

Lent Reflections

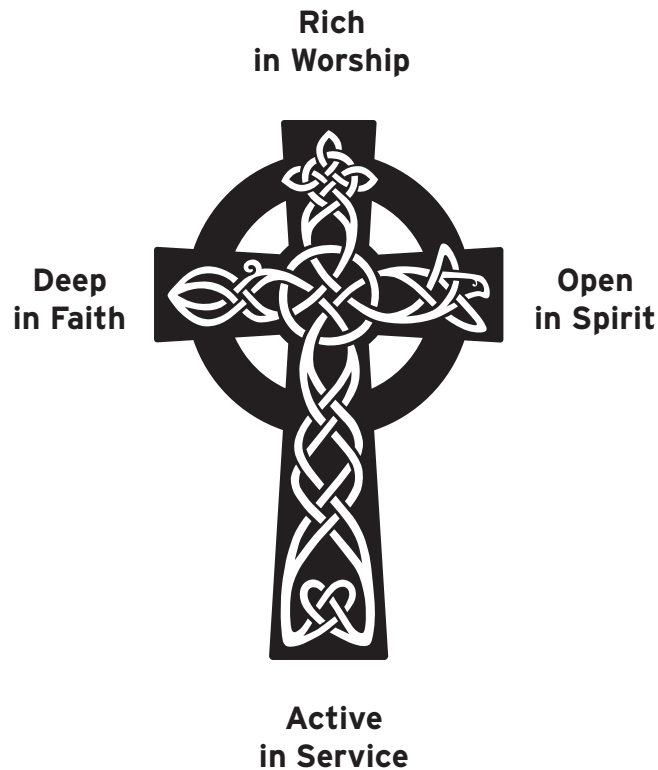


SPARK

*A resource for exploring
our call to be active in service*

MISSION STATEMENT

St. Columba's is a welcoming Christian community that seeks to be open in spirit, deep in faith, rich in worship, active in service.



A PDF of this booklet is available on our parish website (Columba.org). We hope you will invite friends far and wide to use this resource.

MAKING THE MOST OF LENT

Lent calls us to deepen our awareness of the cost and the joys of following Christ. This year at St. Columba's we are opening ourselves to the action of God's Spirit in renewing our collective and individual commitment to be active in service to others. This booklet has been put together by members of the clergy to provide a pattern of reflection and prayer to help us open our hearts and imaginations. Each week touches on a particular facet of the vocation to serve, providing three reflections on that theme to stimulate thought and prayer.

Our current program for renewing our call to service is called "Light the Fire!" and groups will meet this year to explore actual forms of service. They are called SPARK groups.

In creating this related Lenten resource we have turned that name into an acronym, to give us the five themes of Service, Prayer, Advocacy, Relationships and Koinonia (the scriptural word we translate as communion or fellowship, pronounced koyn-on-ee-a). We hope that you will find these varied reflections helpful in your Lenten pilgrimage.

If we use Lent to deepen our awareness of the call to serve others, we will want to commit ourselves to celebrating Christ's self-offering as the servant of all who gave his life on the cross. We hope that you will feel drawn to take part in the three great acts of worship that go to the very heart of the Christian way—Maundy Thursday, the Liturgy of Good Friday and the Great Vigil of Easter (April 5–7). Reserve these three evenings on your calendar now and make your participation and the sacrifice of time an offering to God.

I. Jesus, the One Who Serves

Listening is a vital element in every relationship, and Lent is a time when we focus on listening to Jesus. Reading the gospels again, we try not to impose our own views onto Jesus but to let him speak for himself again. He defined his own identity in terms of service: “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Being available to others. Self-giving. Touching people’s lives with encouragement and healing. Honoring and ministering to people’s real needs. Supporting the neglected. This what we see in Jesus’ actions, as they were recorded in the gospels to show us how he defined his own identity and how he modeled human life with its potential for love actualized.

John 13:3-15

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord are you going to wash my feet?” Jesus answered, “You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.” Peter said to him, “You will never wash my feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no share in me.” Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!” . . . After he had washed their feet and put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call

me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So, if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.”

