

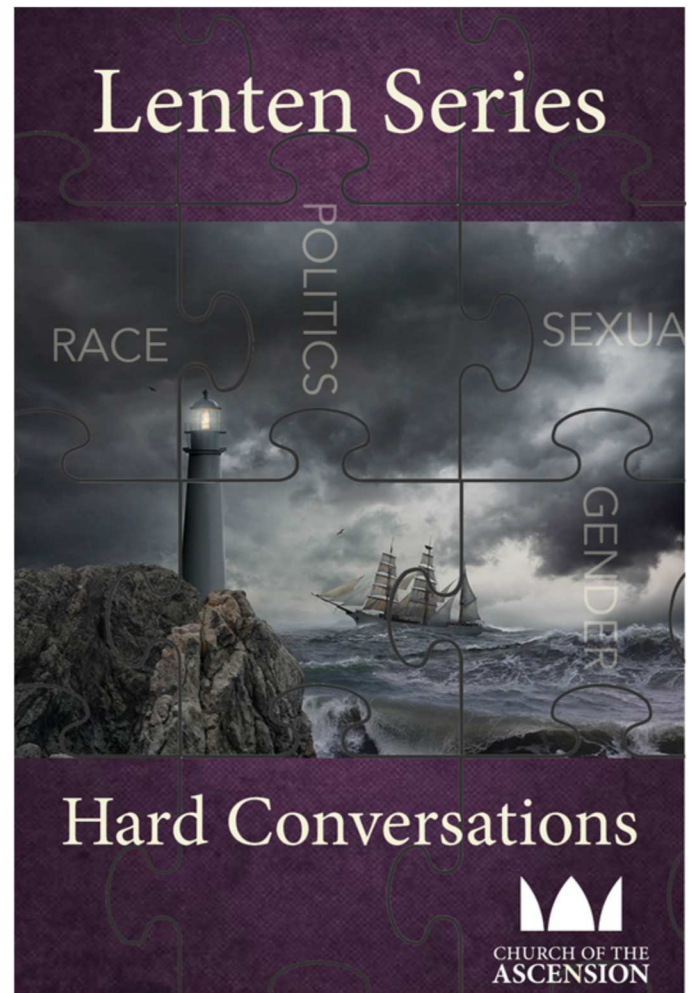
## Lenten Series: Fridays in March

*Please plan to attend our Hard Conversations series on Fridays in March. We will begin in the Parish Hall at 6:30pm and end at approximately 8:00pm. Our topics will be Politics (March 6), Race (March 13), Gender (March 20) and Sexuality (March 27). Evenings will include teaching, prayer, reflection and time for discussion. Child-care for the youngest will be provided as will a program for kids K – 5th grade. The background for the series is described below in an article by Father Jonathan Warren, Associate Rector.*

It is striking how regularly the New Testament conceives of the church in explicitly political language. This comes as somewhat of a shock to those of us who have been raised in the modern west to see religion as belonging to the realm of private ‘values’ as opposed to public ‘facts’. The privatization of religion has been so thorough in modernity that even those who are aware that the church has a positive public contribution to make can only bring themselves to say that the church has political ‘implications’ or that the church is politically ‘significant’.

But if we read the New Testament, we see that not only does the church pray for and participate in the coming of the ‘kingdom of God’, not only does the church refer to its head as *kyrios*, ‘Lord’, not only does St. Paul call the members of the church ‘ambassadors of Christ’ (2 Cor 5:20), but that the very word for church in the New Testament, *ekklesia*, is a political word. This word was chosen very carefully by the early Christians. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint, the word *ekklesia* referred to the significant public gatherings of the nation of Israel (e.g. Deut. 4:10; 1 Kings 8:14; Neh. 8), indicating that the early Christians were identifying themselves with the nation of Israel as God’s public representative on earth. Indeed, they understood themselves to be his ambassadors, and the church to be his embassy.

What does it mean to be an embassy? The theologian Jonathan Leeman writes that an embassy is ‘an institution that represents one nation inside of another nation. It declares its *home nation*’s interests to the *host nation*, and it protects the citizens of the home nation living in the host nation’. The church is the embassy of Christ in every nation, but with this critical difference: ‘it is not an embassy representing another nation from across geographic space. It represents another nation from across time - from the future’. The future of Christ’s reign, which is happening now but will be manifested everywhere at his return, when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Christ is Lord, is represented now in the church.

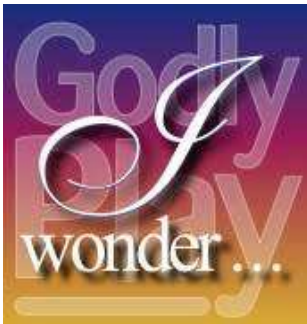


The purpose of the church's existence is to represent Christ to the world. The way in which the church does this is by growing in obedience to Christ's summary of the law and prophets, which we proclaim every Sunday in the opening of the liturgy: *"Hear what our Lord Jesus Christ says: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."* This is a call to the church first and foremost to set its own house in order. The church must know its story and live its story, and it must do so aware of and in conversation with the host culture and in the time in which it finds itself embedded. The church which knows and is living out its story lives in an alternative way from the culture that surrounds it, but also has a contribution to make to that culture.

These conversations are an attempt to begin to wrestle publicly with some of the most pressing concerns in our cultural moment with the mind of Christ. We do not imagine that these are the only topics of concern to our congregation, nor do we imagine that we will exhaust everything there is to say on these topics. But the church which desires to be an embassy of Christ must learn how to remain connected to and faithfully present within its host culture without being assimilated to it. This posture is a gift of the Holy Spirit, who unites us to Christ, but it is a craft which must be learned and then honed and practiced. These conversations on politics, race, gender, and sexuality are practice in the art of being the embassy of Christ in American culture.

During each evening together, Fr. Jonathan Warren will introduce the topic with relevant history, social science, and theological and pastoral resources; we will pray; we will lament together the divisions and confusion within our culture and within the church around these topics; and then we will engage in conversation together at tables around each topic. In each case, we will consider what our next steps as a church might be to grow in our love for God, our neighbors, and our city. We hope you will join us for each of these times together. There will be children's programming during these conversations. If you have any questions, please email Fr. Jonathan at [jonathan.warren@ascensionpittsburgh.org](mailto:jonathan.warren@ascensionpittsburgh.org).

## Special Needs Program in Lent



Thank you to everyone who has expressed interest and support for the Special Needs Group at Ascension! We are always looking for ways to deepen our fellowship with people of all abilities: worshipping together at WINGS and spending time together at Capernaum Friends Club are two ways we do this at Ascension. Taking time to get to know a special needs friend, family member or caregiver, can be another important way to build up the whole body of Christ. How else might we be called to be a friend to a vulnerable person in our midst? If you have suggestions, resources, or just want to be part of our congregation's efforts to improve access and faith opportunities to people with special needs, we would love to hear from you! Please contact Keira Fuener at [keirafuener@gmail.com](mailto:keirafuener@gmail.com).



