



Sierra Pacific Synod  
committed to being re-formed



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## Church Together

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### ASHES-TO-GO

Have you ever seen a pastor or priest, all vested and robed, standing on a cold sidewalk on Ash Wednesday offering ritual ashes to passersby? I hadn't, until recently. I don't know when or where this practice began of bringing Ashes-to-Go out of church buildings into public spaces, but in recent years it has been picking up steam.

#### **Lord of Mercy Lutheran Church, Sparks, NV – Pr. Sarah Johnson**

For Pastor Sarah Johnson, Lord of Mercy Lutheran Church in Sparks, NV, this year was a "get started" year. This past Ash Wednesday was Pastor Sarah's first with this congregation. Due to a state road expansion, Lord of Mercy congregation was forced to leave its long-time building and share space with a nearby Methodist church while their new facility was being built. Sarah had done Ashes-to-Go in her previous Minnesota congregation, and was determined to give it a try on the major thoroughfare on which the Methodist church is located. She stationed herself on the sidewalk in front of the church, with fast-moving traffic and few pedestrians, and had only a few "customers." But several Methodists and Lutherans, coming by for various reasons, did approach her to discover what was happening. Ashes on Ash Wednesday had not been part of this Methodist congregation's piety, but some dared to receive Sarah's "Lutheran ashes" and explanatory words, and new vistas were opened and new bonds formed. In addition, a local news station came by to interview Pastor Sarah and one of her ash-receivers. She was able to share with the news crew the theological reason for Ash Wednesday, and they ultimately decided that they, too, wanted to receive ashes. Lord of Mercy is ready to

implement Ashes-to-Go next year at their new mission center.

### **St. John's Lutheran Church, Sacramento, CA – Prs. Jon Haug and Frank Espegren**

Pastors Jon Haug and Frank Espegren stood in front of St. John's Lutheran Church in Sacramento, from 7-9 am, fully vested, offering ashes and coffee to L Street passersby. This was the third year St. John's offered Ashes-to-Go, and the coldest of those three Ash Wednesdays. They report about 30 participants, including some street people. One young woman, a church member, received her ashes and then went to visit her terminally ill grandmother who died the following day. "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." One worker at a neighborhood restaurant received ashes, and soon returned with a co-worker who also wanted ashes. When you go out of the building and out on a limb in this way, you can't predict what lives you will touch, or in what way.

### **Hope of the Sierras Lutheran Church, South Lake Tahoe, CA – Pr. Diana Turner**

For Pastor Diana Turner Ash Wednesday 2018 was her second Ash Wednesday serving Hope of the Sierras Lutheran Church in South Lake Tahoe, CA. An ordained Episcopal priest for many years, Diana had experienced Ashes-to-Go several times with Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in Sacramento, where priests and vested lay people would station themselves in front of the cathedral, in Cesar Chavez Park, and near a light rail station. Sizing up her new community, Pastor Diana and four lay people (2 women, 2 men) stationed themselves not at their church's remote location, but downtown near Heavenly Village from 11 am to 1 pm. Some positioned themselves near a Starbucks; some set up shop on the main street near a red light where traffic is congested and slow-moving or stopped, and where there is abundant pedestrian traffic. If Sacramento was cold this past Ash Wednesday, Lake Tahoe was much colder! But Diana estimates they interacted with about 70 people. Questions ranged from, "Are you a nun?" to "I'm Catholic; can I receive ashes from you?" Some people were caught off guard by the early Ash Wednesday. Several drivers, stopped at the red light, lowered windows and asked, "Can I receive ashes?" One woman, after receiving ashes, returned later with her child, asking, "Will you bless my child?" There was even a request to bless a sled-pulling horse! They did! Some people didn't want ashes, but asked for a blessing. Many young adults were interested and asked what this was all about.

Lutheran Christians are generally not gifted at knocking on doors and talking to people about Jesus. But we do have some precious and meaning-full rituals, and we can dare to bring those rituals out of our church buildings into public spaces, offering what we have to people who happen to be there. Who knows what might happen? It seems God knows!

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Do you have a story that you would like to share? Send any Church

Together story requests to [mic@spselca.org](mailto:mic@spselca.org).

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