



REFLECTIONS

SPRING 2026

Recognizing our gifts of time, talent and treasure

What does *Lent* Mean to You?

By Deacon Rob Embry, Associate Director
of Diaconal Vocations and Formation

For many, maybe most, Catholics in the pew, this automatically brings up a question from their childhood: "What are you giving up for Lent?" By reflex, thoughts of chocolate or a favorite TV show flit through their minds.

The Church suggests a more well-rounded approach. The core of Lent is prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

Let's jump into the middle. Fasting is about more than "giving up" a favorite treat or pastime. Fasting is bringing our unruly selves - our thoughts, our appetites, our temptations, and (yes) our bodies - into submission to our wills which should be directed to the goal of becoming saints.

Pick a persistent sin that nags you. Decide what guilty pleasure you intend to forgo for 40 days. Consciously link



the discomfort of hunger or self-denial to your persistent sin to remind you to resist the temptation when it sneaks up on you. If your fast means you spend less money on something, put the surplus cash in the parish collection. That's almsgiving!

Almsgiving is not just writing a check and sending it off somewhere. (BUT checks to the parish and charities are a good thing!) Expand your vision:

Purge your house and give away, donate, or sell all that extra junk you don't need that you are renting a storage space for. Give the money to the poor.

Reach out and engage with your extended family. What about your neighbors, especially the elderly and the needy down the street from you?

There are three things,
my brethren, by which
faith stands firm, devotion
remains constant, and
virtue endures. They
are prayer, fasting and
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Volunteer for a ministry – St. Vincent de Paul Society, Mobile Loaves and Fishes, a food pantry, or a parish clothes closet.

Get out of yourself and bring Christ to others.

Finally, tie it all together with God in your prayer. There are many suggestions for enhancing prayer in Lent. I would like to recommend a simple Examen of five steps at the end of the day (with apologies to Father Timothy Gallagher OMC and Father Albert Haase OFM):

Thanksgiving: The Psalms say, “Enter his gates with thanksgiving” (100:4). St. Paul says, “In all circumstances give thanks.” (1 Thess 5:18) Extend the graces of the Eucharist (Thanksgiving) by thanking God for His blessings.

Prayer: Ask the Holy Spirit to let you see with His eyes – to see the good, the bad, and the ugly.

Review your day in detail using the Parable of the Sower in Mark 4 as a guide.

Where did I let the birds on the path take away God’s Word from me at the start?

Where did I let my hardness of heart shrivel the roots of God’s Word in me so that I didn’t persevere against opposition?

Where did I let the thorns of my cares and preoccupations choke out my good intentions?

Where was I good soil for the God’s Word to bear fruit?



Prayer: Ask the Holy Spirit to let you see with His eyes – to see the good, the bad, and the ugly.

Forgiveness: Turn to God and ask forgiveness, then wait quietly for His peace.

Renewal: Plan tomorrow. Anticipate God sowing His Word into your life. Be ready to bear fruit.

There are three things, my brethren, by which faith stands firm, devotion

remains constant, and virtue endures. They are prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Prayer knocks at the door, fasting obtains, mercy receives. Prayer, mercy and fasting: these three are one, and they give life to each other. (St. Peter Chrysologus, Sermo 43: PL 52, 320, 322.)

Young Catholic Professionals



Young Catholic Professionals (YCP) Austin is a growing community dedicated to forming and connecting Catholic professionals ages 22 to 39 who want to integrate their faith with their work and leadership. Operating within the Diocese of Austin, YCP exists to build Catholic leaders who support one another personally, professionally, and spiritually — and then go out and serve others with purpose.

YCP Austin provides opportunities for young adults to build meaningful friendships,

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professional connections, mentorship relationships, and spiritual support through a wide range of events. These include networking socials, speaker panels, service projects, Masses, and workshops focused on both

professional development and faith formation. The chapter also offers a structured mentorship program that pairs young professionals with experienced Catholic mentors who help guide vocational and career discernment.



At its core, YCP Austin helps young adults realize they are not meant to navigate faith, career, and life alone. By fostering an authentic community rooted in shared values and common goals, YCP equips members to grow as disciples and leaders — both in the workplace and in the wider community.