During Lent WINGS will follow the Godly Play Lenten lesson series called "The Faces of Easter." We will use visual storytelling to review key moments of Jesus' life as we prepare for understanding the miracle of Jesus' death and resurrection on Easter. The classes meet Sunday mornings in the New Catacombs at 9am, and participants return to worship for communion.

Upcoming dates for Capernaum Friends Club, Saturday 2-4pm are below. Fun and fellowship with Friends from Ascension, and also an opportunity to reach out to others not part of our church family. Join us!

**March 14: Jesus always loves us**

**April 18: The Story of Easter Week: New Life in Christ**

**May 9: Special Program for Parents and Friends (TBD)**

# The Stations of the Cross:

## Marking the Miracle of Time

By Chris Massa, Director of Music and Worship Arts

*Go to dark Gethsemane, ye that feel the tempter's pow'r;  
Your Redeemer's conflict see, watch with him one bitter hour;  
Turn not from his griefs away, learn of Jesus Christ to pray.*

I didn't grow up in a church that observed Lent, so it wasn't until fairly recently that I began to realize just how little I understood about it. I thought Lent was primarily a season to "give something up," usually chocolate, when it's actually more of a pilgrimage. During the forty days of Lent, we're invited to join Jesus on a journey to the cross, and nowhere is this truer or more literal than during Holy Week, the final seven days before his crucifixion.

One particular aspect of our Lenten observance came from a desire to recreate a very specific type of pilgrimage. In the 15th and 16th centuries, Franciscans began to build a series of outdoor shrines to symbolize particular places in the Holy Land, particularly locations along the Via Dolorosa, the path that Jesus is believed to have walked to his crucifixion. This practice became so popular that, in 1686, Pope Innocent XI gave the Franciscans permission to build replicas of these shrines, also known as stations, within their churches. More than 300 years later, Christians around the world still prayerfully walk the Stations of the Cross.

*Follow to the judgment hall; view the Lord of life arraigned;  
O the wormwood and the gall! O the pangs his soul sustained!  
Shun not suffering, shame or loss; learn of him to bear the cross.*

At Church of the Ascension, our observance of the Stations of the Cross on Good Friday is unique in that, rather than using a statue or icon to represent each Station, we invite members of the congregation — all media, all ages, all levels of experience — to create new works of visual art to be used during the final hour of the Good Friday service when we observe each station. For congregants, this offers a way to engage with the Stations in a way that is new, thought-provoking, and consistently powerful. Artists, if anything about this piques your interest and you'd like to hear more about how you can participate, please email me at [chris.massa@ascensionpittsburgh.org](mailto:chris.massa@ascensionpittsburgh.org).

*Calvary's mournful mountain climb; there, adoring at this feet,  
Mark the miracle of time, God's own sacrifice complete;  
"It is finished!" hear him cry; learn of Jesus Christ to die.*

The journey to Calvary is not an easy or comfortable one, but it is a pilgrimage that Jesus invites us to take with him. My hope is that our entire Church family, those who create art and those who support the arts, would embark on this sacred journey and, together, mark the miracle of time.

(James Montgomery: *Go to Dark Gethsemane*; The Hymnal 1982, #171)





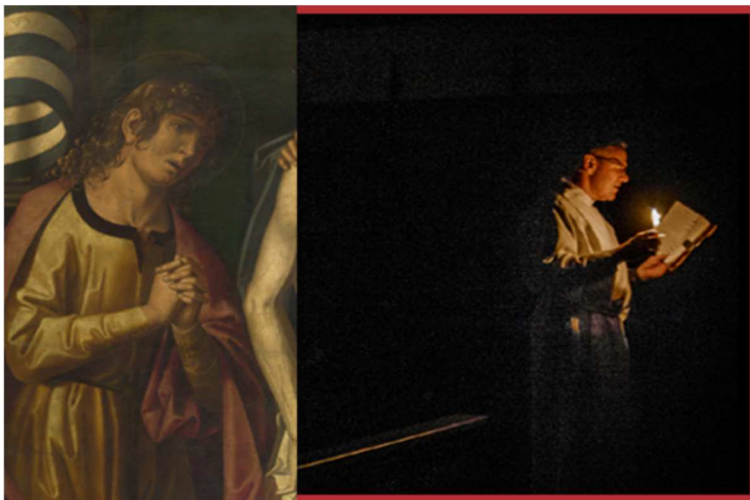
# Holy Week at Ascension



## **PALM SUNDAY**

**April 5 at 9am or 11am**

Both of our services will feature the Liturgy of the Palms, a Festival Procession and a dramatic reading of the Passion narrative.



## **MAUNDY THURSDAY**

**April 9 at 7pm**

The worship of Maundy Thursday is rich in symbolism and will include washing of feet and the dramatic stripping of the altar in preparation for Good Friday. The service concludes in total darkness.



## **GOOD FRIDAY VIGIL**

**April 10 from Noon – 3pm**

Because these are the hours Jesus hung on the cross, we encourage worshippers to keep vigil for the entire three-hour period, but the service will easily allow people to spend any one hour (Noon, 1pm or 2pm) without loss of continuity.

# Celebrate Easter Sunday!



## Great Vigil of Easter at 6am

The first service of Easter Day begins with darkness and includes the singing of the *Exsultet*, or Song of Praise, over the year's Easter Candle, the passing of the Light of Easter, scripture, silence and Holy Baptism. Please remember to bring your bells to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord! Childcare is not provided at the vigil.

## Easter Sunrise Breakfast

All who come to the Vigil are welcome in the Parish Hall for a special Easter Sunrise Breakfast. The suggested donation per person is \$5 with a family cap of \$20.

## 9am and 11am Services

Our 9am and 11am worship will be much the same, but with songs, hymns and anthems to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord on Easter Day! Please remember to bring your bells!

## Sacramental Confession

*Monday, April 6 - Wednesday, April 8 by appointment*

In the Anglican tradition, there is no requirement for private confession. However, James 5:16 reads, "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for one other so that you may be healed." If you desire to have your conscience unburdened and to receive spiritual consolation and ease of mind, you are invited to receive reconciliation with God through the aid of a priest. Jonathan Millard, Jonathan Warren and Andrea Millard will be available by appointment these three days during Holy Week to hear your private confession. Please call or email one of the priests or call the church office in confidence 412-621-4361, (ext. 219).

## Easter Lily Memorials

On Easter Sunday the church is adorned with Easter Lilies given in memory or thanks-giving of a loved one. If you would like to participate, please contact Melita Carter at [cartermo@gmail.com](mailto:cartermo@gmail.com) or 412-736-3540. Donations of any amount are appreciated.



