self-idolatry and throws it away. The Lord calls His wandering people home through the Word. Let the law of Your holy God humble your pride and lead you to contrition, even though your broken heart may hurt. True repentance is appalled at sin because sin separates us from the Lord. And true repentance includes faith in the promised forgiveness of sins.

When Joel speaks God’s Word, he describes the God who has compassion and love for His people. *“He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love” (v. 13).* This is how God describes Himself. He is jealous for His people yet full of compassion, not wanting anyone to perish.

The mark of the ashes and the sign of the cross is placed on our foreheads on Ash Wednesday. Ashes remind us of our mortality in this life and of why we need a Savior – to rescue us from this present, evil age, and to bring us

life and light forever. Through the cross, God has sent His Son to save all people. **The blessings of His death and resurrection are given through the gift of faith.**

I invite the people of the LCMS Kansas District to once again join together on Ash Wednesday for a Districtwide **“Day of Repentance.”** We encourage you to pray the Litany, worship, fast, and give a financial contribution to your local congregation.

What is a fast? How does it fit in with what the Lord is trying to teach us as He calls us to repentance? If you have access to *The Lutheran Study Bible*, turn to page 189, where you’ll find a helpful article called, “When You Fast” (also available online on the *First Things* blog). Note especially these words:

“During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke against fasting as a means of salvation. Instead, **He commended fasting as a private, voluntary act of humility before (Matt. 6:16-18).** Take a few moments now to read His words and reflect on your own devotion. If you are like most people, you have thought more about dieting than fasting. It is hard to imagine a day-

long fast. No doubt fasting for 40 days like Jesus did after His baptism is out of the question. Yet our Lord’s words clearly reveal that fasting should be part of a Christian’s life: He said, “When you fast” (Matt. 6:16), not “If you fast” (cf. Matt. 9:14-15). The early Christians fasted (Acts 13:2-3; 14:23). Why shouldn’t a 21st-century Christian do likewise?”

A simple fast might involve going without one or two meals before receiving the Lord’s Supper and using the time to focus on God’s Word. If skipping a meal isn’t an option, think about taking a break from something else, like social media or web surfing. Whatever form it takes, fasting is a powerful reminder of Christ’s own obedience and sacrifice for us all.

Our Lord wants you to return to Him what is His in the first place. Everything belongs to the Lord, we only get to borrow it for a time. Everything we give back to Him belongs to Him. It never was ours.

“Return to me,” the Lord invites through His prophet Joel (2:12) ... with your whole life. God bless our worship of Him, especially during the season of Lent!

Devotions written by President Justin Panzer are the exclusive property of the LCMS Kansas District. Permission is granted to Kansas District congregations and schools to share these devotions with their members.