

Lenten message from the Rt. Rev. Stephen T. Lane
Episcopal Bishop of Maine
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In the Gospel lesson for Ash Wednesday Jesus has some sharp words for those who do the right thing for the wrong reasons. Charity, prayer, religious observance are, he says, acceptable to God only if done out of genuine love and compassion. Otherwise they're just for show.

Lent is a time for examining the heart, for taking a deep dive into what we believe and why we behave as we do, to ask ourselves if we truly love our neighbors as ourselves, if we truly repent when we fall into sin and turn to God, if we truly respect the dignity of every human being. We're dealing with human evil and sin, but not just the sin out there - the racists and the misogynists and the selfish out there - but the sin in here - my racism and my misogyny and my selfishness.

All the things we do in Lent, the classes, the services, the Bible study, can be a distraction unless they are part of genuine self-examination. It's the heart that matters.

We in Maine are now beginning the process of discerning our next bishop. Surveys and conversations are beginning. And this important work for our future. But it, too, can be a distraction, unless it is offered in the service of genuine love and compassion.

Brothers and sister, we have work to do. In this season of school shootings, opioid deaths, immigrants struggling to make their way, environmental degradation, and all the rest, religious observance pales compared to God's call to compassion and love. May this season be a time for us to recall whose we are, and to seek God's help in loving our neighbor as ourselves.

May God bless your Lenten deep dive.