Lent

By Chaplain Donald Moss

This coming Wednesday is Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent. Both Protestant and Catholic communities will be distributing ashes during Ash Wednesday services. The minister or priest will anoint the forehead with ashes and say, "You are dust and unto dust you will return" or "Turn away from sin and return to the gospel." The intent is to enter into the Lenten weeks before Easter with a heart set on repentance and preparation for the celebration of Easter.

Christianity borrowed the use of ashes as a sign of repentance from Hebrew culture. The readings on Ash Wednesday recall Christ's 40 days in the wilderness. Those 40 days recall the 40 years the Hebrew people were in the wilderness before they entered the promised land. The Hebrew people were led through the waters of the Red Sea into the wilderness until they crossed over the waters of the Jordan River into the holy land.

Both the Jewish people and Christians use this wilderness experience as a metaphor for the journey of life. We journey until we reach the land of our rest. Christians see themselves as having passed through the waters of baptism into the wilderness of life until we rest with God in heaven.

During Lent, we fast, pray and give alms to the poor in order to discipline ourselves away from our selfish inclinations. We hope to die a little to self and become more concerned for others, to change from being selfish to being self-giving. We hope to open up ourselves to God and to one another.

The word "Lent" is from Middle English. It means "springtime." Lent is intended to be a new season in our lives, a new springtime. It is another chance to look at our lives and ask questions about our personal and spiritual progress. It is a season to repent our sins, but it is also a season of joy. It is a happy season because we once again have a chance to turn away from sin and return to God. We renew our efforts to love God and to love one another more openly and completely.

Ashes are a sign of repentance, but they also are a sign of new life. Out of the ashes comes new life and greater love. That is what we are here for, to love.

Nile C. Kinnick High School Visual Basic class makes learning fun

By Nile C. Kinnick High School Public Affairs

Computer programming has been described as one of those necessary evils to attain supreme command in the computer world. There may be some truth to this – the endless hours of pseudo code, programming your first stopwatch, tax calculator or working with the ever present 'Hello World' program. Quite often there seems to be no point other than because the teacher assigned it.

One of the technical education teachers at Nile C. Kinnick High School has found a different approach to teaching programming. Robert Tiffany has taken fun to another level – six levels to be exact, in the Visual Basic I class. After learning the basics of the language in the first quarter, his students have moved from text books to the real world.

One of the largest industries in the world right now is game development. "The students wanted to be involved in something that has just as much purpose as fundamental class work. If it happens to be fun, all the better," Tiffany said.

Tiffany divided his class into six groups. Each group was responsible for developing one level of a six level computer game. The rules for development are simple; each level must have something to do with what the students are learning in class, there have to be rules posted somewhere for each level, each level is progressively harder, and it has to be, as you may have guessed, fun!

Pseudo code becomes the storyboard for laying out their game idea. The 'hello world' programs become dialog boxes so the players can interact with the game. The stopwatch programs become timers and tax calculator programs simply become calculators. "On their own, the students have researched ways to go far beyond their text," Tiffany added. "When there is a reason to learn, nothing will stop them!"

Game development serves so many purposes. "I'm not trying to create a bunch of gaming programmers, I'm just giving students another outlet to show what they can do – a fun outlet," he said. "The fact that it is embedded with so much cross-curricular support and really stimulates the critical thinking skills is merely a byproduct of the process."

The finished product is a game that can be used by both teachers and students for remediation, helping with current lessons or just for fun – and the students love to play them!

For Tiffany, it all boils down to one thing, "If it's fun, the students will learn and I have found out their ability to learn is endless when there is appropriate motivation," he said. "The byproduct of this is students that are having fun learning very advanced technology and games that teachers and students can use for years to come. How cool [is it] for students to be able to leave a legacy like that?"

Nile C. Kinnick High School students 11th-grader Ken Yates, 12th-grader Chris Byerly and 9th-grader Nira Galgana, put their creative minds together with fun classwork at hand in the Visual Basic class.

Photo by Robert Tiffany