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***Lenten Prayer Service***

***incorporating the distribution of ashes***

***Sacred Space***

Create a sacred space with a neutral coloured cloth….a large candle …..some stones, with words on them, e.g. busyness, self-centeredness, , consumerism, …that reflect some of the attitudes that we need to let go of, ….and some of the attitudes we need to develop during this time of Lent, e.g. courage, openness, awareness, kindness, joy, self-denial....Place the bowl of ashes in the sacred space. *[Easiest way to put words on stones is to write or print the word on a coloured piece of paper and use clear sellotape to stick it on to the stone].*

***Presence***

*We take time at the beginning of this time of prayer to gather ourselves…..to recall the invitation of Lent to turn back to God, to follow anew the way of Jesus and allow the Spirit to guide our living….*

**Leader: Lord,**

**centre us in you,**

**root our life in your way of living,**

**deepen your presence in us.**

***Scripture Reading – Joel 2:12-18***

**Reader: 'But now -- declares Yahweh-**

**come back to me with all your heart,**

**fasting, weeping, mourning.'**

**Tear your hearts and not your clothes,**

**and come back to Yahweh your God,**

**for he is gracious and compassionate,**

**slow to anger, rich in faithful love.**

***The word of the Lord***

 Pause…..then invite others to reflection

*What is the Lord inviting me to?*

Pause….

*What is my response to God’s graciousness and compassion?*

Pause…..

**Leader:We take a moment to re-commit ourselves to following Jesus Christ,**

**to being real disciples….**

**Lord,**

**as we are marked with these ashes,**

**may we turn away from sin**

**and grow in faithfulness to your gospel**

The persons distributing ashes, place ashes on the forehead of those coming forward, saying to each: ***Turn away from sin and be faithful to the gospel***

*[It might be helpful to have some music playing during this time or the following reflection could be read when the distribution of ashes is over – This reflection is read slowly by one person*…

***Reflection***

**Lent is a time to learn to travel light,**

**to clear the clutter**

**from our crowded lives,**

**and find a space, a desert.**

**Deserts are bleak:**

**no creature comforts,**

**only a vast expanse of**

**stillness, sharpening awareness of**

**ourselves and God.**

**Uncomfortable places, deserts.**

**Most of the time we’re tempted to**

**avoid them, find good reason to**

**live lives of ease, cushioned by**

**noise from self-discovery.**

**Clutching at world’s success to**

**stave off fear,**

**but if we dare to trust the silence**

**to strip away our false security,**

**God can begin to grow his**

**wholeness in us**

**fill up our emptiness,**

**destroy our fears,**

**give us new vision,**

**courage for the journey**

**and make our desert blossom like a rose.** *By Ann Lewin*

**Leader:Prayer of the Faithful**

*The response to our petitions is* Create in us a clean heart, O God.

* **For the courage to grow in faithfulness to your Gospel…***Create in us****…***
* **For the courage to be instruments of change… …**
* **For all who experience exclusion…….**
* **For those whose lives are marred by injustice**
* **For the places of war and conflict in our world……**

**Leader: Mindful of the God, who calls us to live lives of justice and peace, together we say, *Our Father***

**Leader: God of blooming deserts,**

**encourage us to enter the space of this Lenten time,**

**draw us into the desert of our own lives,**

**where you alone can destroy our fears**

**and give us passion and energy for the journey of life.**

**We make this prayer through Christ your Son.**

**All: Amen.**