Suggestion for Prayer

How has Christ ministered to your needs in the past? What do you need him to be for you just now? Speak simply in prayer in gratitude for ways you have been served, and be honest about your current needs.

II. I Am a Minister

Have you noticed that in our service bulletins, where we name the ministers of our church, we put "All the people of St. Columba's" at the top of the list? The clergy and lay staff come next. This isn't flippant. We really do believe that baptism integrates all our lives into the ongoing ministry of Christ and defines us as members, actual limbs and organs, of his body. We all have a gift and a responsibility to be of service to others.

Christian life is a matter of becoming what we are, realizing our potential as ministers in ways that are realistic for each particular stage of life. Have we embraced this radical understanding of ministry, or do we still secretly rely (for our own convenience?) on the obsolete notion that the name minister can be properly applied only to religious professionals?

Acts 2:1-4

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Suggestion for Prayer

St. Columba's is embracing the theme "Light the Fire!" this year as an expression of our calling to renew and rekindle our collective and individual commitment to serve others. Have you really imagined and welcomed the flame of the Holy Spirit resting on you personally, consecrating and empowering you as a minister in Christ? In your imagination, put yourself in the upper room with the first disciples and let the event unfold, experiencing it. How do you feel? Express these feelings to God.

III. Varied Activities, Same Lord

There is an intimate connection between the action of making ourselves available to serve others and the personal discovery of the vital worth of community. Our humanity is broken and compromised through a hundred forms of isolation and ruptured connections. Every act of service works in partnership with God to repair the world by restoring a connection, and those who serve others are bound to be as transformed and blessed by this restoration as those who are served. In the community woven by serving, we discover there is a place for everyone, and that every form of helping is of equal worth. All have potential, all are qualified to be "connection repair persons," each with a particular speciality.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Suggestion for Prayer

How have you practiced serving others? Write a short inventory. Are you aware of any particular groups of people whom you might be able to serve, who would stretch and challenge you as you connect with them? Ask God to open your eyes gently to the opportunities for service that might be right for you now as you grow and open up as a Christian.

I. Ready to Serve?

"To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God's love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love."

■ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991) p. 390

What a beautiful image: God is a fountain of sending love. The fountain overflows in love, and to be part of that sending love we must find our rest as well as our mission in it. We don't associate mission with rest or quiet or prayer. We are not encouraged to be still in almost any area of our lives. And yet, how can we be engaged in service in the name of Christ without knowing ourselves to be in Christ?

John 15:5 (pray with verses 1-11 for the fullest image)

I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.

Suggestions for Prayer

Find 10 to 15 minutes in your day when you can be alone and read this scripture slowly, imagining yourself as part of the vine or part of a fountain that sustains your life in love. What does it mean to be connected to this never-ending source of life and love?

Take the time above during a walk or jog, on a bike ride, at the gym, in the car before heading to the supermarket or even in the tub.

Allow yourself to pause at least a few times each week. Feel the flow of life in and around you.

SECOND WEEK: PRAYER

II. Praying in the Trinity

The theologian Jürgen Moltmann stressed that the revelation of God in Scripture as Sender, Sent and Sending (Father, Son, Spirit) in relation to the world is a reflection of something deeper, something eternal in God. God is the fountain of sending love and that sending love reflects the relationship in the heart of the Trinity. There is an eternal sending or *missio* (the root of mission) within God.

The doctrine of the Trinity is not static theological speculation but a reflection of our experience of God. The Father (Creator) sends out the Son (Redeemer) and the Spirit (Sanctifier). We experience God as creating, redeeming and sanctifying all of life, and why? It's simple: God is love.

I John 4:7-8

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

Suggestions for Prayer

Using the prayer suggestions on page 7, spend the time you have carved out praying with the verses above or just the last bit: God is love.

Remember a time or times when you have felt deeply loved. How did it feel? Did you feel yourself enlarged? How so? Give thanks for that love.

Think of a time or times when you loved another in a way that was sacrificial (remember that the root of sacrifice is "to make holy"). Where did the power to love come from? Can you imagine your love as flowing from the heart of God?

III. Always Sending and Always Sent: Waiting on the Spirit!

“Any work for God that has less than a passion for Jesus Christ as its motive will end in crushing heartbreak and discouragement.”

