

# The Ascent

SEPTEMBER 2020

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# Living Through the Long Winter Ahead

By Jonathan Millard, Rector

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**I** write this on a warm summer's day, yet we are in the middle of a long "winter." A winter that began with the blizzard of COVID-19 that swept through our city, nation and world near the start of this year. The blizzard brought many of our towns and cities to a near standstill, and much of life as we knew it to a stop. After the blizzard, winter. A long winter. We don't know when springtime will come. Indeed, perhaps winter will prove to be the start of a mini ice age.

I'm very grateful to Andy Crouch, Kurt Keilhacker, and Dave Blanchard who introduced this analogy of "blizzard, winter, ice-age" in their article, "[Leading beyond the blizzard: Why every organization is now a startup](#)," published in [The Praxis Journal](#).

As a church we, like so many other organizations, have had to pivot, making decisions in days that might otherwise have taken months. Since our regular pattern of corporate worship was put on hold on March 12th a lot has changed.

This month's [Ascent](#) highlights how ministry and mission are continuing at Ascension in this long winter of the pandemic. As you will see there are many and varied opportunities for us to continue to worship God, serve others, and stay connected.

As I look back on the last five months, I am deeply grateful for our church family, and for staff, vestry, clergy and lay leaders, for so many who have worked hard, expressed support and been gracious and understanding. THANK YOU.

Notwithstanding all that is good in the ministries that have been sustained and all that we have to look forward to, I don't think anyone thinks this is ideal. Far from it. We truly lament all that is lost, especially for our children, young people, and the elderly. For so many in our congregation, neighborhoods, and workplaces this has been a season with many losses, sickness, death, strained relationships, and unfulfilled longings. We are planning a Service of Lament in October to mark these realities.

There are no shortcuts through grief and in the months ahead through this long winter I pray that we will bring our disappointments and longings before the Lord. Let the cry of the Psalmist be on our lips: "How long, O Lord?"

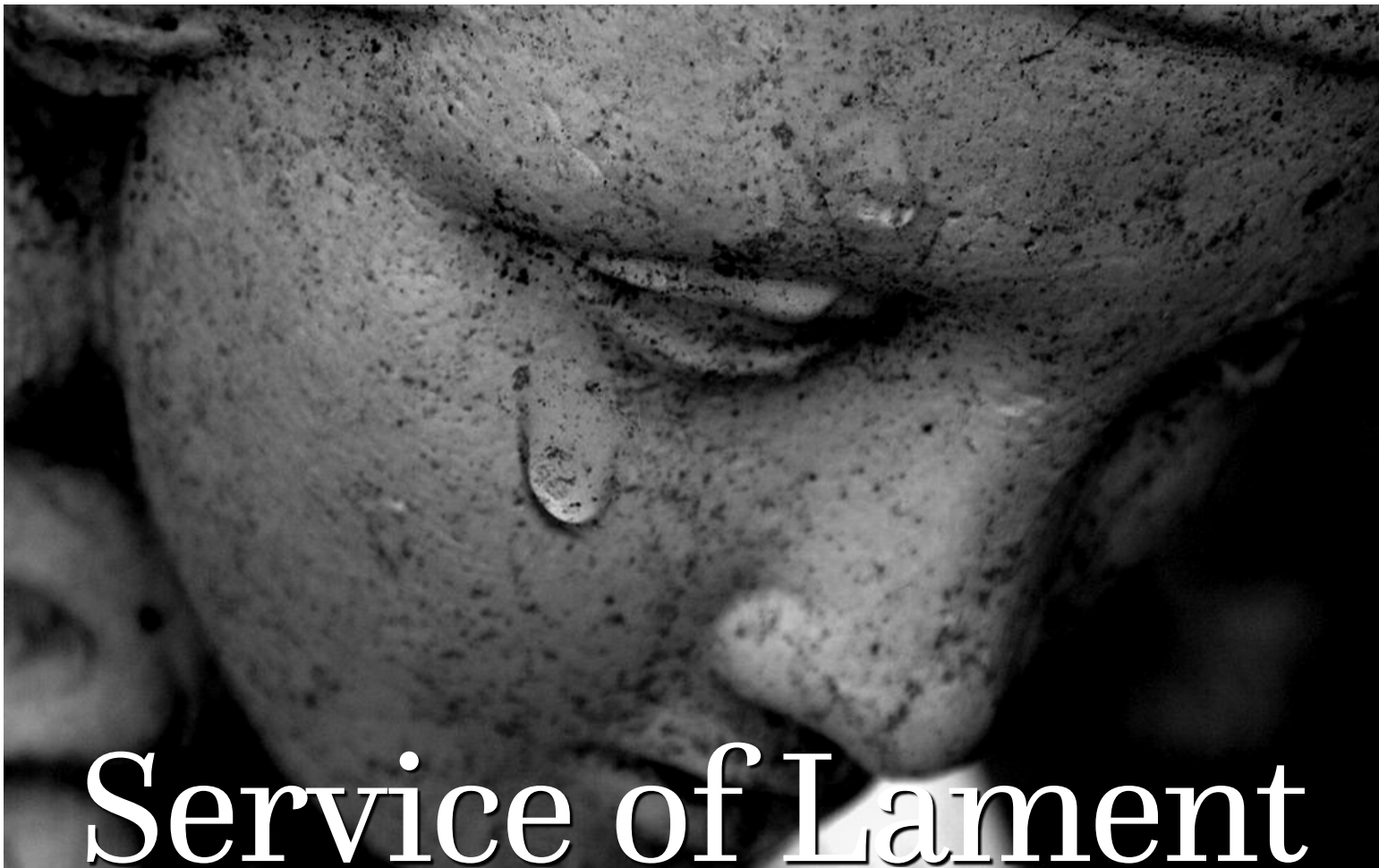
Reflecting on Psalm 13, The Rev. Nicky Gumbel, in [The Bible in One Year](#), writes:

