

# The Ascent

OCTOBER 2020

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



## Provision

Stories from the Ascension family on God's provision  
in our lives.

## Letter from the Rector

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# Jehovah Jireh. The Lord will Provide

By Jonathan Millard, Rector

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**T**here have been many times in my life when I have experienced extraordinary provision from God - financially, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. I know that, compared to many, my life has been easy. I have never gone hungry. I have never been imprisoned or beaten for my faith (or for any other reason). But I have known suffering, grief, and loss. I have experienced the “dark night of the soul” when, with the psalmist and countless fellow Christians, I have cried out in the night, often through tears, “How long, O Lord? How long?”

In October we will begin a new sermon series, using our lectionary readings, that explores the theme of “God’s Provision.” Some may think that’s a strange theme in the midst of a global pandemic when many people are conscious of what they don’t have or cannot do rather than being mindful of God’s great provi-

sion. Yet that’s the point. Even in the midst of loss we remember that God provides for our needs.

I have been wondering these past months whether the other side of the coin of lament might be provision.

Lament is an important, powerful, and much needed response to our current days and circumstances. Some in our congregation lament the death of family members and loved ones due to COVID-19. Others lament shattered dreams - when, or how baptisms, weddings, even funerals will take place. Some are lamenting the loss of work, income, and financial security. Others lament the disruption of schooling for their children or themselves, and the stresses and strains these past months have put on relationships. And there are many other losses, large and small, that cause us to lament. On Wednesday, October 28, we will be holding an evening Service of Lament. I hope many of you will attend in person, or via live stream.

Alongside our lament it is good to remember, with thanksgiving, the steadfast love and provision of the Lord. In this edition of the Ascent, you will see testimonies of God’s provision.

One example of God’s provision in my life goes back to 1989, when I ended my career as a barrister in England to start seminary. As you might imagine, I experienced a significant drop in income. Indeed, the fees I received for my final court case





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that lasted just a week were more than what I would have to live on for the whole of the following year. On one occasion I had no money in my bank account and a bill to pay. I was in my very small dormitory room wondering what I would do when I heard the sound of something being slid under my door. It was an envelope with my name on it. I opened it and inside was some cash. There was no card or letter, just some cash. I never did find out who did that or why, and I no longer remember how much was in that envelope. But I do remember that it was just enough to cover the bill I was worrying about! I thanked God for his provision then, and as I remember this, I give thanks to God now.

More recently, I have been thanking God for his provision for us at Ascension. The decision to shut down normal Sunday services took place on Wednesday night, March 11th. Four days later, we broadcast our first ever live stream service on YouTube. We were using borrowed equipment since the equipment we needed was sold out and unavailable for many weeks. The Lord provided people in the congregation with the right skills, gifts and willingness to serve to put all this together, and he provided us with the temporary equipment we needed to get started.

As we explored what it would take to set up a reasonably robust platform for streaming our services, we

soon realized that this would be quite expensive (some \$12,000 in equipment alone). I was talking with someone who is very supportive of our ministry at Ascension, though not part of our congregation. Without my asking, he said to me, "Let me know how much it will cost to get everything set up, because my wife and I would like to fund it." And they did, and more! Once again, God provided.

While both examples I have shared are financial in nature, the Lord provides in many and various ways. God sometimes provides for the needs of people directly and supernaturally, like with the provision of daily food to eat in the form of manna in the wilderness for the people of Israel.

Often, God's provision comes through his people sharing what they have with others, be that a meal, a listening ear, a skill, financial resources, time, prayer, etc.

As we lament what we have lost and remember God's provision, let us also ask God whom we can serve and how he would use us as his agents to provide for others.