# Annual Meeting Highlights

Church of the Ascension's Annual Meeting was called to order at 1pm on Sunday, February 16<sup>th</sup>. Approximately 170 people were in attendance. Minutes of the previous year's meeting were approved by voice vote and immediately thereafter, the three 2020 nominations to vestry were accepted by acclamation. Those elected to vestry and beginning a 3-year term included Robin Capcara, Brian Janaszek and Tyler Marwood. The meeting then moved to the election of members to the nominating committee. No further nominees were suggested from the floor and, given such, the slate of nominees for the 2020 nominating committee were also accepted by acclamation: Paige Forster, Tom Hillman, R.D. Wilkes, Aaron Sams and Amy Maddalena.



## Financial Report

Susan Crary, Treasurer, and Jim Foster, Chair of the Finance Committee, delivered financial reports on 2019 Performance, the 2020 Budget, 'Prospective Must Knows' going forward, with a concluding word on 'Faithful and Obedient Stewardship'. Before jumping into business, meeting participants said the following prayer for Financial Stewardship: 'Almighty God, whose loving hand has given us all that we possess: Grant us grace that we may honor you with our substance, and, remembering the account which we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of your bounty, through Jesus Christ our Lord.' *Amen.*



Susan Crary reported that the **2019 Fiscal Year** ended in modest deficit. Ascension had \$1.68 million of total income. Year-over-year giving was up 8% to \$1.38 million. Our general and restricted endowments contributed \$223,000. Expenses were kept within 1% of budget. Overall the year ended with a modest operating shortfall of \$29,800. The shortfall was covered by the Vestry Reserve Fund ('emergency fund') which is now left with a balance of \$157,719. Overall, the sources of revenue in 2019 were as follows:

Pledge Payments and Regular Giving	82.5%
Restricted Endowment Income	8.5%
Unrestricted Endowment Draw	4.5%
Other Income	3.4%
Plate & Other Offerings	1.1%

**A Balanced 2020 Budget was presented.** The budget assumes \$1.76 million in total income, which is a 5% increase over 2019. A 2% pool for staff compensation increases was included as were modest program increases. 2020 budget uses of income include 18% for clergy, 31% for program staff salaries and programs, 33% for administration and buildings, 18% for beyond Ascension funding.

Susan Crary also presented the **2020 Mission and Major Maintenance Budgets**. In 2019 the Mission Budget was redesigned to reflect three prioritized tiers of giving. **Tier One (56%)** reflects the Corporate Calling of Ascension. Included in this tier is giving toward the Thailand Partnership, International Ministry and Campus Ministry. **Tier Two (25%)** reflects money directed in support in individual callings of Ascension Missionaries. **Tier Three (19%)** reflects money directed toward different agencies and organizations that Ascension partners with, both local and international. Overall, 10% of prospective pledge/giving income has been earmarked in the 2020 Budget for outreach/mission.

Susan concluded her presentation with the \$34,500 Major Maintenance Budget, which is considerably less than budgeted in previous years. This is because new accounting procedures (to bring Ascension into compliance with the mediation agreement with the Episcopal Church) meant that several line items in the previous Major Maintenance Budget were transferred to the Operating Budget.

Jim Foster continued the financial report with a section entitled '**Prospective Must Knows**'. At a recent meeting the Vestry earmarked Ascension's \$2 million Unrestricted Endowment for historic renovation work associated with the *More Than Stones* Capital Campaign. He emphasized the important point that the income from the Unrestricted Endowment, which accounts for 4.5% of operating revenue in 2020 or approximately \$95,000, will go away soon because it will be spent on historic repairs. It will no longer be there to use in future years. This leaves very little financial wiggle room going forward. Jim reiterated that our current operations are well-managed and lean, our budget is built on solid giving and faithful commitment, and that income from the Restricted Endowment will be helpful but inadequate to make up the 4.5% shortfall. He concluded with **5 imperatives on how we should respond**, asking the congregation to recite with him various passages from Scripture:

1. **Tithe:** You cannot serve both God and money.
2. **Love One Another:** As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.
3. **Truly Worship God:** They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.
4. **Seek and Serve Christ:** For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.
5. **Proclaim the Good News:** Go and make disciples of all nations. baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

Jim Foster left the congregation with a simple but powerful encouragement from scripture that is foundational to his faith and trust going forward in challenging times: *Jesus is the way and the truth and the life!*

## Senior Warden Report



Jim Foster, Chair of the Finance Committee, continued to speak since he also serves as Ascension Senior Warden. Jim began with a question: **Who Are We?** He encouraged all in the Ascension community to understand their part in relation to everyone else: 'The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part, the parts we mention and the parts we don't, the parts we see and the parts we don't. If one-part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one-part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance. We are Christ's body—that's who we are! We must never forget this. Only as we accept our part of that body does our 'part' mean anything.'

Jim then asked the question, **What Should the Senior Warden Do?** He cited 6 primary functions:

- Listen, pray, discern, engage, and encourage
- Support the Rector as a beloved *sibling* in Christ
- Seek to sharpen the Rector, as iron sharpens iron
- Help us focus on the places where God is at work
- Question the consistency of our calling and efforts
- Maintain the centrality of Christ in everything we do

### He Gave Thanks ...

- For Jonathan Millard, all clergy, staff, liturgical assistants, and Tish our writer-in-residence
- For Ginger Weeber (upcoming Sr. Warden), Susan Bailey (Jr. Warden who is appointed by vestry), and everyone who has served on the vestry
- For Paul Fuener (our outgoing chancellor), Mary Martha Truschel (newly appointed chancellor), Sue Crary (treasurer), and Nate Barrett (former treasurer)
- All prior Senior Wardens
- All of you for your prayers and endurance

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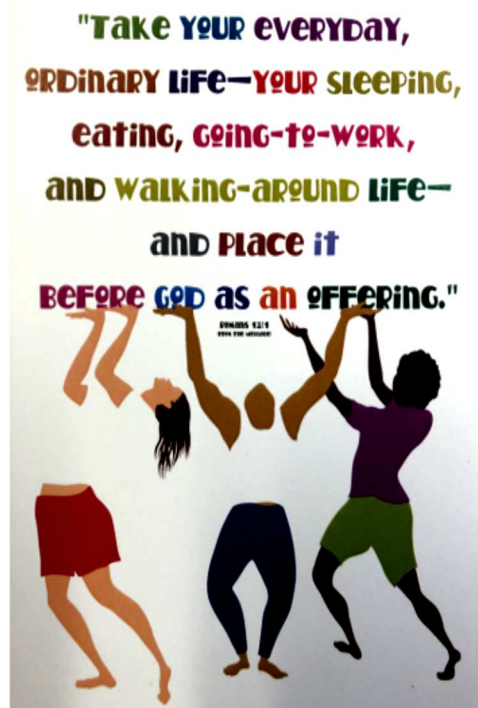
**Exhortation 1:** Using artwork created by Ascensionite Mary Louise Russell entitled ‘**Arise, Precious One**’, he exhorted the congregation to care for one another.