"In [this] psalm we see four things that you should continue to do during difficult times:

- Keep praying - David continues to cry out to God, 'Look on me and answer, O Lord my God. Give light to my eyes' (v.3). He pours out his heart to God. Don't give up praying even when God seems far away.
- Keep trusting - 'But I trust in your unfailing love' (v.5a). 'I've thrown myself headlong into your arms' (v.5a, MSG). It is relatively easy to have faith when things are going well, but the test of faith is when things do not appear to be going well.
- Keep rejoicing - He does not rejoice in the trials, but in God's salvation. He says, 'my heart rejoices in your salvation' (v.5b). 'I'm celebrating your rescue' (v.5b, MSG).
- Keep worshipping - In spite of everything he has been through, David is able to see the goodness of God: 'I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me' (v.6). He remembers all that God has done for him.

As you begin to praise and worship God, it brings perspective to your problems. Sometimes, I find it helpful to look back on my life and thank the Lord for bringing me through so many of my own personal struggles, disappointments and bereavements, and to remember how through it all 'he has been good to me' (v.6).

Lord, I worship you today. Thank you for your goodness to me. For all the battles ahead, I trust in your unfailing love. [Amen]"



# Service of Lament

How long, O LORD?  
Will you forget me  
forever?  
How long will you hide  
your face from me?  
How long must I take  
counsel in my soul and  
have sorrow in my  
heart all the day?

**Psalm 13:1-2; ESV**

Lament offers us a way to turn our deepest pain into prayer before the Lord. When Christians lament, it is an act of worship. And God knows there has been untold loss and suffering this year: some are mourning the death of loved ones; all have been affected by the global pandemic. Racial oppression, political polarization, and economic uncertainty have left many deeply troubled and/or hurt. Marriages have been strained, relationships damaged, and dreams shattered. How are we to respond to all this misery and sorrow? We lament.

On **October 28th** we will gather as a community of faith to pour out our grief, pain and longings to the Lord as we seek his healing presence, mercy and love. More details will be provided in the coming weeks.

# Prayer Practices that Unite and Sustain Us

By Andrea Millard, Director of Prayer Ministry & Leadership Development

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**T**he Anglican tradition offers us a wealth of prayer practices that unite us to God (and with one another) and sustain us spiritually. At Ascension we offer daily, weekly, and monthly opportunities for prayer. Here are some of the ways you can participate:

## Daily Prayer

### Morning Prayer

Monday through Friday teams of Ascension members lead daily prayer. This offering is available on our Ascension website via our YouTube channel. (While it is intended as Morning Prayer, you can access it any time of day that works for you.) In addition to praying a confession, psalms and collects (a form of prayer that includes an address to God, a petition and a conclusion), we also hear whole portions of God's Word, plus a brief reflection on the day's scriptures. Importantly, we have the joy of seeing various church friends as they lead us. Morning Prayer typically takes about 15-18 minutes. Check it out: <https://www.ascension-pittsburgh.org/join-us-monday-through-fridays/>.

## Weekly Prayer

### The Great Litany

The word litany means prayer or supplication and refers to a style of prayer that follows a pattern of petitions or requests, followed by fixed responses. It is a form of prayer for "occasions of solemn and comprehensive entreaty" (2019 BCP p. 99). The Church has long turned to this type of prayer in times of national anxiety or disaster – what an appropriate prayer practice "for such a time as this."

Beginning Wednesday, September 16<sup>th</sup> and continuing for ten consecutive weeks, we invite you to join in praying the Litany "live" via Zoom. On Wednesdays, the call will open at 6:45pm with a prompt start at 7pm. Join us once or join us for many. It takes about 15 minutes to pray. Please email me for details.