# Fall Preaching Provision

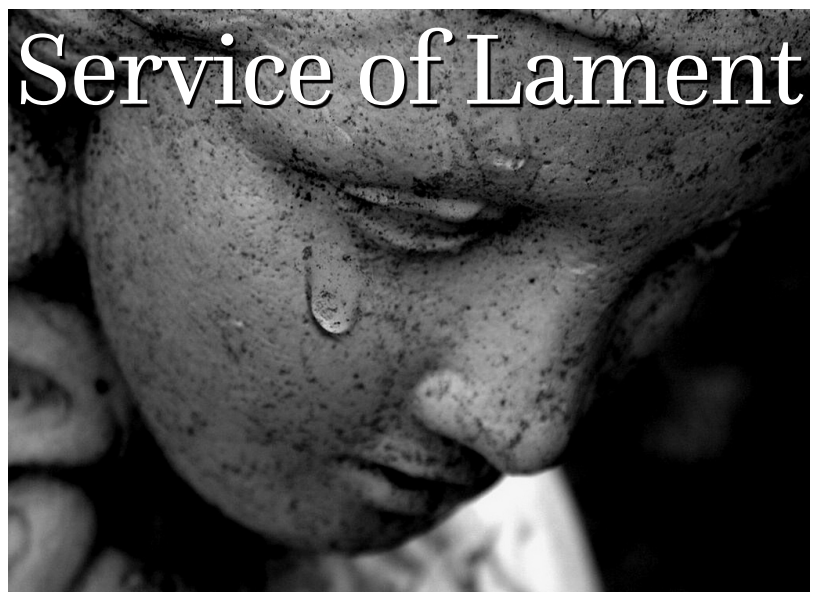
This fall, our Sunday sermons will focus on the theme of provision.



October 4	Provision: The Christian Life Philippians 3:14-21	November 1	Provision: The Saints as a Gift to the Church Rev. 7:9-17; Luke 6:30-36
October 11	Provision: Justice, Goodness and Salvation Win Isaiah 25:1-9; Matt. 22:1-14	November 8	Provision: Be Ready! Amos 5:18-24; Matt. 25:1-13
October 18	Provision: God's Abundant Storehouse Malachi 3:6-12	November 15	Provision: Faithful Stewardship of God's Gifts Matt. 25:14-30
October 25	Provision: Scripture and the Jesus' Way Psalm 1; Matt. 22:34-46	November 22	Provision: Christ our King Ezekiel 34:11-20; Psalm 95; 1 Cor. 15:20-28; Matt. 25: 31-46

Bible Studies ('Sermon Questions') following the theme of the sermon and readings will be available each week under the [Resources tab](#) of Ascension's website.





# Service of Lament

## Oct. 28

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. The service will be live streamed with usual attendance limits.



## Open Air Soul Care Oct. 24 | Nov. 21

We are offering opportunities this fall for quiet mornings of attending to our hearts and souls in October, and November. 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. Space is limited; registration is required. We will meet in the Courtyard 9:30 – 11am on October 24 and November 21. Register using the Congregational Care Hub on the News & Events page of the website.

## EXPLORE ASCENSION

*New Member Class*



## Oct. 21 | Nov. 19

The next Explore Ascension classes (via Zoom) will be held on Wednesday, October 21 and Monday, November 19 at 7pm. This class, taught by the rector, Jonathan Millard, 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.chislaghi@ascensionpittsburgh.org](mailto:marilyn.chislaghi@ascensionpittsburgh.org) and she will send you the zoom link.



# Provision: Deep in the Heart...

By April Bailey

*April, her husband Mark, and their two children Amelia and Elijah, have been at Ascension for just over two years and attend the 9am service.*

**I**n 2016, our family was preparing for our daughter, Amelia's kidney transplant. This was not a surprise. She had been diagnosed with kidney disease early in life, but you are never ready for your 13-year old to face such a health crisis.

Mark was pastoring a small church in deep west Texas. We moved, in faith, to a tiny town of 6,000 people just shy of four years earlier. With every step of that move, we saw God's provision. He opened doors. He provided housing. He met our financial needs even when the church could not. So, as we approached this new challenge, we trusted that He would be there, providing.

In August of that year, we made the five-hour trip to San Antonio for Amelia's quarterly check-up. Her kidney functioning was down to 25%. It had been 30% just three months before. We were reminded that the path we were on would lead to a transplant.

