BRITISH COLUMBIA SYNOD

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Abounding in love
Free up space to explore and grow in our spiritual practices.

The season of Lent arrives very early this year. It will feel like the Christmas decorations have hardly been put away when it is time to consider our how we will observe Lent. Ash Wednesday falls on Feb. 14, Valentine's Day, a day when many give thanks for the gift of love in their lives.

Ashes, flowers, candy, chocolate, it is not often that we would think of these things together. Yet, on both Ash Wednesday and Valentine's Day there is an opportunity to slow down, reflect, give thanks, and create room for our relationships deepen.

Valentines' Day is not about proving one's love via chocolate, cards or flowers despite what advertisers would lead us to believe. Instead, the date gives us an opportunity to intentionally express our thanks for the love we share with a partner, family members, friends, or others in our communities.

Ash Wednesday and the season of Lent are also not about proving our love to God. We won't earn more of God's love and favour if we give up chocolate or get out of bed an hour earlier in the day for devotions.

Instead, Lent is a beautiful part of our faith journey, a special season of discipleship that invites us to "give up" or maybe better to "free up" space to explore and grow in our spiritual practices.

As someone not raised in the church, I remember first encountering the season of Lent. I was curious and a little nervous walking into the sparsely attended mid-week service. I wasn't sure if I should even be there. Maybe this service was intended for those who knew their way around all these traditions.

However, it wasn't long before Lent was one of my favourite seasons. I discovered there were often five- or six-week studies that were just the right length for a single parent mom.

The diverse topics helped me learn more about Christian faith. I felt like I was on even footing even with those who had been in the church a long time since we were all exploring something new together.

It was during Lent that I first had the courage to risk praying out loud in a group. It sounds like a such a small thing, but this was a big step in my faith journey. I wanted to give voice to the prayer concerns God was shaping within me.

I still remember the setting, the pew, the light, the group, and my fear. I could hardly hear for the pounding of my heart in my ears. I wanted to pray, I knew I would pray, but it was intimidating to think about doing so....and then in time it wasn't.

Lent gave me space to grow, to try new things in the church and continue this journey of discipleship in Christ.

One Lent we heard more about stewardship, about how the resources we offer are used for God's purposes in places far beyond our local congregation. I learned about the work of the Lutheran World Federation and Canadian Lutheran World Relief. I discovered how my regular offerings and special gifts allow me to participate in God's work by supporting churches in regions of conflict or where there are needs around the world. Each year I become more aware of how we share in God's work.

Across the BC Synod and ELCIC there are many different practices during Lent. In some, there is a tradition of simple soup suppers shared on the evening of the mid-week worship so those coming

from work can more easily attend.

One congregation invited people from the recovery groups to join the meal. At the supper and during the shared clean up people had a chance to chat before heading to their respective gatherings, meetings, or worship while others headed home.

When we gather for worship on Ash Wednesday most of us will hear this reading from Joel, Rend your heart and not your clothing. Return to the Lord your God...(Joel 2: 13a).

Engagement in Lent is a "rending," a tearing open of our hearts to the renewing love of God who is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love" (Joel 2:13b). It is this love that is continually at work in us and in God's world to create new hearts, new attitudes, and new understanding for the sake of all that God loves, including each of us.