### 10For@4: Weekly Zoom Prayer Gatherings

When COVID-19 caused us to suspend meeting together physically, we activated an online weekly Zoom prayer meeting: 10For@4: Healthcare Workers (Wednesdays). 10For@4 is shorthand for "Ten minutes of prayer for a particular group at 4:00 pm." We now have two additional groups: 10For@4: Children & Youth (Tuesdays) and 10For@4: Peace, Justice and Racial Reconciliation (Thursdays).

These prayer times follow similar pattern: co-leaders open by praying a collect, then we offer prayers for individuals, followed by "one word" prayers for 3 - 4 specific needs, and, closing with a scripture verse and a spontaneous prayer. If you are interested in praying with us, please email me for more information.

## Monthly Prayer

### Open Air Soul Care: A Quiet Morning for Spiritual Reflection in the Courtyard

In this season of hyper distraction and persistent stress, it is difficult to settle ourselves – our minds, bodies and souls – enough to enjoy the Lord's presence. Yet we can help one another slow down, get quiet and seek God when we gather together.

We are offering three opportunities this fall for quiet mornings of attending to our hearts and souls. Think of these as mini retreats. Our time will include space for silent prayer, scripture reading and individual reflection. We will also enjoy the beauty of God's creation in the courtyard.

Each Soul Care session will have a different theme. Register for one, two or all three. Space is limited; registration is required. We will meet in the Courtyard 9:30 - 11am on the following Saturdays: September 26, October 24 and November 21. Register using the Congregational Care Hub (<https://www.ascensionpittsburgh.org/being-the-body-of-christ/>).

## Ongoing Prayer

### Prayer Requests

Each week our intercessory prayer team (trusted people of prayer) prayerfully intercede for requests that come to us from the congregation. Team members receive a weekly update of prayer requests and praise reports. To honor confidentiality, intercessors are provided with the first name and last initial of those seeking prayer, followed by a summary of the need or request (if requested, requests may be offered anonymously or for the ministry staff only). The intercessors pray for requests throughout the week. We join you in prayer, trusting in the Lord to minister to your needs.

To submit a praise report or prayer request, send an email through the Congregational Care Hub <https://www.ascension-pittsburgh.org/being-the-body-of-christ/> or please email me.



# EXPLORE ASCENSION

## *New Member Class*



By Marilyn Chislaghi, Director of Ministry  
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**W**e have been pleased to welcome 26 adults into membership since the pandemic began in March. Our membership classes went virtual, and we've been pleased that these efforts have been blessed of God.

The next Explore Ascension class (via Zoom) will be held on Thursday, September 17 at 7pm. This class is for all those who are new to Ascension, who wish to find out more about Anglicanism in general or Ascension in particular. It is also part of the pathway to membership. Please register for the class by emailing Marilyn and she will send you the Zoom invite.

The class is in two parts. The first part involves one hour of homework. Several video clips on important moments in Anglican history are on a dedicated playlist on Ascension's [YouTube channel](#). Participants are asked to watch the videos prior to the class. The Zoom class will last for an hour and 15 minutes. Jonathan Millard will lead participants in a discussion of key distinctives of the "Anglican way" and of Ascension in particular. There will be opportunity for questions. Those who wish to become members will be asked to fill out a membership application and will then meet one-on-one with one of our clergy prior to being welcomed to Ascension in one of our services (or virtually if that is the preference).

The next new members class is  
 Thursday, September  
 17 at 7:00 p.m.

# Adult Discipleship

By Karen Stevenson, Interim Associate Rector

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## Community Groups

**T**he Christian life was never meant to be lived alone. The scriptures - Old and New Testament - indicate that God's primary way of working in the world is through the people of God, the community of faith related to him and to one another. The New Testament is full of "one another" passages (love one another, bear one another's burdens, forgive one another) indicating the importance and the nature of a life lived together. We are meant to be "individually members one of another" as the one body of Christ (Romans 12:5), so that together we may encourage and enable one another on the path of discipleship and witness in the world.

At Ascension, the spaces we have created to foster these intentional and purposive interpersonal relationships among the body of Christ are Community Groups (CGs). We encourage every member and every regular attendee of Ascension to join a group. We have 25 groups (and growing!) meeting all over the city (for a map see the Community Groups page on Ascension's website at [www.ascension-pittsburgh.org](http://www.ascension-pittsburgh.org)). The groups are diverse in terms of when they meet and how they organize their activities, but each CG loosely follows the pattern of the early church: fellowship, sharing a meal, worship, study, and prayer (Acts 2:42-6).

