

How to Fast From Carbon and “Get Real” about Lent

Giving up chocolate for Lent? Here’s another idea: give up some carbon! Everything we consume, from heating fuel to plastic bags, adds to the store of heat-trapping carbon dioxide in our atmosphere—and that hurts our planet, especially the poor. If you would like to “give up,” something for Lent, a carbon fast can be a penance, an opportunity for alms giving, and an inspiration to pray. *Stop by the welcome center to pick up the carbon fast handout*, with ideas for each week of Lent. Make this the best Lent ever.

The Church urges us to practice three types of penance to help us on the road to conversion during lent: fasting (our relationship to ourselves), prayer (our relationship to God), and alms giving (our relationship to others, i.e. the rest of creation). We can use these three practices to follow Pope Francis’s call to care for creation. We can begin a carbon fast, we can pray for the health of our planet, and we can give to those who receive little of the earth’s bounty.

“Conversion” means we come out differently on the far side of Lent; we are not the same people we were on Ash Wednesday. Jesus used the story of the prodigal son to illustrate conversion in the extreme, from a self-seeking, reckless consumer of wealth to a grateful, loyal son. It is easy for people in wealthy countries such as the United States to have a little of the prodigal son within us—Americans consume a lot, our 5% of the world’s population consumes 40% of the world’s resources. We can use the fasting, prayer, and alms giving of Lent to “convert” ourselves to be more grateful for and more careful with God’s creation.

What follows are suggestions for *taking action*, for specific penitential steps to take each week of Lent. We can be both our own head coach in forming a plan and our star player in executing the plan.

Week of Ash Wednesday

Carbon Fasting: Figure out your carbon footprint using the worksheet attached to this handout; decide how you might be able to reduce your footprint based on your answers on the footprint worksheet, **but pick just one thing**. (If you need some extra help choosing, a list of practical ideas is also attached). Put a note on the fridge with the total kilowatt hours from your last electric bill—that is the number you are trying to beat (reduce).

Prayer: Decide when during the day, or on which days of the week, you will pray Pope Francis’s Christian Prayer in Union with Creation at the end of this handout.

Alms Giving: Have a family meeting to decide how best to support the poor and exploited or how to support those caring for creation. Remember: alms giving can include time and talent, not only treasure. And it can include Saint Mark’s Charitable Fund or Capital Development Fund, which can be used to make efficiency improvements to our parish buildings.

Week of the First Sunday of Lent

Carbon Fasting: Go to work on that **one thing** you decided to do to generate less carbon. Get that done.

Prayer: On the days and at the time you decided, pray Pope Francis's Christian Prayer in Union with Creation.

Alms Giving: Donate your time, talent, or treasure to the organization you chose that supports the poor and exploited or those caring for creation.

Week of the Second Sunday of Lent

Carbon Fasting: Decide on **one more thing** you noticed on the Ecological Footprint worksheet that you could do to generate less carbon.

Prayer: On the days and at the time you decided, pray Pope Francis's Christian Prayer in Union with Creation.

Alms Giving: Donate your time, talent, or treasure to the organization you chose that supports the poor and exploited or those caring for creation.

Week of the Third Sunday of Lent

Carbon Fasting: Decide on **a third thing** you noticed on the Ecological Footprint worksheet that you could do to generate less carbon.

Prayer: On the days and at the time you decided, pray Pope Francis's Christian Prayer in Union with Creation.

Alms Giving: Donate your time, talent, or treasure to the organization you chose that supports the poor and exploited or those caring for creation.

Week of the Fourth Sunday of Lent

Carbon Fasting: It's Laetare Sunday, the Sunday we rejoice and the priest wears rose colored vestments, because our wait for Easter is half over. Are we halfway to achieving the conversion that we seek? Think about that. Rejoice in the three things you have done to generate less carbon and the gifts you have given. Thank your family.

Prayer: On the days and at the time you decided, pray Pope Francis's Christian Prayer in Union with Creation. This week, as part of the dinner prayer, add your own short prayer of gratitude for the things you most value about God's creation.

Alms Giving: Donate your time, talent, or treasure to the organization you chose that supports the poor and exploited or those caring for creation.

Week of the Fifth Sunday of Lent

Carbon Fasting: Decide on a **fourth thing** you noticed on the Ecological Footprint worksheet that you could do to generate less carbon.

Prayer: On the days and at the time you decided, pray Pope Francis's Christian Prayer in Union with Creation.

Alms Giving: Donate your time, talent, or treasure to the organization you chose that supports the poor and exploited or those caring for creation.

Week of Palm Sunday

Carbon Fasting: Holy Week is here! You have made four changes to reduce the carbon you are using. Keep it up, and figure out how to make these changes permanent.

Prayer: For the first part of the week, continue to pray Pope Francis's Christian Prayer in Union with Creation. During the Triduum, join your carbon fast to Christ's passion.