■ *Oswald Chambers, So Send I You
(Bristol, U.K.: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1988) p. 30*

In our wish to work for God and with our passion to model Christ we are called upon to open our hearts and minds to the gifts and direction of the Holy Spirit, given to each of us in baptism. When we are resonating with the eternal love frequencies of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, there will be an enormous release of energy and we will be sent out in mission.

In fact, it is always the Spirit’s mission and not our own. If we can begin to understand ourselves as the ones sent, we come closer to being like that first Christian community who gathered in Jerusalem after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

The apostles along with others were greeted by the risen Christ and filled with hope and fear. But it then took 50 days of communal waiting for the gift of the Holy Spirit to “light the fire” of the Church. And what a fire it was!

We are called to follow their example in love, witness, service and prayer. Sometimes that means waiting in a time of discernment for the prompting of the Spirit. It also means responding when the prompting is heard. It always means staying connected to the worshipping community—our parish.

Excerpt from Eucharistic Prayer C

... Open our eyes to see your hand at work in the world about us. Deliver us from the presumption of coming to this Table for solace only, and not for strength; for pardon only, and not for renewal. Let the grace of this Holy Communion make us one body, one spirit in Christ, that we may worthily serve the world in his name.

Risen Lord, be known to us in the breaking of the Bread.

Suggestions for Prayer

While at Eucharist on Sunday or a weekday morning, listen carefully to the words of the eucharistic prayer. Put down your bulletin and feel the presence of the gathered community—our community—and offer yourself as a gift to God.

During communion pray for a spirit of openness and generosity for yourself and also for St. Columba’s. Invite the Holy Spirit to guide your life and ours.

Pray these words: Come Holy Spirit. Fill the hearts of your faithful people and kindle in us the fire of your love, that we may serve the world in Christ’s name.

THIRD WEEK: ADVOCACY

I. Personal and Political

The Bible is both personal and political. It is about personal transformation through relationship with God, and it is about political transformation through the action and advocacy of God's people. The good news Jesus brings is that God's reign of peace and plenty is supplanting the systems of domination and injustice perpetuated by worldly powers. The Church has often blunted the political edge of this message, so that we may think the Gospel is only, or primarily, about personal transformation. But the personal and political go hand in hand—we cannot have one without the other.

How are we to bring about God's reign? Jesus advocates for systemic change by embodying the new order he is proclaiming. Jesus ignores cultural boundaries and conventional pieties: He touches the unclean when he heals; he shares meals with tax collectors; he engages with Samaritans and women. Solidarity and advocacy go together: In order to advocate for the outcast, we must meet them, listen to them and allow our hearts to be open to them, so that together, we may find a new way forward. This is what Jesus does when he meets the Samaritan woman at the well.

John 4:5-7, 9-10

Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that

you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

Suggestion for Prayer

If we hope to bring good news to the poor, we must work to re-imagine ourselves as "we"—we, who are all God's children—rather than "us" and "them." As you go about your day, practice seeing the commonality you have with everyone you encounter. On the Metro or sidewalk, look at all the faces around you, and pray, for each person: The Christ in me blesses the Christ in you / the Christ in you blesses the Christ in me.

II. Me? Really?

God called Moses to be an advocate for the people of Israel, to bring them out of Egypt. But Moses said no many times before he said yes. He gave all sorts of excuses about why he wasn't the right candidate to stand up for the Israelites. Why couldn't Moses see in himself what God saw? Moses was afraid: afraid that he wasn't good enough or smart enough or eloquent enough for the job. Perhaps he was also afraid of facing down the powerful and mighty Pharaoh. Confronting powerful people, especially by calling out the ways they are hurting others, is scary—and dangerous. Confronting our own fear of inadequacy is sometimes even harder. In the story of Moses' calling, we see that it's only human to resist when God asks us to do something audacious.

Exodus 3:9-12, 4:10-13

The LORD said to Moses, "The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain." . . . But Moses said to the LORD, "O my LORD, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." Then the LORD said to him, "Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?

Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak." But he said, "O my LORD, please send someone else."