In November, we received a phone call the day before her next appointment. Amelia's blood work came back showing a kidney functioning of only 15%. Even the doctors were surprised at how quickly she declined. The checkup appointment was now all about dialysis. It was a lot to take in.

A week later we were seeking kidney donors.

In all that we were going through, God was providing. He was providing peace that surpassed all understanding. This peace continued to the day of her transplant and beyond. Although we did not know at the time, He was providing a living donor.

People we had known thirty years ago, and some we had just met, offered to be tested for compatibility. Marsha, a member of our small church in her early 50s, turned out to be a match. That alone would have been enough. Yet God in His infinite

wisdom and wonderful provision put it on Marsha's heart to be listed on the National Registry for organ donation. As a result, she was matched with Marty, a man in his 50s who also needed a kidney. Marty had a 27-year old dear friend who had offered to donate her kidney to him but was NOT a match. She was, however, an even better match for Amelia. Surgery was planned not for one transplant but for two. It was then that we caught a glimpse of God's perspective and how He would provide more than we could understand or imagine. Our daughter's need for a kidney provided one for another person deeply loved and known by God who likely would not have received a transplant otherwise.



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The story has many twists and turns and way too many examples of God's tangible and intangible provision to list here, but with every corner, we saw questions and needs, big and small, answered in the way only a sovereign God could. This included allowing Amelia to maintain 15% kidney functioning for the next six months (when it dropped 15% in the previous six months), and therefore, avoiding the dialysis we dreaded.

God's desire is for us to flourish, not just exist. Too often we view flourishing as a life of ease or excess. But, with God, we flourish when we experience life as it

was meant to be in Christ. We experienced His peace, protection, faithfulness, and His extravagant love that repeatedly showed us how intimately He knew and cared for our hearts, our fears, our needs, and our longings. His provision brings us to a greater understanding of who He is and a place of stronger faith and trust in Him for anything that we may face in the days ahead.



# Ten Minutes

By Marilyn Chislaghi, Director of Ministry  
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PHOTO CAPTION: "New Skete: multiplication of loaves & fishes" by jimforest is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

**I** can recall many vignettes over the course of my life where God's provision has been just what was needed at just the right time. Some of the scenes that come to mind had to do with small things. Other scenes recall circumstances far more serious with rays of God's sunlight burning through dense fog. There is one incident that happened several years ago that continues to put a smile on my face, and the whole event was about ten minutes long.

It was Friday evening in the fall, just after 6:30pm. My husband Charlie and I had picked up daughter Clare from her Pittsburgh Girls' Choir practice that happened at Ascension. We drove off north on Neville and turned right onto Bayard. We were about half a block down on Bayard, happily chatting about the day and about the practice, when a flash of light hit my eyes. It was just an instant and I thought I had seen the neon white stick of someone who is blind, although I really wasn't sure. At the same time an overwhelming and ominous feeling came over me that we needed to go back. Perhaps I had heightened awareness because I had two previous encounters with visually impaired people who were in peril. And, on this occasion, nightfall would soon be upon us. Anyways, I expressed my concern to Charlie and, good man that he is, he did a quick U-turn.

We came upon a tall, thin woman who was indeed holding a white neon cane, indicating she was blind. She was not moving. Just standing there. I rolled down my window and asked if she was OK. No response. I asked again. No response. I asked louder. No response. Charlie parked the car and we all got out.

I asked again, as clearly as I could, "Are you OK?" The woman responded in garbled speech that was difficult to make out. "I'm deaf." Then she added, "I'm lost."

Blind. Deaf. Lost. Oh wow. "Where do you live?" I said it as clearly and as loudly as I could since evidently she could hear a wee bit. She responded but none of us understood. We asked again. She said it again. We did not understand. At that precise moment a long-time family friend, Dave, just happened to pedal by on his bike. He came into our circle with the woman. "Where do you live?" She responded. He understood and smiled, "I know where that is!" and gave us directions to a care home several blocks away.

We didn't want to frighten our new friend any further and communicated as best we could that we would drive her home. She quite willingly got into the passenger seat and off we went. Within a few minutes she was at her front door being greeted by her friends. In she went. She was home.

