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Nixon: Join us in a season of nonviolence

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By Barbara Nixon — Special to the Idaho Statesman

On February 13, the season of Lent begins in the Christian Church.

These several weeks before Easter mark a time of serious personal introspection, stemming from an acknowledgement of the messes we make with our fragile, mortal lives.

This is why, on Ash Wednesday when the Lenten season begins, you will see many followers of Jesus walking about with ashen crosses on their foreheads or hands. They have been reminded that “you are dust and to dust you will return.”

Many people will fast from something in their lives, or add a daily practice during this season. Others will attend special study groups or classes. At Hillview United Methodist Church, we are choosing to examine the violence in our lives by naming Lent “A Season of Nonviolence.” This seems a fitting focus in the aftermath of all the gun violence that closed 2012.

This emphasis comes from our belief that the violence that erupts so horrifically around our country cannot be addressed only by examining and limiting access to assault weapons. We believe that it cannot be addressed only by improving diagnosis and treatment of people with mental illnesses who may be prone to violence. We believe we must also take a closer look at the violence present in our own lives on a daily basis: the movies we watch, games we play, books we read, jokes we tell, how we speak and act when angry or frustrated.

All of these and more contribute to a culture in which violence is not simply tolerated, it is seen as acceptable, as entertaining, even as a source of amusement.

And so, during Lent, those at Hillview who are so inclined will be signing personal pledges, promising their willingness to monitor and work on limiting the violence that permeates their lives every day. Each participant will have a little rubber bracelet to remind them of this commitment. Bible study will focus on scripture in which Jesus teaches nonviolence as a response to those who use violence or abuse power in other ways. People will have opportunities from week to week to talk about how it is going and what we are learning about ourselves. The season will come to an official close on Easter morning with the hope that our lives and attitudes will have been transformed in ways that can truly make a loving difference in the world around us.

Anyone is welcome to participate in this practice. You do not need to be a part of Hillview, or any faith community for that matter. You only need to have a willingness to examine your own life and what fills it. If you'd like to sign a pledge and wear a bracelet, you may get these free at Hillview during the week of February 10. In my wildest imaginings, over the next few years, I can picture thousands of people throughout Idaho joining together for a time, to carefully look at our own responsibility for the world we live in and how we could help make it ever so much better and more peaceful for generations of children to come.

(Note: This idea stems from the official Season for Nonviolence that has been in effect for the past fifteen years, running between the birthdays of Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi. Individuals, faith communities, work places, even cities like Chicago and Phoenix, make pledges and proclamations annually.)

Barbara Nixon is the senior pastor at Hillview United Methodist Church in Boise.

The Idaho Statesman's weekly faith column features a rotation of writers from many different faiths and perspectives.

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