**Exhortation 2:** He exhorted the congregation to ‘**Listen and Do**’ and cited the following portion of scripture: ‘My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like

someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.’

**Exhortation 3:** Using artwork created by Ascensionite Bonnie Liefer, He exhorted the congregation to ‘**Give Every Moment to God**’ quoting Romans 12:1: ‘Take your everyday, ordinary life - your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life – and place it before God as an offering.’

He concluded with the reminder that in all things **it is the Lord who establishes our steps** and concluded with this prayer: ‘My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always, though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.’ *Amen.*



## Thailand Mission Team Report

Ascension has sent two mission teams to Thailand as part of a newly forming partnership. The first team went in January 2019 and consisted of Marilyn Chislaghi, Denise Cox, Jonathan and Andrea Millard, and Joel Scandrett. The second team that followed a year later in January 2020 had the following team members: Brandon Daily, Karen and Mark Stevenson, Charity Wahrenberger, Emily Wilson. Jonathan Millard will travel to Thailand this fall to give 6 talks at the Anglican Church of Thailand (ACT) Leadership Conference for all clergy, missionaries and lay leaders.

While the 2019 team mostly observed the ministries of the Anglican Church in Chiang Mai and Bangkok, the 2020 team engaged in an outreach event to a local Chiang Mai neighborhood – a “pond in which they fish,” to use their terminology. This event was coordinated with St Andrew’s Anglican School and involved a Book & Reading Fair. In addition to this event, team members also travelled up to poorer regions in the



mountains where ACT is at work, and some members also travelled to Bangkok to observe the work of the church in two main locations there – near the airport and in central Bangkok.

Both Ascension teams came back to the United States feeling that they had learned far more than they had given in service. The strategic approach to church planting and outreach made a huge impact. The Anglican Diocese of Singapore has taken the lead in building up the Anglican Church of Thailand. It has established six Deaneries in South East Asia, of which Thailand is one. It was noted that clergy in Singapore work very hard, all wearing ministry hats in churches at home, and also overseeing aspects of mission development in one of the six Deaneries. On the ground in Thailand, churches are planted strategically – they are located where there is a growing population, where there is a university, and where there is an airport. Churches function strategically in their location, identifying “ponds in which they will fish”, namely neighborhoods and specific people they will work tirelessly to share the gospel with.

Because Thailand is 99% Buddhist, the work is slow. Yet the work of the church is progressing thoughtfully, deliberately and steadily as churches are built, schools formed, and outreach ministries of various types take shape. As the Rector, Jonathan Millard, was later to comment, the visit of the team in 2019 dramatically influenced his thinking about our *More Than Stones* Capital Campaign, the whole point and purpose of the initiative being to position Ascension strategically to more fully welcome our neighbors and reach the nations with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

## Rector's Annual Meeting Address

*Jonathan Millard's Address is given in its entirety in what follows:*



As I look back two words stand out for me: **Celebration & Thanksgiving**. We have so much to celebrate and so much for which to give thanks.

Last year at this time we noted that we were continuing to see steady growth in attendance and financial giving. This past year that trend has continued – but way beyond what we might have imagined or expected. Our average Sunday attendance last year went up **10% (from 443 in 2018 to 486 in 2019)**. That breaks down between our two services with **239 at 9am** and **262 at 11am**. We continue to welcome new people every week. It was a joy to have 64 in our home for the 12th Night Newcomers Party on January 5<sup>th</sup>. Yesterday, 20 people came to the Discovering Ascension class. The scriptures remind us that one plants and another waters, but God gives the growth. So, all the glory goes to God, even as we give thanks for all those who work so hard to make Ascension the place it is.

Another obvious area for celebration and thanksgiving concerns our *More Than Stones* Campaign. A year ago, we had not even begun. The vestry first explored the possibility of launching a capital campaign in September 2018. A year ago, January, we began to explore how we would go about a campaign and what we should be doing. Here we are 12 months later, after a vestry/staff retreat day, 12 Listening Groups attended by 322 people, the receipt of 1,433 feedback responses, several months working with our Architects out of which we now have a clear vision for the way ahead and we are well on the way to reaching our goals.

To be absolutely clear: **the vision** undergirding all our building efforts is about **welcoming our neighbors and reaching the nations**. The specific goal of our *More than Stones* campaign has been to visit every household. We have now completed almost 90% those visits – a total of 307 households with just 41 more to go! 189 people have made pledges and 69 people who have been visited and invited to participate are prayerfully considering how they will respond.



We're hoping to receive another 110 pledges before we're done. What I can tell you today is that the total dollar amount pledged so far from 189 households is **\$4,835,545**. Talk about a cause for **Celebration and Thanksgiving**. Thank you, Lord! Thank you, Ascension!

At the end of last year, the vestry unanimously agreed to use all the portion of our Endowment funds that are unrestricted toward the Capital Campaign: \$2 million. Under the terms of the Settlement Agreement with TEC this required the permission of the TEC diocese which we received. That means, as of today, we have a total of **\$6.835 million** towards the monetary goal of 8.2 million, leaving us with **\$1,365,000 left to go**. We are actively pursuing grant applications – and I want to give a huge shout out to Jordan Markley who has helped us research and write grant applications. We are also now eager to finish the task of visiting every household.

What is clear is that we have sufficient funds to go ahead **this year** with Phase 1: This will likely include the cleaning and necessary repointing of the stonework to our historic buildings, together with the most urgent repairs needed to the stained-glass windows, roofs, etc. We also plan to move ahead with the repairs and refinishing of the floors in the Nave and the repairs or replacement of the pews. The vestry will make the final decision about the scope of this work in the next month or two. Major work is expected to begin very soon.

Meanwhile, all the everyday uses of our building continue. Thank you to **Karen Gowdy, Bob Forrest, Richard Cavallucci** and **Josh Momaney**. Prayers for **Bob Forrest** are requested as he battles with cancer. Welcome to **Isaiah Bornman** who was hired as our new building manager. Also, a big thanks to **Dan Hartling**, Chair of our Property Committee, and to **Joe Schaad** and **Guy Tomcik** who spend extended hours working on church facility projects each week.