If you are interested in being connected with a group in your part of town, please send me an email or sign up on the Ascension [website!](#)

## Confirmation

Confirmation is a step all members of Ascension are encouraged to take. In confirmation, we make a mature confession of faith, publicly renewing the vows and promises made at Baptism. But we also ask the Holy Spirit for daily growth in wisdom, courage, and humility before God in every aspect of our life and work, to receive a fuller measure of the Holy Spirit's power and blessing to fulfill your commission as a follower of Jesus to serve as his witness to the ends of the earth. In preparation for confirmation, an 8-month course is offered, which includes meeting once a month (via Zoom for the time being) and exploring topics such as exploring the history and theology of Anglicanism; spiritual gifts; vocational flourishing; sacramental theology; and living a life of prayer and worship. These classes will be taught by the Ascension clergy. Although these class sessions are primarily for those who are going through the confirmation process, they are open to all interested in these topics.

We will be meeting for the course on the **second Tuesday of each month from 7 - 8pm (beginning on Tuesday, October 13)**. We will kick off the course with a **"Meet and Greet"** in person (safely dis-

tanced) after church on **Sunday, October 11**, giving us a chance to meet one another before we move to the Zoom platform.

Confirmation will take place on Ascension Sunday May 16, 2021. Our Bishop will be present to lay hands upon your head and pray for "daily increase in the Holy Spirit" to strengthen you for the calling of baptism (Preface to Confirmation). In Scripture there is a rich theology that grounds the liturgical practice of the laying on of hands. Laying hands upon a person is a way of giving them a particular job or office (Numbers 27:18ff; Deuteronomy 34:9; Acts 6:6) and in Acts the apostles prayed new believers to be filled with the Holy Spirit with the laying on of hands (Acts 8:17-18; 19:5-6). In this sense the bishop solemnly directs all confirmands to carry out their worldly vocations (their task or office) to the glory of God by the power of the Holy Spirit.

If you are interested in participating in these class sessions please contact me or Andrea Millard ([andrea.millard@ascensionpittsburgh.org](mailto:andrea.millard@ascensionpittsburgh.org)).



# Porch Pods



## Youth Ministry Update

By Alex Banfield-Hicks, Director of Youth and College Ministry  
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**W**hen we first had to shut the doors of our Youth Group space in March, the team transformed an empty room into a livestream studio! Look at our [CAYG YouTube channel](#) to find the early productions, followed by an excellent nine-week series called NEAR, and notice how much shorter our hair was then.

As soon as the weather improved, we switched from small groups meeting on Zoom to backyard Bible studies meeting in the open air. Thanks to CAYG Summer Director Wes Williams for his insightful Bible study guides into the Book of Acts that resourced nine different Bible studies happening throughout the week and across the city. Thanks to our other Summer Director, Sam Ferguson, for leading a team in no less than three of these. And thanks to the Cagwins, Sams, Scandretts, Stouts, Tinkers, and VanderMolens for hosting some of these groups on their properties! Six months into doing Youth Ministry in “Covidtide”, what have we learnt?

- Small groups, which were a vital part of traditional CAYG at Ascension, are now essential for we cannot meet in big groups anymore.
- Meeting in person is much better than online when it comes to cultivating friendships, engaging with the scriptures, and praying together.
- More air is better than less, so we meet outdoors and maintain a safe distance.
- Apparently, it can rain quite a bit in Pittsburgh.

So, what will Ascension’s Youth Group experience look like in the fall? Can we continue to meet in small groups, in person, outside, and not get rained on?

Over a hundred years ago the architects of Craftsman style homes in Pittsburgh’s East End must have had us in mind! And I am thrilled that families around Highland Park are sharing their porches with us! Porch Pods is the plan for CAYG in the fall!

Just as iPods presented a new opportunity for listening to music twenty years ago, Porch Pods are a new opportunity for all of us at CAYG to learn to listen to God and to each other. Combining Scriptural discovery and group spiritual direction, with one leader and about five “CAYG-ers”, Porch Pods will be starting a ten-week series the weekend after Labor Day. Middle School Porch Pods will be meeting from 7 - 8:30pm on Fridays and High School Porch Pods from 7:30pm on Sundays. Leaders will gather for a physically distanced dinner on my covered back patio before we head off to our various Porch Pods.

We potentially have up to fifteen porches available to us, but I would love you to pray that:

- A sufficient team of leaders will be raised up to lead these Porch Pods
- Chefs will be willing to cook dinner for one of these Friday or Sunday evenings.

Please contact me if you would like to find out more.





Carol Amidi, *Bird's Nest in a Well*, 2020.

# Music & Worship Arts: Nesting in the Well

By Chris & Elise Massa, Director & Associate Director of Music & Worship Arts Ministry

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**T**he last several months have seen a significant shift in the opportunities available to musicians and artists in our church. Not only has the pandemic made it ill-advised to gather in large groups, but one of the primary ways in which we are accustomed to worshipping together, namely singing, appears to contribute to the spreading COVID-19.

