

## Counselor's Corner

### What Is Your Forty Day Plan?

Today is Ash Wednesday. It is a solemn and humbling day for Christians. Although there is no obligation to participate in mass and receive ashes, I recently read that attendance in church is only second to Christmas. It seems quite amazing, because we are reminded that our life on earth is limited, and that we need to get a plan and seriously work it during the next forty days.

People often wonder what they should “give up.” Many people will refrain from eating sweets and fast foods, smoking, drinking, or watching a TV program. A few will attempt to give up the Facebook! All these are examples of our willingness to discipline ourselves, but it is important that we give up things for a greater good.

Phil Ressler, a Lutheran pastor, suggested forty things that we might attempt to give up, and not one includes culinary or other delights. He suggests giving up things like our fear of failure, our comfort zones, our willingness to be a constant people pleaser, our apathy, our negativity, our hatred. His list includes giving up ways of thinking and acting that do more damage to us than candy! They eat at our happiness and our internal strength, and they hinder our ability to care for others.

When Pope Francis talked about Lent last February, he used the term “globalization of indifference”. He said that it happens “whenever our interior life gets caught up in its own interests, and “there is no room for others”. It seems that Pope Francis believes that self-reflection and self-improvement is good and necessary, but being other-centered is the next step. Without that forward movement, the intent of Lent seems to be incomplete. Volunteering our time and money is a great start, but I think there is a need to incorporate mercy, the theme of this Jubilee Year.

Our daily, respectful treatment of others shows that we care. Our extension of friendship, help, and forgiveness moves us closer to mercy. Have you ever passed someone, said hello, and received no greeting back? Have you ever done that to others? At times, our preoccupation with the things we have to do next keeps us from living in the present and seeing those around us. To fail to recognize another’s existence can be as hurtful as mean words or actions. There are many adults and students who feel lonely, because others treat them as if they are invisible. We can do something about this. **It all starts with a hello.** So, let’s accept the challenge of living a good life during these forty days and beyond, and commit to letting no one among us stand alone.

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