Isaiah

We've heard from our treasurer about the 8% growth in giving last year. Special thanks go to our bookkeeper, **Linda McLane**, and our treasurer, **Susan Crary**. And, of course thank you to each and everyone here who gives faithfully to God's work through Ascension. **Once again, great cause to celebrate and give thanks to God!**



Jonathan

**Community Groups** are continuing to thrive and be the backbone of our life together. At end of 2017 we had 18 groups. Today we have 28. A huge thank you to **Jonathan Warren** for his work on this – and for all his ministry among us. We are truly blessed to have Jonathan as our Associate Rector and it is good to have him back after his brief paternity leave. JW is back with vigor and vim and the work he has been doing preparing for our Lenten series is outstanding. Please plan to be present for our *Hard Conversations Series* on Fridays in Lent. We are so grateful for all the Warren family. Let us keep **Tish** in our prayers as she is working to finish her second book. I am looking forward to Tish returning to the pulpit after June 1st.

ESL continues to be a thriving ministry. We now have 14 classes and 6 Bible Studies each week. Some 38 volunteers help with this program and, thanks to the *pro bono* legal services of one of our newcomers, we are now able to offer free legal advice. Thank you to **LuAnn Pengidore** and the team of volunteers who work in this ministry!

**Youth and College Ministry** also continues to thrive with good numbers and a dedicated team of volunteers. *Venite*, Ascension's new college ministry which meets here, has seen nearly 20 different students attend for their series on the *Surprising Goodness of God* on Wednesday nights. It has been encouraging to see students from CMU and Pitt bring friends, as well as international students who have been connected to *Venite* through Ascension's ESL ministry.



LuAnn

Currently, **Friday night youth group** sees some 42 middle school students, from about 10 different churches, join them for a series on the 10 Commandments, ably served by the committed team of 10 regular volunteers, who arrive for dinner at 5:30pm and leave tired but still smiling at 9pm. **Sunday night youth group** has seen 41 high school students, from a similar spread of churches engage with the same series, again served by a dedicated team of 9 regulars who somehow survive a steady diet of Sunday night pizza. Leah and Alex are also preparing to gather High School Seniors for a *Make College Count* retreat in May and are in discussions with other local Anglican churches to make this available more widely. Thank you to **Alex Banfield Hicks**, **Leah Hornfeck** and the team of volunteers.



Catherine

**Children's Ministry:** Last year we again welcomed many children and families. We have new babies galore! 14 born in the last 10 months and another 10 on the way!! As we said goodbye to Matt Ulrich, who stepped down after three years, we were greatly blessed to have **Jill Amber Graham** lead a team of volunteers to cover our interim period until we were able to welcome **Catherine Slocum** as our new Director of Children's Ministry in August. Catherine is doing a tremendous job – and is a very calm, competent, non-anxious, experienced minister who is building up a fabulous and growing team of leaders.

In the past six months our caregiving team has grown from 10 to 20 quality caregivers. The Sunday Morning Volunteer team now has 50 dedicated leaders who help run our Sunday School and nursery/toddler rooms from month to month. Equally remarkable are the many special projects and events that have required love, care, and commitment in order to “pull off.” If you missed Catherine's wonderful report in the January Ascent do pull it up from our website and read about all that God is doing in and through our Children's Ministry. **How much we have to celebrate and for which to give thanks!**

**Music Ministry:** Last year we celebrated Jeanne Kohn's retirement as full-time Director of Music Ministries after 26 years. We also welcomed **Chris Massa** who succeeded Jeanne last summer – with a new job title: “Director of Music and Worship Arts”. Additionally, Elise Massa become Assistant Director of Music and Worship Arts.” Chris is working  $\frac{3}{4}$  time and Elise  $\frac{1}{4}$  time. **Jeanne Kohn** has stayed on as our part-time organist and choir director and will fulfill this role until Pentecost of this year. I'm delighted to announce today that after Chris Massa fully takes on the Choir Director role, Jeanne has graciously agreed to continue on as our part-time organist. We continue to be blessed by a wonderful team of choristers, singers, composers and musicians. **We celebrate and give thanks to God!**

As we experience new Life, Health, Growth – we want to ensure that we are not only growing wider but deeper. To that end, my wife, **Andrea**, joined the staff team on a  $\frac{1}{4}$  time basis last year as our interim Director of Prayer Ministries. Thank you to Andrea for your leadership and expansion of Prayer Ministry and Group Spiritual Direction these past 12 months. Andrea's work has been evidenced in the design of teachings and prayer opportunities at our Parish Retreat, in a renewed Intercessory Prayer List and ongoing training, as well as the current course, “Companions in Holy Listening” that some 40 people are attending.



Andrea



Mark

Last Year we also welcomed **Deacon Mark Stevenson** (also to a  $\frac{1}{4}$  time position) to be our interim Deacon for Congregational Care. Mark has worked diligently in myriad different ways: visiting people in the hospital, leading a training session for Community Group leaders, assisting with strategic planning for our OWLS ministry, alongside the day to day pastoral encounters. I think it's fair to say that  $\frac{1}{4}$  time work is almost impossible. It really means  $\frac{1}{4}$  time pay for what has largely been significantly more time worked. This is one area that we need to address in the coming months.

That said, I am delighted to announce today that, at Mark's request, and with my full support, Mark's role at Ascension is going to change from March 1<sup>st</sup>. He will cease to be our interim director of Congregational Care and will instead become our permanent Parish Deacon. This new role will enable Mark to devote his time to the things he loves most, not least being a pastoral presence among us, continuing to do pastoral visiting and working with OWLS as well as one or two other specific areas of ministry and mission including our ongoing relationship with Thailand. The essential difference in this new role is that Mark will have

*Continued on Page 12*



more flexibility to pursue his other work and interests beyond Ascension, while continuing to serve as a non-stipendiary deacon among us.

Looking ahead it is my sincere hope, desire and expectation that we will be able to add a third staff priest to our team in the near future. Please pray for the vestry as we will be addressing this and other staffing needs at our retreat in two weeks' time. Some of you may recall that one of the big outcomes of the *More Than Stones* listening process was the plea for us to take seriously the workload of our staff and find a way to fund additional support. In response to that we changed the financial goals to make provision for doing this.

While we are blessed with a terrific staff team, I am so mindful of and grateful for the many dedicated and talented volunteers who work so hard in every conceivable aspect of our life together. Last year I announced that **Kiera Fuener** was taking over the leadership of our Special Needs Ministry. Kiera has done a fantastic job with the team of folks that work alongside her. We have some 12 families that regularly attend that have adult children with special needs. One of the wonderful things about this program is that it has a real and intentional discipleship component to it. I am so grateful for the presence of those with special needs as they worship with us and are a visible part of our church family.



**Kiera**



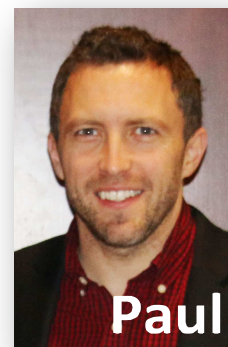
**Karen**

I want also to thank our Director of Administration, **Karen Gowdy** and the support staff, **Judy Yadrick**, **Stacey Regan**, and part time - **Ruth Hartling** and **Val Cotter**. SO much work goes on behind the scenes every day. Karen, in particular, has done a lot of extra work administering much of our *More Than Stones* campaign. Last year we celebrated Judy Yadrick's 20 years among us. Judy will be retiring this summer and we are deeply grateful to you.