I call her "the woman" because things happened so swiftly that we never found out her name.

The story of Hagar has come to mind in the years since this happened. Hagar was in terrible circumstances – rejected, alone, destitute. Yet God met her. In response she uttered the words, "You are the God who sees me" (Genesis 16:13). That's exactly what happened that evening on Bayard. A woman who could neither see nor hear. Yet God saw her. Amen!



# Surprising and Prodigious Provision

By Anne B.

*Anne and Frank live and work in North Africa but currently reside in Pittsburgh and attend Ascension regularly with their children.*

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**P**rior to moving to North Africa, I worked as a foreign language teacher. From the time I was a little girl, I wanted to be a teacher, and after spending a year abroad during college, I knew I wanted to teach languages. We first arrived on the field on September 30th of 2001 with two young children and five months pregnant with our third. We began intensive language study on October 1st. I loved every minute of it.

I was not by any means the best student, or fastest learner, or most eloquent speaker of Arabic, but Frank and I had an ethos that included a strong commitment to participating in the language and culture of our host community. I decided to use my background as a foreign language educator to serve as a language learning advisor for our team, and then later for other Christian workers in the country outside of our team.

After several years of coaching our colleagues on how to be a more productive language learner and training locals on how to effectively teach an unwritten dialect or Arabic, I began to develop close relationships with the local teachers. I never actually called them “teachers,” but instead referred to them as “nurturers” because their job was to “nurture” people like me into their language, into their culture, and into their way of life. My nurturers began coming to me and saying, “Anne, thank you for this job opportunity, but I am essentially a private tutor working under the table which means that I can’t put this job on my resume. I can’t receive social security, and I have no health insurance.” At that point, I was committed to starting some sort of entity or organization that offered legitimate employment to my nurturers.



**PHOTO CAPTION:**

"Miracle of the Loaves and Fish" by [Lawrence OP](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#)

At first, I felt that this would be easy. My husband Frank had started other businesses in Tunisia and he currently operated what he called a Kingdom Business. He had all the know-how and I had the people; I assumed it would be almost automatic. So, Frank put together a business plan for me, and on the last line of the executive summary was a number that reflected how much money we would need just to get my language center started. It was a number that seemed impossible. It felt daunting for two reasons. First, I had never had anything close to that much money. Second, we were starting this endeavor as a not-for-profit "Kingdom Business" so we could not look for venture capital speculators who were interested in getting a return on their investment. I thought my dream of starting the language center was dead.

Raising money and communicating need is a reality for all church workers. We have been doing it for over twenty years, and we just accept it as a part of our calling. I would be lying though if I said it was not a source of stress. Even though I have dozens of experiences that serve as evidence that God's provision is prodigious, I nearly always think, "This time it probably will not happen." More times than I care to admit I have found myself anxious about a need and lacking faith that God will really provide. I do not, however, have any memory of a time when God did not provide, although I am convicted by the fact that when He does, I am usually surprised. The other thing that I

have learned from twenty plus years of Christian ministry and support raising is that even though God's provision is prodigious, we are usually blessed with about ninety percent of what we thought we needed. I suspect this is His way of exercising our faith in his provision and keeping us relying on him.

I struggled with the number at the bottom of the executive summary. I thought to myself, "Yes God has been faithful in the past, but this much...there is no way." We decided to send the business plan to several strategically selected people. We received seven responses and raised ninety percent of what we thought needed.

I wish I could say that in the future I will never be surprised when God answers prayer so obviously, but I probably will. What I can say, however, is that I saw a number and thought that starting my language center would be impossible, but today I operate a language center that is larger and more dynamic than I could have ever imagined. Go to [www.marhababik.com](http://www.marhababik.com) and check us out. None of it would have been possible without God's surprising and prodigious provision.



