

'I love you' with ashes inspires Father McGivney High School students

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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EDWARDSVILLE - Father Jeff Goeckner of St. Boniface Church in Edwardsville is known for his innovative ways of reaching young people.

On Ash Wednesday, Goeckner was at it again, trying to reach Father McGivney Catholic students in a Mass.

During the Mass, he called three students to the altar and placed three ashes on each's forehead. In the end, he asked the other students to call out what it said and they said: "I love you."

"I challenged them to love and respect one another, especially on Valentine's Day," he said. "St. Valentine was martyred for his love for Jesus. I think we need to set aside some of our difference and reach out to people during Lent we are normally not kind to."

Goeckner said when we respect one another, we build up "a really good community of faith."

Goeckner said in some ways Ash Wednesday is like New Year's Day.

"We all make resolutions on Ash Wednesday," he said. "It shows we are all committed to making the resolution to be a better person."

Goeckner said Lent is an extremely important time to reflect.

"We are doing the same thing that Jesus did in the 40 days he went out to pray and fast before he began his public ministry," Goeckner said.

"Ash Wednesday also reminds us of our baptism when we were anointed with salvation," he said. "As we grow older in faith, we have to be reminded of our baptism and our sinfulness. The ashes remind us of our penance and dedication to the 40 days of Lent to refresh our soul and reclaim our gift of baptism along the way."