So what do we do—as ministry members and a congregation—when our familiar framework for worship feels like a house of cards? We lean hard on the foundation and cornerstone of our faith—Jesus Christ. We listen to the Spirit, and those around us, for new and fresh perspectives. Then, we live well in this season, praying that we would be the like the person the psalmist described: “the one... who going through the valley of misery uses it for a well.” (Psalm 84:5-6)

These pages contain some of the ways that each area of the Music & Worship Arts Ministry will be leaning, listening, and living well with one another this Fall. Unless otherwise indicated, please email Chris Massa for more information.

## Worship at Home Resources



### Spotify Playlist

Listen to songs for the season and new songs that we hope to introduce to the church. Search for "Ascension Pittsburgh" to find the playlist!



### (un)Ordinary Time

A free art devotional by Ascension artists for the season's lectionary readings. Download from our new [website](#), and follow Church of the Ascension on [Instagram](#) for weekly posts.



### Song Stories

All music in our worship services has a story. You can read the stories for the upcoming week's music by going to our website, or following Church of the Ascension's [Facebook Page](#).



# Music & Worship Arts

New Website: <https://sites.google.com/view/ascensionmusicandworshiparts>

## Music Team

Smaller teams will continue recording on Saturdays. Play a stringed instrument? We'd love to talk to you! Also, members can join our "Album of the Month" discussions of various genres and music, recommended by fellow ministry members. In August, we shared our thoughts on Urban Doxology's title album (right). September? Eric Clapton's Unplugged!



## Choirs (Adults & Kids)

Join us for the first ever virtual choir season! The adult choir will strive to sing one virtual hymn or anthem a month. Weather permitting, there may also be opportunities to sing outside. For children Pre-K and up, contact Jane Banfield Hicks ([jbanfieldhicks@gmail.com](mailto:jbanfieldhicks@gmail.com)) to see how the children may be leading our congregation in worship this year.



## Worship Artists

United Adoration (UA) is a non-profit that seeks to empower artists, and the local church, to create art that is meaningful to their communities. Bi-weekly Creative Sessions invite artists of all disciplines to create based on a particular theme, and receive feedback from other artists. Monthly Worship Art Shares (1st Fridays) is a space to share the fruit of the Creative Sessions, or non-related projects. Join the Slack Workspace UA-Creates, and look for the channel #UA-Pittsburgh. Email Elise Massa for more info.



# Making College Count in COVID-Times



VENITE

## Venite College Ministry Update

By Leah Hornfeck, Associate for Youth and College Ministry  
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**I**n the world of college ministry, the beginning of the fall semester is like waking up on Christmas morning full of excitement and anticipation. The students we have come to know and love so dearly are rejoining us, and there are new students who are eagerly beginning their college careers. Usually I'd be telling you about all of the events and activities we have planned to meet new students and welcome them into the Venite family. However, this year things are going to look different.

While we still intend to meet, welcome, and invite students to Venite and Ascension, the COVID-19 pandemic forces us to reevaluate all of the plans and strategies we've typically relied on. Thankfully, we have had some opportunities this summer to experiment - following all the proper safety protocols, of course - and have been able to begin imagining what campus ministry could look like for the fall 2020 semester.

One of these experimental events was our "Make College Count" day away at Laurelville at the beginning of August aimed at helping rising freshmen start thinking about the transition from high school to college. We went on a journey of self-discovery, asking ourselves the question, "Who am I?" as we worked together through a variety of low ropes initiatives. We competed in a metaphorical photo scavenger hunt as we sorted through our motivations and desires all

bound up in the question, "Why am I going to college?" We spent some time in silence and solitude reflecting on "Who do I want to become?" And we circled up to pray for one another, commissioning our students for their upcoming semester. Though there may have been boundaries we had to work with - wearing masks, physical distancing, staying outdoors - it was encouraging to see that none of these prevented or limited the work of the Spirit of God in the hearts and minds of these students.

Nothing, not even a pandemic, can stop God's work. We can still pray for and work toward the Kingdom to come "on earth as it is in heaven." Though we still don't know what exactly is in store for us with this fall semester, this experience has helped to give us some new and creative ideas as to what is possible as well as uplift our spirits because more is possible than we had initially thought. We are hoping to continue utilizing outdoor spaces and activities for our Venite gatherings as long as the weather allows us to and as long as there are students here in Pittsburgh.

If you're a college student looking to get connected in a faith community, we'd love to have you join us! Please reach out to me. We can't wait to meet you!





# Children's Ministry

By Catherine Slocum, Director of Children's Ministry  
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The first few months of the pandemic

**T**hrough the initial months of the pandemic, Children's Ministry at Ascension had to radically shift delivery of our children's program but has continued to strive to teach the love and grace of God to our youngest members. We have had a ton of participation from all kinds of people on many fronts. It has been fun to watch connections develop and the program unfold. Here is a glimpse of what has happened so far.

