*Reprint permission is granted for local congregational use.Just copy and paste into your newsletter! Please include the copyright notice. Other uses please inquire: rblezard@lss-elca.org.*

March 2018

***Consider a Lenten Facebook ‘fast’***

Along with the old standbys of chocolate, alcohol, smoking and soda pop, Facebook and social media have joined the list of common things people give up for Lent as they prepare their hearts and minds for Easter.

It’s definitely a 21st century twist to the ancient practice of “fasting” to improve our willpower, strengthen our spirits, clear our minds, distance ourselves from distractions and bring us closer to God. And in our day and age, it’s entirely necessary, too.

What’s the stewardship connection? God entrusts us to treasure and use wisely all that we have and all we are. Growing evidence concludes that excessive digital media not only wastes our time but also may cloud our thinking.

Research shows people can become addicted – yes, addicted – to digital media. Scientists discovered that when folks get an affirmation on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat or other social media, it triggers a response in the reward and pleasure centers of our brains. We want more and more and have a hard time disengaging. (It’s a real issue. Just Google “smartphone addiction” to learn more.)

Moreover, there is growing concern about the effects that excessive digital exposure has on the developing brains of children.

For those of us who use our phones for keeping up with news, texting, sending email, reading or watching video streaming, excessive smartphone use can lower our attention spans and train us to crave a constant stream of new information.

And of course, all this digital media takes up time that we might be using for more healthful activities, such as praying, meditating, processing the important things of our lives, talking to friends, taking a walk, reading a book, exercising or playing a board game with family members.

So maybe giving up Facebook and other digital media is a perfect idea for Lent in the 21st century. Like those old standbys of chocolate, alcohol, smoking and soda pop, giving up social media and other digital applications for Lent may not be easy, but it will help strengthen our spirits, test our willpower, clear our minds, distance ourselves from distractions and bring us closer to God.

*--Rob Blezard*

*Copyright © 2018, Rev. Robert Blezard. Reprinted by permission. Pastor Blezard serves as an assistant to the bishop of the Lower Susquehanna Synod and works as content editor for* [*www.stewardshipoflife.org*](http://www.stewardshipoflife.org)*.*