# Four Favorite Moments

By Alex Banfield Hicks, Director of Youth and College Ministry  
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**H**aving done several ministry roles in my past and having lived in six cities and in three countries since graduating from college, moving to Ascension strangely felt like coming home. Directing Youth and College ministries here feels, for the first time of my life, like pulling on a glove that fits all five fingers. I would like to highlight four of my favorite moments of God's provision that made it possible for a non-Church going lad in the South West of England to end up ministering to America's youth in Pittsburgh. These four moments are centered on a book, a ring, a visa, and an email.

A book. We often can tell stories of God's provision answering our prayers. But my first story is His answer to another's prayers. When I was growing up in a thatched-cottage in England, an old copy of C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* sat unseen and untouched on my bedroom bookshelf amongst various other volumes belonging to my parents. Some Christian friends had given it to them, had been praying for them, and saw nothing change. And then one day in 2000, when I returned home during my first year studying away at Oxford, I noticed it. True, it drew my attention because I had been to some events organized by Christian friends at Oxford for non-believers, but I wasn't ready to commit. Yet, reading that book, stretched out on my bed, the Truth became unavoidable: Jesus was alive, was Lord, and was calling me to follow him. I prayed there and then.

A ring. Fast forward six years and I am halfway through a two-year mission team commitment in Milan, Italy. I am also very much in love with my American teammate and have bought flights so I can meet her parents in their luxurious suburban home and ask their permission to marry their daughter. But I am also a penniless missionary surviving on the gifts of others and not in a position to buy a nice engagement ring. But I prayed. And shortly before my date of departure, my Grandmother decided to write a not insignificant check to each of her four grandchildren. Perfect timing.

A visa. Fast forward another six years and Jane and I are preparing to move from the UK to the USA, so I can pursue a three-year M.Div. in St Louis. Getting the US visa we needed required the paperwork to show our financial sustainability for that time, and I am fundraising. Thanks to the generosity of others we are getting close to our target but are not there yet. I email a friend in London to see if he has any friends who might be interested. "Send me your brochure" he says. I don't have a brochure, but I know how to turn a Word doc into a PDF, so I send that. Silence. Then a guy, who I have never met, emails me out of the blue. "How much do you need to reach your total?" I give the number. Silence. About a week before our appointment at the Embassy to apply for the visa he emails again, I respond with the outstanding number needed, and he offers to cover the rest. I have still never met him.

An email. While studying in St Louis, and praying about what to do next, I received an email from a friend I had met many years before, shortly after reading *Mere Christianity*. We had worked together as camp counselors at a Christian summer program, had stayed in touch, and he had recently moved from London to Pittsburgh. He emailed to invite me to visit, and the 'Burgh suddenly appeared on my mental map. He introduced me to Jonathan Millard who heard me preach at Christ Church Fox Chapel. I had never done youth ministry before, but I did like Pittsburgh, Ascension and

Jonathan, so we accepted his job offer which came shortly thereafter. And then a few years later, my Aunt sent me an old birthday photo. What am I wearing? A Pittsburgh Steelers jersey, of course!



# The Kindness of Strangers

By Karen and Mark Stevenson  
Interim Associate Rector and Parish Deacon



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**W**hen we think about God's provision, there are so many things to which we could testify related to our material resources, but perhaps one of the most significant stories of God's provision in our lives happened about two years ago and had to do with God's provision of people.

(Karen) I had driven to Holland, Michigan to visit my parents and took my bicycle along. The first day of the visit, I took a long and beautiful ride ending at Lake Michigan. I set out the next day full of hope for another such ride. About one mile into the ride, I hit a set of railroad tracks at slightly the wrong angle and went down hard. And so, the praying started.

God's first provision. The road was narrow at this juncture, and I slid right into traffic. A gentleman driver had slowed down when he approached me and so was able to stop without hitting me. He immediately pulled over and helped me off the road. Another stranger pulled over and with him helped me to try and stand. I had broken my pelvis and couldn't stand so he called an ambulance and waited with me for it to arrive. Then he offered to take my bicycle back to my hotel.