Experienced Catholic professionals who are interested in supporting YCP Austin as mentors, board members, donors, sponsors, or speakers are invited to connect with Chapter President Cameron Filbrandt at cameron.filbrandt@ycpaustin.org. To learn more about the group, visit www.youngcatholicprofessionals.org or follow YCP Austin on social media.

Inaugural Year The Women's Giving Circle

A place for women to come together and be part of gifting organizations in our community

In the heart of the Diocese of Austin, women have always been the quiet force behind faith, service, and transformation. In October 2025, 21 women came together from across the diocese to unite Catholic women who believe in the power of collective generosity. These founding women saw the need to uplift ministries, expand opportunities, and nurture the future of our Church. Soon after, the Women's Giving Circle (WGC) was launched. Now with over 200 members, the WGC is coming together -- across generations, parishes, and backgrounds -- to make an even greater local impact.

The circle is a participatory philanthropy where individuals donate their own money to a pooled fund, then decide together what projects and charities to grant funds to. The grantmaking process is an opportunity to actively support nonprofits across the diocese. For this inaugural year, the founders have nominated eligible nonprofit organizations to apply to an initial grant round. After



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As members, the women will help discern where grants are given, learn from inspiring speakers, and join a sisterhood rooted in faith and purpose. Together, we multiply our impact--each gift, each voice and each women adding strength to the mission.

To learn more about the Women's Giving Circle, visit our website www.austindiocese.org/womens-giving-circle and see how you can help shape the mission of giving back to those in need together.



the Women's Giving Circle grants committee narrows down applications, donors will have an opportunity to listen to presentations from each organization and then cast their vote at the meeting. This participatory and collective giving has a larger impact on our communities and helps to mentor the next generation of women to become philanthropic leaders!

Women's Giving Circle



St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

New for You: The Universal Charitable Deduction

If you make cash donations to nonprofits such as the Diocese of Austin, there's a new way you could save on your taxes. It's called the universal charitable deduction.

According to the Stelter Company, starting this year, you can give up to \$1,000 (single filers) or \$2,000 (married couples) in cash and still receive a charitable deduction — even if you don't itemize. So even smaller donations can benefit you as you make an impact at the Diocese of Austin. (Note: Gifts to donor advised funds are excluded from this benefit.)

You can claim this deduction on top of the standard deduction, which for 2026 is \$16,100 (single) and \$32,200 (married filing jointly). If you are 65 or older, you may claim an additional deduction of \$2,050 more (single filer) or \$1,650 more (per qualifying individual if married filing jointly).

Also, for tax years through 2028, eligible seniors receive yet another deduction: \$6,000 (single filer) or \$12,000 (per qualifying individual if married filing jointly) — though this phases out at higher income levels.

Add it all up, and you get an easy new way to help those we serve right away while reducing your taxes. Talk to your tax professional about how this deduction aligns with your charitable goals. When you are ready to make a gift to support the Diocese of Austin, your parish, a Catholic school, or your favorite ministry, contact Dan Wierzbowski at (512) 949-2496 or dan-wierzbowski@austindiocese.org for a no-obligation conversation.



Beyond cash giving: more options for you

You may still benefit if you give **appreciated stock or real estate**, which eliminates capital gains tax on the growth, even if you don't itemize. If you are 70½ or older, you can make a gift **directly from your IRA** to the Diocese of Austin, your parish, a Catholic school, or your favorite ministry. You pay no tax on the distribution, and if you are required to take minimum distributions, it can satisfy all or part of that obligation.

According to the Stelter Company, starting this year, you can give up to \$1,000 (single filers) or \$2,000 (married couples) in cash and still receive a charitable deduction

Please note: This content is for informational purposes only and does not constitute tax, financial, or legal advice. Consult with your professional advisor before making decisions.

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Diocesan Holy Hour **FOR VOCATIONS**

April 25, 2026

*St. Helen's Parish
in Georgetown*

9 a.m. to Noon



www.austinvocations.com/events