

Ashes to go

By Sue Sprang

LAKE ANN/TRVERSE CITY – On Ash Wednesday, Feb. 18, Advent Lutheran Church, St. Ann, brought Jesus to the “heart of the city” with the imposition of ashes. This is the second year the congregation has offered *Ashes to Go* to the community in an unlikely setting.

Recently off mission status and settled into a new church building, the sense of *being in community* is fresh in the congregation’s mind. Advent is the result of other “Jesus people” taking seriously the disciple call to be in the community, as well as to establish points where those who are looking for new or renewed spiritual direction can connect with Jesus and his people.

Lent is a very appropriate time to call the people God has made in God’s own image to search within themselves... to seek spiritual health and wholeness. Ash Wednesday offers a unique, tangible way of “bringing Jesus” to those who are yearning for spiritual peace, who are asking of life: *“Is this all there is?”*

The imposition of ashes, the marking of the cross of Christ on our foreheads, brings God to us in a very human way. There are the ashes, a black, messy heap of dust made holy in the sign of the cross and the words: *“You are dust and to dust you shall return.”* There is the human touch, finger to forehead, as Christ’s cross is drawn. And there is the reminder that yes, we are but dust cast into the wind, in need of spiritual centeredness and forgiveness.

Last year, spurred by Ash Wednesday “on the go” events taking place across the country, and Pastor Justin Grimm asked “why not?” – and the congregation moved forward to bring *Ashes to Go* to the greater Traverse City area.

When the owners of Brew, an independently owned coffee shop, café, and brewery in downtown Traverse City, was approached about being a meeting place, they readily took to the idea and *Ashes to Go* had a home.

Then it was a matter of inviting people – anyone who felt the need – to come. Media spots were the primary source for getting the word out.

“The response was great,” Grimm said. “People liked it and were very appreciative to have that be how they started their day.



Pastor Justin Grimm of Advent, St. Ann, “brings Jesus to the people” on Ash Wednesday

“All ages, kids before school with their parents, Catholics, Lutherans, members and non-members – a variety of people – came.”

Last year about 50 people attended; this year almost 70.

Ashes to Go is held at Brew from 7-10 a.m. on Ash Wednesday. Folks drop by at their convenience. The service includes prayer, the reading of Psalm 51, and the imposition of ashes.

At five minutes or less, the service may be brief – but what *power!*