(Mark) I was not able to join Karen on the trip, so when she called home and told me she was injured and in hospital, I began to panic. My first impulse was to drive to Michigan. But that

would have created more chaos, so I stopped and prayed. The Lord brought to mind a cousin of Karen's who lives in Holland, so I switched into manager-mode. I called Karen's parents and told them as gently as possible that there had been an accident. They were in their 90's and neither of them drove. I asked for the phone number of her cousin Dennis. I called Dennis who was quite literally a God-send. He went to the hospital and took Karen back to her hotel. He also picked up her pain meds and made sure she was as comfortable as possible. Karen still had to drive home with a cracked pelvis and other injuries, but thanks be to God, she made it.

(Karen) When I had arrived at the hospital, I realized I had left my wallet and phone with my bike. Again, I prayed that God would protect these and the bike which I had entrusted to a stranger. When I got back to the hotel, my bike (with both my phone and wallet) had been safely stored. The hotel staff were incredibly caring and kind to me.

God's provision in our lives has been amazingly gracious - from his reassuring daily presence, to strength for the day, comfort in grief, and wisdom when we need it. So many times, it is through the people in our lives that he extends to us his compassion, kindness, strength and love.



# It's Never Too Early for Clapping

By Sarah Laribee

*Sarah served as Director of Youth Ministry at Ascension for four years, 2010 – 2014. Since that time, she has been teaching high school in Kurdistan and recently moved to Chicago.*

**I**t is a matter of pride for me that people usually find me a pretty happy person. I am generally and genuinely positive and upbeat, energetically so, even, possibly annoyingly so. But my optimism is boundless, and I like that about myself.

My students in Kurdistan couldn't figure it out. I'd constantly get a "Miss, seriously how much coffee do you drink a day?" Or, "Miss. It's only 9am. It's too early for clapping." (It's never too early for clapping.) But most people who know me, know me as a happy, outgoing, and hopefully joyful person.

What fewer people know is that, for the past five years, I didn't talk to my father.

It doesn't matter why. In the beginning of my silence, I was convinced I had good reasons for the distance. But I also know myself well enough to know that most of the behavior in my life that turns into sin usually begins with a smattering of good reasons.

Over the half a decade where I cultivated an image of one Sarah, joyfully serving overseas with goofy stories of students and a new culture I was falling in love with hoping to show the love of Jesus, I was also carefully tending an inferno of rage. My closest friends knew this dichotomy in me, but it's not really something you casually drop in a newsletter: "Please pray for these people I love as they are experiencing horrible social and political turmoil, and also I am still refusing to talk to my dad, even though he's probably tried eight different ways this year to reach out to me. I have somehow convinced myself that bitterness is the same as righteousness! Hope you're all great!"

I have seen God work miracles of provision in so many myriad ways in my life. Even this summer, Ascension stepped in to generously help me as I had to take an evacuation flight from Kurdistan because of months-long COVID-19-related airport closures in Iraq. God has provided home, family, friends and the best church a person could hope for in you all, even though I have been away for so long. Even this year, as awful as the pandemic has been, it has allowed me to join in live stream worship with you all every Sunday from



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["Loaves and Fishes by John and Helen Mary Skelton"](#) by [mira66](#) is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#)

such great distances. With all the loss this year has brought, the days are drenched with the provision of our Father.

But for me, the starkest provision in my life right now has been Christ melting the ice of my own carefully cultivated anger. I simply, and sinfully, refused to forgive, miserly counting my grievances in some dank basement bank vault inside my heart.

I know that there are circumstances in life where walking away may be necessary for health and safety. I'd like to clarify that what was happening with me wasn't that. It was simply...a hoarding of forgiveness. And in my case, God's most profound provision has come not in a typical sense of "blessing" so much as a beautiful and gracious chastening: my good, merciful and just Father disciplining my heart that I could no longer live a double life: the optimistic joy of a Christian without the often difficult work of the forgiveness of a Christian. Our crucified Lord doesn't allow for that binary.