A huge thank you also goes to our co-chairs of the campaign **Charlie Chislaghi** and **Mary Martha Truschel**. Charlie is our cheerleader and encourager extraordinaire and Mary Martha can efficiently chair a meeting like you wouldn't believe.

One person I want to especially thank today is **Paul Fuener**, who has served as our chancellor – which simply means our *pro bono* legal counsel, for the past 11 or 12 years. Paul is a partner at K&L Gates and he has given so much gracious, timely and helpful legal advice to Ascension and me over these past many years. Paul asked to have a break from this role while still being available as a backstop as we may have need to call on him and K&L Gates.

I am delighted to announce that **Mary Martha Truschel** has kindly agreed to step into the role of our chancellor going forward. Mary Martha has just retired from an illustrious career as a prosecutor with the Department of Environmental Protection. Years ago Mary Martha gave me some much needed advice when she served as special counsel to the Ecclesiastical Court of our diocese which convened for the only time in its more than 100 year history when I had the dubious honor of serving as the presiding judge for a case that came before us. I couldn't have done without Mary Martha's help. Mary Martha has also served the diocese as the chair of our Constitution and Canons Committee, so she is no stranger to the legal machinations of a church!



**Paul**

Thank you to our Liturgical Assistants. **Jack Gabig**, **Joel Scandrett**, **Bishop Grant LeMarquand** and **Ann Tefft**. Also, a thank you and a shout out for Ann and the team who assist with the OWLS ministry. This is one of the areas that we have seen significant growth in this past year. March 1 will mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the time Jack Gabig came on staff as Ascension's Youth Minister. Today Jack is a seminary professor at TSM.



This year I want to especially celebrate and give thanks for **Marilyn Chislaghi** who serves as Director of Ministry. As we grow so does the work of getting people connected and of developing healthy infrastructures.

Shortly after I arrived, I appointed Marilyn as our Parish Administrator. Since then her role has expanded and evolved. Marilyn continues to do an outstanding job. Indeed, there is very little that goes on at Ascension that Marilyn does not know about. She has a huge job which includes: Staff supervision, facilitating the work of various committees, oversight of a host of ministries, communications, all of our events and hospitality events and hospitality including our Annual Parish Retreat – and so much more. Not a day goes past when Marilyn is in her office, when there isn't some member of the staff team who stops by to ask for advice, to run something by her, or to ask a question or share a crisis, or who simply wants to vent! So often, we go to Marilyn! This year marks Marilyn's 15<sup>th</sup> year on staff. I am delighted to share that Marilyn will be having a well-deserved sabbatical in the Fall after our Parish Retreat.

I want also today to say a special thank you to our Church Wardens, **Jim Foster** and **Susan Bailey**. A reminder – Wardens serve one-year terms of office, renewable for up to 4 years. I meet with the wardens monthly and additionally as may be needed. They serve with me as the executive committee of the vestry and they have a special role as a link between the congregation and the rector and vestry and also as between the parish and the bishop. Indeed, should the rector go off course – it is the duty of the wardens to consult the bishop.

Jim Foster has served for 4 years as our Senior Warden and as he now steps down from this office, I want to say a big thank you. Those of you who know Jim will know that he has a huge capacity for work and for pursuing excellence. He has rightly expected and sought a lot from me and the whole staff team and vestry. I have so appreciated his wise counsel, his searching questions, his support and encouragement and above all his commitment to God and for wanting all that we do to reflect God's call on us to be good stewards of all that God has entrusted to us. Jim will continue to serve as the chair of our finance committee, and I know he is only a phone call away should I want to pick his big brain on any number of issues.



I am delighted today to announce my appointment of Jim's successor. **Ginger Weeber** has graciously agreed to serve as our Senior Warden. Ginger is a long-time and very committed member of Ascension and has served previously on the vestry and stewardship committee. Susan Bailey is eligible to serve again as our Junior Warden, but it is the Vestry's responsibility to elect the Junior Warden so that position will be determined at the first meeting of the new vestry.

My final thanks this afternoon go to Andrea. I cannot begin to express how wonderful it is to be able to share with her in ministry in so many ways, and to have Andrea's love and support day by day. Thank you.

**And finally...** I continue to count it an immense privilege and joy to serve as your rector. Ascension is a remarkable Congregation. I am blessed to count so many of you as friends. I am so grateful to be a part of this church family. I so appreciate your love and prayers for me and my family. My prayer for you is that we may all together continue to love God and love our neighbor. May we live into our calling to *Welcome our Neighbors and Reach the Nations*.

Yours in Christ,

Jonathan N. Millard (Rector)



# Youth Ministry

As our high school seniors prepare to head off for college in the fall, we do pray that they find a great church community as college freshmen. To help them in the process of locating a new church, walking into a room of strangers, reflecting on a church service and building contacts in a new community, we are again hosting our 'Senior Church Tours.'

While this may look like a fun time to visit a different local church and then go out to lunch and talk about it, it is also cultivating the wisdom necessary to make a strong transition to life beyond Ascension. And I like to keep these local church destinations a mystery to make the whole adventure more exciting! Pray for our times together! Thanks



## SENIOR CHURCH TOURS

Sunday	Destination	Meet in the Parish Hall
Jan 12	Mystery	11:00
Feb 23	Mystery	10:00
Mar 15	Mystery	10:00

Visit a partner church, experience their worship, talk about it over lunch!

Just wanted to share how thankful I am for the team of regular CAYG volunteers who serve faithfully every Friday and Sunday night.

As Jonathan Millard shared at the Annual General Meeting, Friday night youth group has seen 42 middle school students, from about ten different churches, join us for our series on the ten commandments. Some of them (mainly the middle school boys) are pictured below!

Sunday night youth group has seen 41 high school students, from a similar spread of churches engage with the same series. These students come, not only to see their friends, but to be with this loving bunch of young adults (and some not-so-young). And to be a leader is to be judged by a room of teenagers every weekend!

So my heart-felt thanks goes out to Asher, Austin, Bailey, Bryan, Carli, Danyel, Gabbie, Jessica, Kelsey, Leah, Matthew, Natalie, Olivia, Sam, Tom and Wes!