Alms Giving: Your Easter donation to St. Mark parish will be deposited in the Capital Development Fund. As you prepare for Easter, prayerfully consider a significant donation that will allow the parish to reduce its own use of carbon.

Easter

You have completed your carbon fast! Pray that it may lead to a true conversion, a life style that is focused a little less on consumption and a little more on caring for the poor and the rest of creation.

Ideas for a Carbon Fast

These ideas are presented in no particular order. Just pick the ones that you have the time and means to do and that will make a difference. Place a check mark on the ideas you plan to act upon.

- Go on an incandescent light bulb hunt in your home or office. Replace any you find with compact fluorescent or LED bulbs (Eversource offers discounts on these bulbs, visit eversource.com).
- Go on a hunt for drafty cracks in your home or office. Use a candle, incense stick, or even a feather, holding it near windows and doors. When you find a draft fix it with weather stripping, a “draft snake,” or get professional help.
- Take a hard look at your wastebaskets: be sure you are recycling as much as possible. In Londonderry all paper, cardboard, pasteboard (think cereal boxes), and clean plastic, aluminum and tin cans can be recycled. Keep track of how full your trash bin is when you put it out. Aim to put less in the trash each week.
- Turn down you thermostat one degree; but put on a sweater or fleece when you do it. You don’t need to endure discomfort; you just need to dress for the season.
- Go on a hunt for “vampire loads,” which are electric loads used when electronics are in so-called “standby”—they are still drawing electricity. For example, don’t leave the cell phone charge plugged into the wall, except when you are charging your phone. Make sure appliances, like TVs, are in “power saver” mode. Consider buying a “smart” power strip that cuts electric loads completely during the night (also available at eversource.com).
- Go on a hunt for Energy Stars. Make sure your appliances carry the Energy Star logo. If they don’t, start saving up for a replacement. Even if you can’t afford an upgrade now, you can start a “wish list” that will have more value than your Amazon wish list.
- Arm yourself with some fabric bags; keep them in the car, so when you are at the store you will not need plastic bags. There is now nearly as much plastic in our oceans as there is living biomass.
- Consume less beef and more pork; less pork and more chicken; less chicken and more fish, fruits, and vegetables. Not only is this good for your health, it makes a huge difference in the amount of water needed to produce what we eat. Limit beef to one day a week or less. Keep a “diary” on you calendar, noting if the dinner was beef, pork, chicken, or “meatless.”
- Only run the washer and dishwasher when they are full.
- Give your hot water heater a break: buy it a nice, cozy insulation jacket and turn down the temperature a few degrees.

These ideas would make a big difference, if we all adopted them. Here’s a way to make an even bigger difference: **each week of Lent write a letter to one of our local, state, national or religious leaders asking them to protect us, especially the poor, from a warming world; urge them to support policies to get us away from fossil fuels.** Your letter can be short. No need for scientific discussions or nerdy policy considerations—just tell them you care.

A prayer for our earth

All-powerful God,
you are present in the whole universe
and in the smallest of your creatures.
You embrace with your tenderness all that
exists.
Pour out upon us the power of your love,
that we may protect life and beauty.
Fill us with peace, that we may live
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.
O God of the poor,
help us to rescue the abandoned
and forgotten of this earth,
so precious in your eyes.
Bring healing to our lives,
that we may protect the world and not prey
on it,
that we may sow beauty,
not pollution and destruction.
Touch the hearts
of those who look only for gain
at the expense of the poor and the earth.
Teach us to discover the worth of each
thing,
to be filled with awe and contemplation,
to recognize that we are profoundly united
with every creature
as we journey towards your infinite light.
We thank you for being with us each day.
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle
for justice, love and peace.

A Christian prayer in union with creation

Father, we praise you with all your
creatures.
They came forth from your all-powerful
hand;
they are yours, filled with your presence
and your tender love.
Praise be to you!
Son of God, Jesus,
through you all things were made.

You were formed in the womb of Mary our
Mother,
you became part of this earth,
and you gazed upon this world with human
eyes.
Today you are alive in every creature
in your risen glory.
Praise be to you!
Holy Spirit, by your light
you guide this world towards the Father's
love
and accompany creation as it groans in
travail.
You also dwell in our hearts
and you inspire us to do what is good.
Praise be to you!
Triune Lord,
wondrous community of infinite love,
teach us to contemplate you
in the beauty of the universe,
for all things speak of you.
Awaken our praise and thankfulness
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for every being that you have made.
Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined
to everything that is.
God of love, show us our place in this world
as channels of your love
for all the creatures of this earth,
for not one of them is forgotten in your
sight.
Enlighten those who possess power and
money
that they may avoid the sin of indifference,
that they may love the common good,
advance the weak,
and care for this world in which we live.
The poor and the earth are crying out.
O Lord, seize us with your power and light,
help us to protect all life,
to prepare for a better future,
for the coming of your Kingdom
of justice, peace, love and beauty.
Praise be to you!
Amen.