This summer, I hugged my dad for the first time in five years. And he hugged me, too, forgiving me in that embrace for all the calls I had screened, all the emails I never responded to. I am grateful to my earthly dad for extending me

forgiveness when it took me so long to do the same. And am grateful to my Heavenly one for lovingly, but incisively reminding me how utterly ridiculous a number 70x7 actually is. And I am looking forward to the next chapter of life, living whole-heartedly into the joy he has given. With even more early morning claps.



# God of hosts, literally

By Nate Twichell

*Nate and Erika Twichell lead Agape Year, a missional gap year program*

**W**hen Erika and I realized that we were going to try and continue to run our missional gap year program, Agape Year, in the midst of COVID, we had just a ton of fears. Will Fellows come? Where will we volunteer? As missionaries dependent on the financial support of our senders, what will happen to our support during this recession? Where will our Fellows live?

You see, for the past three years, young people have been coming to Pittsburgh to see God's Kingdom Come. They have been coming to Pittsburgh to feel the church in action, to see the body that they are a part of, and to receive hospitality as they live with host families. God has provided four Fellows for us this year, our biggest cohort yet! Each year, we place the Fellow with a host family for the eight months that they are in Pittsburgh. And each year that is one of the most meaningful and impactful parts of the Fellow's year. But finding hosts in a pandemic? And twice as many as we have ever had to find before?

We are friends with a young couple that lives a few houses down the street from us. After praying about it, Erika and I decided to ask them to consider hosting. But really, we don't know them THAT well. Surely they'll say no. But it seemed like the faithful thing to do, so we sent an inquiring email. And we waited.

A few days later the husband called. They were in! They wanted to host. But more than that, it was an answer to prayer...their prayer. Adam laughed as he told me how they had planned on hosting a young person from a different program. He told me how they had been preparing their hearts and their home to extend hospitality. And he told me how they had been crestfallen when the program was cancelled due to COVID. Then Erika and I emailed. What had felt like a stretch for Erika and I was in fact something for which God had been preparing them for months. God opened the door. God provided.

This year, more than any other, we see God's provision in our lives. He has provided an abundance of Fellows. He has provided housing for that abundance of Fellows. And while our support isn't 100%, He has sustained our family in surprising ways. One of our consistent prayers during COVID has been that we would have eyes to see and ears to hear how God is providing for us in this season of extreme uncertainty. Thanks be to God for answered prayer!





# When the Bottom Drops Out

By Chris Massa, Director of Music Ministry  
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**W**hat do you do when the bottom drops out? I was driving home from work when I got the phone call. I had been working at Starbucks for several years, and I was now working in Monroeville and living on the South Side with Elise, my wife of only a few months. I had worked a closing shift that night, so it was around midnight, far later than I was used to getting phone calls, particularly from my sister, Allison. This was important, she said. She had been diagnosed with something very serious, something genetic. I had to see a doctor right away.

This “something genetic” was familial adenomatous polyposis (FAP), a rare condition that, if untreated, almost always results in colon cancer. The tests had come back positive for FAP, and she didn’t know if it had been caught early enough. And, of course, she didn’t know if she was the only one who had it, which is why I had to get a colonoscopy as soon as possible. I don’t think either of us said this out loud, but I know I was thinking it: I’m four years older than Allison, so if I had FAP, there was a good chance it would be an even more advanced case.

News of a possible cancer diagnosis will always ruin your day, but in my case, it was the icing on the cake of a very difficult year. Elise and I had recently adopted a kitten only to find that it was sickly, so we had to have it put down. Our apartment had also been robbed by—we eventually discovered—someone we knew. To top it all off, Elise and I worked shifts that were almost complete opposites. We were newlyweds who wanted to spend as much time together as possible; instead, we barely saw each other. But the most difficult thing—up until the diagnosis, of course—was that we felt like we were going through

it all alone. Despite being part of two churches, the invitations and check-ins stopped once we got married. We were hurting and scared, we didn’t feel safe in our own home, and we felt lonely and abandoned.