Each Sunday morning children are invited to participate in Kids' Church ([Ascension YouTube channel](#)) beginning at 9:30am. Here are some highlights: The children are encouraged to memorize a weekly Bible verse and we often hear from a few kids who memorized the verse that week. We also feature an adult teaching the upcoming verse. We spotlight a member of the congregation who provides ideas for ways to grow and learn. We have heard from visual artists, an organist, a weaver, a doctor, a composer, gardeners, meal makers and others! We have also had various members of the congregation share some really fun songs. Last but not least, we have come to know Sally Lolly, a puppet character who helps with the 'liturgy' and who has come to be loved by kids and parents alike.

During our corporate livestream service our pastors give an interactive children's

talk. Beforehand, the children have been asked to send in recorded responses. The topic of the children's talk often syncs with the theme on the weekly Sunday Paper activity sheet which is available on our website.

Every week a prayer team (meeting via Zoom) is lifting our youngest members up in prayer along with their families.

To learn more about these opportunities please email me or join our private Facebook group, Ascension Children's Ministry, for updated information and fun videos for the family.

## As we enter the 'pandemic winter'

In September we will enter the seventh month of the pandemic. It isn't going away quickly, and as Father Jonathan articulated in his cover article, it has been likened to a long winter. After careful consideration of all factors, it was determined that we should not have an in-person children's program this fall. While this is certainly disappointing, during this 'winter' we will continue everything that we have done to date, doing our best to keep up and even increase the quality of our Kids' Church program. I have been blown away by the participation to date from musicians, presenters, videographers, and those praying for the children each week. If you would like to volunteer in some capacity this fall, please reach out to me.

Let me offer two more invitations. If you

would like to chat about the joys or difficulties of this season as you navigate it with your children, please reach out to me. If you would like prayer, please reach out to me. I am reminded that in times past households prepared carefully for seasons of winter, stocking their pantry shelves with all kinds of necessities. I am confident that God will not only provide all we need for this winter we did not foresee, but somehow will bring about flourishing during these days as we continue to proclaim, in all the ways that we currently can, who He is and what He has done for us. He is faithful. I leave you with Isaiah 55:10 – 11:

"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

# O.W.L.S.

## Older, Wiser, Lively Saints!

By Ann Tefft, Liturgical Assistant

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**T**he Ascension OWLS Fellowship will begin its fall speaker series with a Service of Holy Eucharist on Thursday, September 10 at 10:30am. Jonathan Millard will celebrate and I will give a short homily on “Seeking God’s Transforming and Healing Power.” Gather your thoughts by looking over Matthew 9:18-34 and come prepared to tell others what you think.

While it will be necessary to be six feet apart and to wear masks, some fellowship sure beats no fellowship! I know that many of us are looking forward to soaking up the beauty of our worship space once again. While we will be unable to sing, there will be inspiring instrumental music to sing within your heart and a celebration of our Lord’s Supper. I welcome your responses via email: “Yes, I want to come” or “No, here are my desires and concerns”. Like most of us, I am looking forward to when we can once again share lunch and fellowship together. In the meantime, as the pandemic continues, let’s walk steadily and keep our OWLS fellowship active in the ways that we safely can, so we don’t skip a beat when life as we know it opens once again.



# Ascension Meal Ministry



**S**ince the beginning of the pandemic, Ascension’s two meal ministries have served 9 individual or family units and have blessed them with almost 100 meals. The Soul Food Meal ministry was created two decades ago for those grieving a loss, suffering an illness, or in some other need.

The Newborn Meal Ministry is for those who have recently added a child to their family. We have included a picture of little Peter, born to Yuyu and Qin who immigrated to the US from China and have no family support in Pittsburgh. The community group they belong to and the wider meal ministry of Ascension were incredible blessings to Yuyu and Qin. In their own words, “We couldn’t imagine what it would be

like if we didn’t get help from everyone, especially for the first few weeks! With everyone’s help, we are back on our feet now.”

Jill Shook coordinates both meal ministries and uses electronic meal registries to efficiently communicate the needs of an individual or family to those participating. We have need for a few more cooks. And, if you don’t want to cook, gift cards can be sent or meals can be ordered and delivered. During the pandemic safety protocols have been in place surrounding the mechanics of delivery and all have been safe thus far. If you want to sign up for this ministry, please email Jill directly at [jilleshook@gmail.com](mailto:jilleshook@gmail.com). Participants engage as they are able. May the Lord bless you as you serve!



