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Attempting to express our unity in diversity, our local ministerium learned from one of the clergy who is Episcopalian about the budding national practice called "Ashes to Go." As we approached our own parish celebrations of Ash Wednesday, several of our membership decided that we would like to extend the annual mark of repentance through the imposition of ashes at one of our busy village intersections during the morning hours of Ash Wednesday.

This was to be a sign of our own willingness to celebrate church without walls, as well as an attempt to reach out to those in the community whose schedule did not fit our worship services for this feast. Those who traversed the community and worked in our environs would also find in this ritual an opportunity to ground themselves for Lent. The response was far greater than we could have imagined. We signed well over 100 people that morning.

Even more exhilarating was the response to our efforts from the faithful of all religious stripes. There were moms with kids in strollers, a dad on paternity leave with his newborn, parishioners who left our church services to retrieve their parents and shut-ins unable to make the early Mass; there were students who ambled down from the high school, rushing workers and truck drivers, the curious, and reporters, cameras and news gatherers all. What a buzz, what a stir this caused in our village!

The ritual of ashes became a transformative event for the ministers and those ministered to. Words of gratitude were expressed by recipients. Tears were shed, confidences opened and secrets disclosed at this touch of grace. Their numbers, and their quickly prepared dispositions of heart, edified us who had simply desired to share, to reach out and touch those who may have not been seen or heard from on this particular Wednesday of the year. Parishioners brought family members and friends or honked and waved signs of encouragement or gave a thumbs-up of support. For here was a moment of opportunity seized by passers-by. Here was a chance to connect the dots of life and liturgy, of God and us, of the worlds of the sacred and sometimes not-so-sacred. Nothing sterile here.

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Sounding the drum of my strongest-held belief in the importance of connection, I also profess that here was one more opportunity for the laying on of hands. In the imposition of ashes, I noted that we ministers provided the mark of the cross, yet the ritual was also accompanied by some extension of human touch — a blessing with outstretched hand touching the head, outstretched arms resting on people's shoulders, or the spontaneous reaching out at beginning or end with an embrace.

I have no doubt about the place of high and holy ceremonies within the church building to inaugurate a new liturgical season; I now have utmost certainty about the necessity to celebrate our faith and rituals outside our walls, too. In our "Ashes to Go" celebration, the participation of the faithful so edified their ministers that we chose to extend our efforts three hours beyond schedule. We took careful note that when God is on the run, people do vote with their wheels, and the Spirit still blows where it will.

Editor's note: *This reflection was originally published in the March 2014 issue of [Celebration](#). Sign up to receive [daily lenten reflections](#).*

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