Suggestion for Prayer

Eventually, God convinces Moses that he is the right advocate for the people of Israel. God will equip Moses to do the thing God is asking him to do. How often have you said no to God? What were the excuses you gave? Did you let God make his case to you? Think about your worries and fears. Imagine God's argument to you when you present these fears and worries to him.

III. Life Together in Christ

Where is our community being called to advocate for God's vision in the world? It is tempting to think about this question in terms of how we can use our abundance to help those less fortunate. But charity (in its modern sense of giving to the poor) is inadequate to the task of bringing about God's vision for the world. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians, "If I give away all my possessions . . . but do not have love, I gain nothing" (13:3). The self-giving love (agape) Paul is talking about compels us to work for justice in our church, in our community and in the world at large. The life we share in Christ is one of radical equality, and Christ's love burning within us means we can never rest until that equality embraces all.

Galatians 3:23-28

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Suggestion for Prayer

What divisions exist in our world today that cry out to be healed? Who is the slave crying to be free? The truth is, we are all in bondage until all of us are free. Pray for everyone suffering in bondage under the world's current political and economic systems, and imagine what God's liberation of all people would look like.

I. Jesus, Son of God

The relationship between God and Jesus is intimate and strong. There is a relationship of love; the tender love between parent and child. When Jesus began teaching, he repeatedly referred to his unique relationship with God—this sense of oneness. As he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus called out to “Abba, Father.” The word Abba (Aramaic for Daddy) is both deeply intimate and profoundly respectful, capturing the trust and affection between Jesus and his God and Father. Jesus’ entire life—each loving act—pointed to God’s love for humankind as he ministered to those living on the margins and the most vulnerable of society. Truly Jesus loves God with heart and soul and might. We are called to do the same.

Deuteronomy 6:4-6

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart.

Suggestion for Prayer

Ask yourself: What prevents me from loving and serving God as fully as Jesus? Pray to God that your heart may be opened to this command.

II. I Am a Child of God

God pursues a personal and loving relationship with each one of us. This relationship can never be forced, but God takes the initiative and always extends the invitation, beckoning us into a relationship that is personal, intimate and faithful. God claims us as children and knows us completely. When Jesus was baptized in the Jordan, he heard a voice from heaven saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). These words reveal the true identity of Jesus as God’s beloved child. We too must remember that these words spoken to Jesus at his baptism are words spoken to all who are brothers and sisters of Christ. Never forget that being known by God is being loved by God.

Psalms 139: 1-9

LORD, you have searched me out and known me; *
you know my sitting down and my rising up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.

You trace my journeys and my resting-places *
and are acquainted with all my ways.

Indeed, there is not a word on my lips, *
but you, O LORD, know it altogether.

You press upon me behind and before *
and lay your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; *
it is so high that I cannot attain to it.

Where can I go then from your Spirit? *
where can I flee from your presence?

If I climb up to heaven, you are there; *
if I make the grave my bed, you are there also.

If I take the wings of the morning *
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

Even there your hand will lead me *
and your right hand hold me fast.

Suggestions for Prayer

What does it mean to you to be fully known by God?
How does this shape your life?

What does God desire of you? Complete the
sentence: God's purpose for me is . . .

What prevents you from knowing that you are a
beloved child of God? Ask God to open your heart
to deepen your relationship. How will you respond
to this relationship?

III. Family of God: The Body of Christ

Although God calls each of us personally, we do not live in isolation. We are the body of Christ and individual members of it, and as the body of Christ we are inextricably interrelated. God calls each of us to serve, and through the Holy Spirit we are empowered with gifts that are complementary to the unique gifts of others in community. As Christians we are called to minister both to one another and to those around us.

In the Baptismal Covenant we promise, with God's help, to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves. But genuine ministry involves both giving and receiving. This reciprocity is critical for the transformation of our hearts and lives. It is not doing ministry to others, for that keeps us from acknowledging our own needs. Rather our lives are enriched by mutual nurturing when we are brought to Christ through the people we serve.

1 Corinthians 12:4-13a

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the

Spirit chooses. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.

Suggestion for Prayer

As we journey through this season of Lent, our community of St. Columba's is asking God's Spirit to light the fire of service in our hearts again. Where do you think God is leading our parish? Ask yourself: What gifts do I bring? Give thanks to God for the many gifts of our community offered in service to others.