# Special Needs Ministry



By Keira Fuener, Director of Special Needs Ministry

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**A**s the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10 – 11)

I have been thinking a lot about these verses in light of all that has been limited by virus concerns this spring and summer. For our special needs group, we certainly do miss gathering together in person for Capernaum Club each month and WINGS on Sunday mornings. We miss doing our work in the parish hall and participating in the service by walking up the offering. And like everyone, we miss singing with the congregation in the sanctuary!

Beginning in July, and continuing through the fall, we have been using the Stories of God's People from the Godly Play curriculum to learn more about God's Word together. Each week we meet on Sunday morning at 9:30am (via Zoom) to visit and to pray, and to take some time to look at God's Word presented as a visual story. Each person is invited to share something in their house that might help tell the story. In this way, we have learned more about God's love for us, and also learned more about each other. God certainly has been faithful to us by being near during these times! A weekly video lesson is posted on Ascension's website for our friends and their caregivers to watch when they are able.

If you would like to participate in the weekly Zoom calls, or support and encourage our Friends with special needs by writing letters or an occasional phone call, we would love to have you join us! Please contact me for more information!



# International Ministry

By LuAnn Pengidore, Director of International Ministry

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**I**f you are an international that is living, working, studying, visiting or supporting family members in Pittsburgh, please join us in one of these activities at Ascension and get to know other internationals and members at Ascension. If you are interested in getting more information on any of the programs or activities listed below, or if you want to volunteer in some capacity, please contact me!

First Things First:  
Introducing a Couple of our Students!



Anastasia Goldina and her husband Mikhail are both art lovers and antique dealers. They resettled in Pittsburgh from Moscow three years ago and have been involved at Ascension for two years. Anastasia speaks seven languages and challenges herself to keep improving. Anastasia has taken three classes at Ascension and then began to help with the Monday morning class led by LuAnn

Pengidore and Timmy Podnar. She has also led two art museum field trips and has led an online Norman Rockwell discussion. Mikhail has attended Bible discussion classes with Chris Thieman and Robin Capcara and has one on one conversations with Ann Tefft. We are very happy to get to know them and they have really been an asset to the program!

## English as a Foreign Language Classes this Fall

Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday evenings from 6:30 – 8pm

The International Ministry will have 12 different classes from levels 0-6 that meet twice a week with 26 teachers and assistants leading. These classes include beginner, intermediate, advanced conversation, idiom, and reading and discussion classes. All of our classes will meet online this fall. Testing will take place in person the first two weeks of September.

## Safely Distanced Bi-weekly Field Trips

This fall, the international ministry will continue to take safe biweekly field trips on Friday nights or Saturdays around the Pittsburgh area. This summer, we have taken all kinds of field trips, including the following:

- 2 outdoor history tours, one of Oakland and the other of downtown Pittsburgh

- 2 bicycle trips along the Allegheny river and around Moraine State Park



- Tour of the summer flower show at Phipps
- Tour of the Carnegie Art Museum photo exhibit by Le and Teeny Harris
- Hike through Schenley Park
- A visit to the Westinghouse Memorial with Melita Carter (who worked for Westinghouse)
- A virtual tour of the Strip District
- A career counseling workshop with Joan Anson
- An online discussion of Norman Rockwell paintings with Anastasia Goldina
- A discussion of healthy eating accompanied by a summer salads & wraps cooking class with Jen Conlon
- An Independence Day picnic on July 4th with several Ascension families

## English Learner Bible Studies Online

There are many studies of Scripture internationals are invited to attend!



- Join Meg Sateia and Jess Bennett for a study of Proverbs on Monday mornings at 10:45am.
- Join Barb and Jim Franzen on Monday evenings at 7pm as they go through books of the Bible.
- Join a graduate study with Robin Capcara on Tuesday mornings.
- Join Timmy Podnar in a small group study that goes through much of the Old Testament and sees the promise of the Messiah. Time is to be decided.
- Join a Wednesday night study with Josh and Jess Bennet at 5pm.
- Join a Thursday night intermediate study with Ann Tefft and Denise Bozich.

## Community Groups

Internationals can join one of the Venite groups for those who are college aged. There are also young professional groups in the East End or Squirrel Hill.

## Conversation Partners Online

Many members of Ascension meet weekly online with one stu-

dent and discuss the news or holidays or topics that students find interesting. This is a great way to increase English language competency!

## Church on Sundays, a Discussion Group, and Walks in the Neighborhood

Some of us (teachers and students) attend church from 10 - 11:15am on Sunday mornings and often go for walks too. As with everything in the pandemic, we wear masks, sit 6 feet apart and maintain safe distance on our walks. We also hope to add a discussion group in the Hunt Courtyard immediately following the service.

## Prayer Group Forming

I am looking for 3 - 4 people who will commit to pray for our students, classes, teachers, and any special needs we have. This commitment is for the academic year - fall and spring semesters. If you would like to participate and receive email updates from me, please contact me.