# Venite: Ascension Campus Ministry

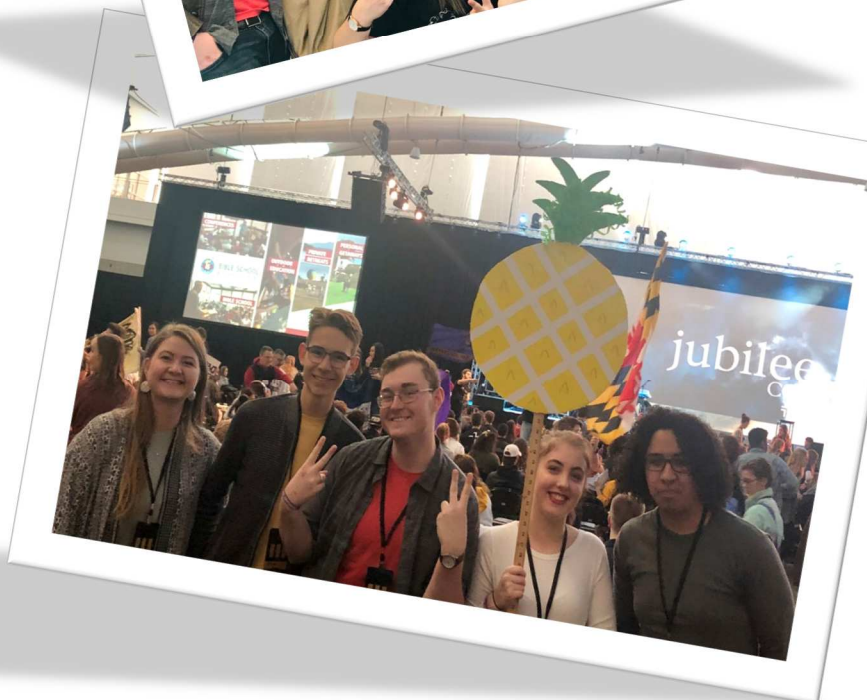
Last month, we took a dozen students to the CCO's Jubilee Conference here in Pittsburgh. From Friday evening to Sunday afternoon, we worked our way through the Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration narrative of the Bible. Andy Crouch explained to us how God made the world highly ordered and full of abundance with intentionality so that we may flourish in its goodness. Jackie Hill Perry convicted us of our tendencies to trust in created things more than our Creator himself. Dean Weaver reminded us of our birthright—that we're children of God, and he died and rose again so that we could join his family. David Kinnaman taught us how to be resilient disciples through experiencing Jesus, practicing cultural discernment, engaging in meaningful relationships, pursuing vocational discipleship, and living a counter-cultural mission as we work toward and wait for Christ to come again.

We also spent time with one another, building and deepening our friendships. We caught up with old friends from out of town who we haven't seen in a while. We chatted over meatballs and fried pickles, mulling over the things we were learning about. We shared our stories and danced as we waited in lines at food trucks. We discussed our unique experiences with our hair, particularly as it pertains to our ethnic backgrounds. We stayed up way too late (of course) watching movies in our hotel rooms. All of these things not only brought us closer but helped us to build each other up toward Christ and gain a sense of the mission that we are on together.

The mission we are on is spelled out quite clearly in Jeremiah 29, *"Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."*

While we may have left with our head and hearts filled, feeling a deeper connection to God and to those around us, it's important for us to remember that Jubilee is not an end, but a means. Jubilee equips us for this work that we are charged with as exiles—those living in a time between the Creation and the Restoration—and strengthens us to find our heart's true home in God himself. Now, we must do this work and invite others to join us in it.

If you're a college student and you want to find a home in Christ and get to work with us, join us at Venite, here on Wednesdays at 8:30pm!



- Leah Hornfeck ([leah.hornfeck@ascensionpittsburgh.org](mailto:leah.hornfeck@ascensionpittsburgh.org))

# Children's Ministry Lenten Series:

## Partnering in Prayer

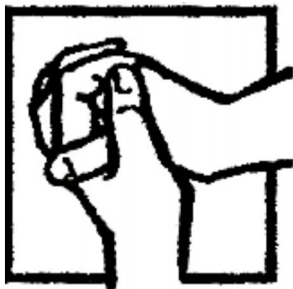
Join us for this great Lenten Series that is designed to help children understand and engage prayer. It has been said that if you want to understand an Anglican you need only to see how they pray. Afterall, we do not have a book of confession, like some traditions, but a Book of Common Prayer. In this series, we will help children understand the nature of prayer and how to better engage in prayer.



*Week One – Friday, March 6*

### **What Prayer Is**

In this session, children will see that prayer is fundamentally about maintaining intimacy with God, in ways more similar to maintaining intimacy with our loved ones than is commonly considered. Through play, practice and instruction, we will look at the nature of prayer as a basis for how we connect with God through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.



*Week Two – Friday, March 13*

### **How to Pray: Active Prayer**

From time immemorial, people have walked and talked, written to clarify thoughts, and generally used the motion and activity of their bodies in relation to their minds. Hence, it is not surprising for us to find that when we engage in prayer-walking, or prayer-journaling, or prayer-coloring, something wonderful happens; we are better able to communicate with God. In this session, children will learn about how to pray through activities that will help them discover and create great prayer habits.



*Week Three – Friday, March 20*

### **How to Pray: Listening Prayer**

From the still small voice that was calling to Elijah to the voice heard by the boy Samuel to the voice of the Angel spoken to Mary or the Voice her husband Joseph heard as a warning in his dream, our God speaks and one of the most wonderous forms of prayer is found, not in our communication to God, but His to us! In this session, we will explore Bible stories, experience silence and continue to learn how to pray through the discipline and habits of listening.



*Week Four – Friday, March 27*

### **How to Pray: Intercessory Prayer**

Throughout the Bible, we see God changing his mind as a result of prayer. In the Bible, we are commanded to intercede through prayer. This most common form of prayer is crucial to our relationship with God, others, and the created order. In this session, we will complete our time of learning how to pray through group games and activities that prove the power of God's Church interceding for the poor and needy and those we call friends and enemies.

*This program (designed for ages 4 – 5<sup>th</sup> grade) will run concurrently with the adult Lenten series “Hard Conversations” from 6:30 – 8pm on Friday evenings. A special thanks to the Rev. Jay Slocum for crafting the lessons on prayer. Nursery care will be provided for infants – 3 years. For more information please contact Catherine Slocum at [catherine.slocum@ascensionpittsburgh.org](mailto:catherine.slocum@ascensionpittsburgh.org).*



# OWLS FELLOWSHIP OLDER WISER LIVELY SAINTS



**The OWLS**  
**at Church of the Ascension**  
extend an invitation to the  
OWLS Luncheon and Presentation.  
Enjoy Lunch, Fun and Fellowship!  
All are warmly welcomed!

**COST:** \$10 charge for lunch,  
**but first-time friends are free!**

RSVPs are necessary to Rev. Ann Tefft:  
412-526-1107 or [tefft.ann@gmail.com](mailto:tefft.ann@gmail.com).

**Parking** restrictions will be lifted for people to park on  
the streets, and the Neville Street lot will be reserved for  
seniors. We meet in the Parish Hall.