I. Communion

As Lent draws to an end and we anticipate the events of Holy Week and Easter, we meditate this week on the Greek word *koinonia*, which is loosely translated as community. But its meaning is more complex and deeper than simply community. In scripture *koinonia* is translated as fellowship, communion, sharing and intimacy. *Koinonia* can best be understood in the way Jesus gathered his disciples and shared in the first Eucharist (Greek for thanksgiving.) At the Last Supper the 12 disciples each took a share of the life and ministry of Jesus as they received the bread and wine. Each Sunday as we receive the Eucharist, through the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, we join in *koinonia*—communion, sharing an intimate connection to Jesus.

1 Corinthians 10:16-17

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing [*koinonia*] in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing [*koinonia*] in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

Suggestion for Prayer

Reflect on the times you feel most connected to God. Reflect on the times when you feel most connected to the community at St. Columba's. Ask God to deepen your experience of *koinonia* in the celebration of the Holy Communion. Ask God to deepen your experience of *koinonia* through your acts of service.

II. God's Fuel

As you engage in a relationship of koinonia, you discover that we each bear responsibility to offer our whole being for the community. A parish like St. Columba's relies upon the gifts and talents that each person brings to do the work to which God has called us. Each one is called by God to take a share in God's action in the world.

Consider the process of building a bonfire. It begins with small pieces of fuel and it only takes a single spark to ignite it. As the small pieces catch fire, larger pieces can be added. To keep the fire burning new bits of fuel, small and large, must be continually added. Sometimes the fire wanes and sometimes the fire roars.

So it is with God. Jesus is the spark that has begun the fire, and each of us is a bit of fuel that gives the fire life. And, just as the flames did not consume the burning bush in the Moses story, so it is with us. We are not destroyed or turned to ash as we engage in koinonia, rather we find warmth and light as we help Christ scatter embers of love all over the world.

Hymn 704 *(from The Hymnal 1982)*

O thou who camest from above
the fire celestial to impart,
kindle a flame of sacred love
upon the altar of my heart.

There let it for thy glory burn
with ever-bright, undying blaze,
and trembling to its source return
in humble prayer and fervent praise.

Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
to work, and speak, and think for thee;
still let me guard the holy fire
and still stir up the gift in me.

Still let me prove thy perfect will,
my acts of faith and love repeat,
till death thy endless mercies seal,
and make the sacrifice complete.

■ *Charles Wesley (1707–1788)*

Suggestion for Prayer

Reflect on the hymn text above and give thanks for the gifts given to you. Name in your heart the things that you are most passionate about and ask God to give you courage to share them. Ask God to give you new gifts that might be fuel for the fire that Christ has started at St. Columba's.

III. Sharing

Koinonia is not a solitary thing. To be truly in community requires relationship with others. The word community is a combination of *common* + *unity*. A community is a group that is united around a common purpose. Koinonia is the kind of intimate interdependent kinship that is similar to the bonds that families share.

St. Columba's is a spiritual home for many, and through our connection to St. Columba's God is continually prodding us to give more of ourselves. God is also offering care from people you can trust when you need help. There is interconnectedness and interdependence in community. Koinonia requires both give and take. The English word fellowship comes close to describing the joy and warmth that comes from belonging to and trusting in a community.

1 John 1:5-7a

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship [koinonia] with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship [koinonia] with one another.

Suggestions for Prayer

Pray for the church. Pray for Mariann Budde, our bishop. Pray for the clergy and staff who work to support the parish. Pray for those in the parish you see as wonderful examples of servanthood. Pray for yourself and others to be inspired by the Spirit to be active in service and full participants in koinonia.

Kindle in our hearts, O God,
the flame of that love
which never ceases, that it may burn in us,
giving light to others.

May we shine forever in
Thy holy temple.

Set on fire with Thy eternal light,
even Thy son, Jesus Christ,
our Savior and Redeemer.

The Next Step: Light the Fire!

Consider joining a SPARK group to become more active in service with others. For details, send an e-mail to lightthefire@columba.org.

NOTES

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