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# People Still Need to Eat: Meal Ministry in a Pandemic

By Jonathan Sewall

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**S**taying at home is a good choice for many to stay safe with disease spreading in our city. But some of us do not have a home, and others cannot stock theirs with food to eat. Many were in precarious economic straits before the pandemic, and now their situations are worse. With all this, our church remains committed to serving meals to those in need.

We continue to provide meals for East End Cooperative Ministry (EECM) once a month and for Shepherd's Heart on the Sundays we reserved last December (approximately 6 times this year). In total, on an annual basis, we prepare the equivalent of approximately 1440 meals distributed to both of these great ministries.

Volunteers are still welcome for this work. We cook in the church kitchen where we can spread out, and we wear masks. To maintain sufficient distance, we have no more than three households represented. Cooks from different families remain apart. However, members of a single family, who do not maintain distance at home, can work close together. Most recently, we have been meeting to cook in the kitchen on Sundays after the 10am livestream service, but in some cases we can cook at other times.

Total cooking time varies between 1 and 3 hours, depending on which meal we are preparing--sometimes we cook both together. But folks can leave whenever they need to. Kids are most welcome. If you would like to watch a great visual of this ministry in motion, please see Episode 10 of Ascension Kids' Church, available on the Ascension YouTube channel!

One part of the work, alas, is not safe with the disease: we can no longer serve the meals ourselves. So, at EECM we drop off the food at 5:30pm Tuesday for the staff to serve to the residents. At Shepherd's Heart we cannot go upstairs to the sanctuary where the meal is served, but we can help the staff by transferring the food into take-out containers (about 120 of them!) in their large kitchen on the 1st floor.

Here are our remaining cooking dates this year. Please contact me if you are interested.

Sunday Sept 27	EECM and Shepherd's Heart
Sunday Nov 1	Shepherd's Heart only
Sunday Nov 22	EECM only

# Agape Year



By Erika Twitchell, Co-Director, Agape Year  
[erikanneaylwin@gmail.com](mailto:erikanneaylwin@gmail.com)

**A**gape Year is an eight-month long Anglican, missional gap year for recent high-school graduates based in Pittsburgh. It seeks to anchor young adults in the story of God through the family of God to live their lives as citizens of the kingdom of God. Co-directors Nate and Erika Twitchell worship at Ascension and are missionaries with the Society of Anglican Missionaries and Senders (SAMS).

## A Different Goodbye: Agape Year 3.0

It was a sticky summer afternoon. I poured the leftover morning coffee over ice, grabbed the computer, sat down on the much too warm sofa while starting a Zoom meeting. Soon, Nate, complete with his Covid beard, appeared on the screen, soon followed by Christian. We had sent our missional fellows, Nate and Christian, home in mid-March amidst the unexpected upheaval of the pandemic without our usual time of wrap up and preparation for what lay ahead. We had hoped to bring them back to Pittsburgh this July for a proper goodbye and debrief but had to cancel those plans as cases

surged throughout the country. As I sat in our living room and as they sat in their own homes many miles apart connected virtually, my heart was heavy with disappointment. This was not how it was supposed to be.

While Covid-19 changed what was “supposed to happen” for Agape Year in the spring and summer, it did not, nor could it, change the powerful work that God wanted to do in our fellows’ lives. As we sat with our fellows via Zoom, we recalled the ways in which God had been present, the seeds that He had planted, and the work that could not be undone. This work was evident in Nate and Christian’s reflections on the ways they experienced belonging to the family of God. Through worshipping at Ascension, building friendships through the Venite College Ministry, serving alongside the Youth Group and International Ministries, they saw the kingdom of God in living color. Thank you for your Christ-like welcome to our fellows. That welcome has rippled across their identity in Christ.

## A Hopeful Welcome: Introducing Agape Year 4.0

This fall we will welcome four missional fellows into our community. Our year will

look different in light of Covid-19. We will not be able to worship with you in the same way as we have in the past. We have adapted some of our ministry partnerships. We will travel less broadly, but dive into God’s work here. One thing we are certain of: God will show up. He will come close to us. He will speak and we pray our missional fellows will have ears to hear, eyes to see, and hands to act. Will you join us in praying for each of these young adults? Help us to watch and pray. Jesus, prepare our hearts to wonder.

Aidan Findley

Nashville, TN

Avid guitarist and classic rock enthusiast

Ethan Albert

Davison, NC

Enneagram expert and lover of hoodie sweatshirts

Eva Didot

Harrisonburg, VA

Crepe maker and entrepreneur extraordinaire

Amara Bailey

Aliquippa, PA

Resident artist and fashionista

**Worship Services** Sunday 10:00 am Livestream on [YouTube](#) with walk-through Eucharist from 11:30-12:30

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

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A Worshipping Community;  
 Equipping God’s People; Sharing  
 Christ’s Healing with a Broken World