**Thursday, March 12** (second Thursday of the month)

**All About St. Patrick with Mary Martha Truschel**

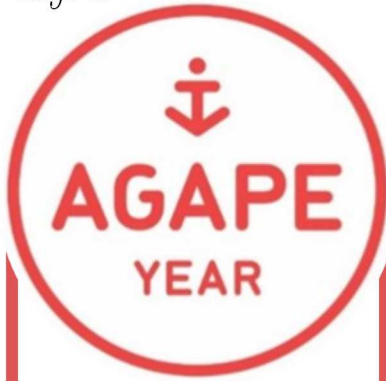
**12:30PM – 2:30PM**



Saint Patrick was a fifth-century Roman-British Christian missionary and bishop in Ireland. Known as the “Apostle of Ireland,” he is the primary patron saint of Ireland. The dates of Patrick’s life cannot be fixed with certainty, but there is broad agreement that he was active as a missionary in Ireland during the fifth century. Early medieval tradition credited him with being the first bishop of Armagh and Primate of Ireland, and referred to him as the founder of Christianity in Ireland, converting a society practicing a form of Celtic polytheism - and he has been generally so regarded ever since, despite evidence of earlier Christian presence in Ireland.

According to the autobiographical *Confessio* of Patrick, when he was about 16, he was captured by Irish pirates from his home in Britain and taken as a slave to Ireland, looking after animals. He lived there for six years before escaping and returning to his family. After becoming a cleric, he returned to northern and western Ireland. In later life, he served as a bishop, but little is known about the places where he worked. By the seventh century, he had already come to be revered as the patron saint of Ireland. Saint Patrick’s Day is observed on 17 March, the supposed date of his death.





*Agape Year is a 9-month gap year program (September to May) for recent high school graduates who seek to grow in their love and knowledge of Jesus Christ while engaging in His mission for the lost, the poor, and the uninvited both locally and globally. Students will live and serve in community here in Pittsburgh for five months, participate in the Global church for six weeks, and sojourn across the country sharing the story of what God has done and witness what He is doing through His church here in the States. It is a taste of the kingdom of God!*

[www.agapeyear.org](http://www.agapeyear.org)

[erikatwichell@sams-usa.org](mailto:erikatwichell@sams-usa.org)

[natetwichell@sams-usa.org](mailto:natetwichell@sams-usa.org)

Henry Twichell and a St. Andrew's classmate during the trip to Thailand



by Nate Twichell

I like to say hello and wave to people. I wave to folks who are walking past our house. I wave to people when they let me merge. I nod to other cyclists when I'm on my bike and say hello to other walkers I encounter in our local parks. Our son Henry will often ask me who I'm waving to and more often than not it is a complete stranger. My answer to his question is almost always that I am waving to, or saying hello to our neighbor.

We were in a city park on the other side of town (we crossed a bridge and went through a tunnel!) and I reflexively told Henry that the person I was waving to was our neighbor.

"But we don't live here! How could he be our neighbor, Papa?"

Most Sundays we gather together as Citizens of the Kingdom of God and are reminded:

*Hear what our Lord Jesus Christ says: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.*

But who is our neighbor? One of our goals with Agape Year is for our Fellows to have an expanded view of who their neighbor is and what it looks like to love your neighbor. This expanded view can look like eating with homeless in Pittsburgh, teaching English to internationals at Ascension, and worshipping with young believers in Thailand. Our idea of who our neighbor is gets expanded with each of these experiences.

The last week of March our Fellows and I will have the opportunity to have the idea of who is our neighbor expanded by spending two days in a Border Encounter in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico and El Paso, Texas. We'll be immersed in the realities of the US-Mexico border as we explore, listen, serve, and reflect with Border Patrol agents, asylum seekers, legal aid providers, and local church leaders. Can you pray for our time there? Can you pray that our idea of who is our neighbor be expanded? Can you pray that we will be able to see people as Jesus saw people?

I remember growing up with Robert Frost's line of "good fences make good neighbors" being spoken as gospel. But what does the Gospel of Jesus tell us about neighborliness? May we come to truly love our neighbors as ourselves.

# So, What Happened in February?

Well, not only did the Groundhog see its shadow, but our special needs friends put on their dancing shoes for a Valentine's Day Party. After doing the twist to some fun tunes, they enjoyed learning about the love of God and did some very colorful crafts.

Spending time alongside our special needs friends is a delight. We have a strong team but would welcome more 'buddies' to attend class on Sundays at 9am (on a rotation) or the monthly Saturday Club. If you would like to check out this opportunity, please email Keira Fuener at [keirafuener@gmail.com](mailto:keirafuener@gmail.com). Thanks!

As Jonathan Millard earlier reported in his annual meeting address, our International friends have also been busy at Ascension. We now have 14 classes and 6 Bible studies each week. Some 38 volunteers help with this program and, thanks to the *pro bono* legal services of one of our newcomers, we are able to offer free legal advice. One of the classes offered this term is a Discovering God Bible Study led by Kirk and Kim Wadsack as well as Donna Wilkes. Thanks to all who volunteered to make meals for this crew, pictured below! If you would like to volunteer with internationals, many of whom are students or professionals in local hospitals and universities, please email LuAnn at [PittsburghEnglish4U@gmail.com](mailto:PittsburghEnglish4U@gmail.com). Thanks!





# Newcomers



## **Sunday, March 15 after the 11am service**

Join clergy & staff after the 11am service for an  
Irish-themed lunch

- Have you been at Ascension 3 years or less?
- Are you new or still feel 'newish' even if you're going on 4 years?
- Interested in joining a Community Group?
- Interested in finding a ministry to serve?

Bring yourselves and your questions and church leaders will provide conversation and lunch! As a special treat, Jonathan Warren will speak for a few minutes on St. Patrick and the role of the saints in Anglican spiritual practice.

We'd love you to RSVP to

[marilyn.chislaghi@ascensionpittsburgh.org](mailto:marilyn.chislaghi@ascensionpittsburgh.org).



## CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION

A Worshipping Community;  
Equipping God's People;  
Sharing Christ's Healing With a Broken World

### **Worship Services**

#### **Sunday**

9:00 a.m.  
Holy Eucharist

11:00 a.m.  
Holy Eucharist

#### **Wednesday**

Noon  
Holy Eucharist  
in the Gordon Chapel

#### **Address**

4729 Ellsworth Ave.  
Pittsburgh, PA 15213  
Phone: 412-621-4361  
Fax: 412-621-5746

#### **Website**

[www.ascensionpittsburgh.org](http://www.ascensionpittsburgh.org)

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*Judy Yadrick, Publisher*

#### **Ascent Deadline**

Articles for the April Ascent  
are due March 17  
The publication will be  
available March 29.