

Archdiocese poised to celebrate Lent

The Archdiocese of Baltimore is observing Lent in major ways.

Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien will celebrate Ash Wednesday Masses March 9 at both the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen. .

The Basilica Mass will begin at 12:10 p.m. while Mass at the cathedral will start at 5:30 p.m.

Lent is the 40-day period when Catholics are asked to pray, read Scripture, fast and give alms in an effort to sharpen their senses and focus mind and heart on the reign of God.

Easter, the culmination of Lent, is April 24.

The archdiocese is promoting its sacrament of Reconciliation campaign, "The Light is on for You," during Lent. All Catholic churches in the archdiocese will make the sacrament available on Wednesdays, starting March 16.

Most parishes will offer confessions on from 7-8:30 p.m. Others will set their own preferred time each Wednesday in Lent. The program is now in its third year.

Patterned after an Archdiocese of Washington program, "The Light is on for You" utilizes a multi-media marketing campaign to encourage Catholics to reconnect with reconciliation.

Baltimore-based Catholic Relief Services will start its annual Lenten program, "Operation Rice Bowl," on Ash Wednesday. A news release from CRS said "Catholic parishes and schools from more than 12,000 communities use symbolic rice bowls as the focal point for their prayer, fasting and learning. Getting involved in the program is a tangible way to help people living in poverty around the world."

Participants prepare simple, meatless recipes each week and put the money,

otherwise spent on bigger meals, into symbolic rice bowls. That money supports CRS' mission to fight global hunger and poverty.

"Participating in Operation Rice Bowl provides Catholics with 40 days of making a real difference in the lives of people struggling with hunger and poverty," said Operation Rice Bowl's program manager, Beth Martin, in a statement. "Learning about our brothers and sisters in developing countries and following the call to sacrifice helps thousands of people onto a path out of poverty every year."

Catholics raised more than \$6 million through Operation Rice Bowl in 2010, with 75 percent going to fund hunger and poverty projects in 40 countries. The remaining 25 percent stays in U.S. dioceses to support food pantries and soup kitchens.

Visit archbalt.org for more information on "The Light is on for You." For more information on Operation Rice Bowl, visit orb.crs.org.