After I told Elise about my sister’s diagnosis, we started calling everyone in our phone book. After about ten calls and no responses, a friend whom we hadn’t spoken to since the wedding answered. We invited ourselves over and spent the evening drinking wine and lamenting. Sometimes God provides for people in dramatic ways, but sometimes it’s subtler, more gradual, like the widow who never ran out of flour and oil (1 Kings 17:7-16). That’s how it was for us. We confronted our robber and were able to extend grace and prayer. We got another cat, and we (eventually) got new jobs.

My colonoscopy came back clear. No polyps, no FAP. My sister’s condition had advanced more quickly than even the doctors had expected—over the course of about a month, it had progressed from pre-cancer to cancer—but it was caught and treated in the nick of time. It has not been an easy journey for her and her family, but she’s been cancer-free ever since.

All of this happened almost ten years ago, and one of the most striking differences between then and now is this: When everything seems to be going wrong, when the bottom falls out—and I know many of us have experienced this over the past few months—Elise and I now have people to talk to. Between our community group, our ministry partners, and our larger church family, there’s no shortage of people we can call when it feels like there’s no hope, and people who will call us if they haven’t heard from us in a while. We are so grateful that God has provided for us by putting all of you in our lives. Thank you.



# The LORD Your God Will Be With You Wherever You Go

By Catherine Slocum, Director of Children's Ministry  
[catherine.slocum@ascensionpittsburgh.org](mailto:catherine.slocum@ascensionpittsburgh.org)

**I**n the opening lines of the Book of Joshua, we find a great man of God, one who has traveled from a place of slavery in Egypt to the brink of the promised land. He has experienced forty years of wilderness wandering despite his faithfulness as one who once scouted a land flowing with milk and honey. Now, with his mentor, Moses, dead, and the entire tribe of Israel depending upon him, he must lead his people into a land inhabited by hostile people. The dangers and uncertainties he and those he leads face, are unprecedented. He has no guarantees, no statistical probabilities, no experts to rely upon. Instead, he is guided by faith based upon a promise God made him and his people. In Joshua 1:9 we hear God say, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

During this season of uncertainty and danger, with so few guarantees for our future, we remember that these words acted as a guiding light for Joshua. Similarly, we may not be able to determine our path, but God is with us wherever we go. It is such a delight to hear stories of faithfulness from the Body of Christ. Below are a few stories of how God is proving to families at Church of the Ascension - that he is with them no matter where they go. Let these stories be a balm to you as we all face uncertainty. But, let these stories also be an encouragement to you to stop and recognize the ways that God has been with you during this season. Also, please know that I am praying for the children and parents at Church of the Ascension by name and will stand with you in faith rather than fear knowing that, "the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

**Jennifer Crosby**

For the first ten weeks of the pandemic, my husband and I worked from home full-time



PHOTO CAPTION: "He who comes to Me will never be hungry" by Lawrence OP is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

while also watching our 3-year-old and 1.5-year-old. One evening in May, after a particularly challenging and stressful day, I felt like I was failing as a parent. God provided in that moment an overwhelming sense of His grace through an article I read and a timely conversation with my in-laws. I was reminded that His grace buries all of my faults and it empowered me to be patient with my family because He has been patient with me.

#### **Meg Sateia**

After my husband took a pay cut, I was able to make back roughly the same amount of money that we were losing by taking care of our friends' son. Our kids have loved having a friend to play

with during this time when they haven't been able to see their other friends in person. We have also enjoyed being able to have weekly in-person dinners all together. God is good!

#### **Lisa Suit**

One way that God has provided for our family during this season is by always providing enough for our family to live on, even though my husband isn't working due to his job being closed due to COVID. God has also given us many times of sweet closeness and enjoyment together as a family, and ways for my kids to creatively reach out to their friends despite all of the uncertainty in the world right now!

#### **Nina Deng**

The greatest provision during this time for our family is Church of the Ascension itself. As you have noticed, our family just became members on August 2nd. We are so thankful God planned this Church for us before the whole pandemic started. As a foreigner living in a foreign country for so many years, my great comfort is that Our Lord is so faithful to us that He will always provide a family on earth for us.

The verse I truly love at this time is: "The Lord will keep His promises. With love He takes care of all He has made." Psalm 145:13

## The Great Litany: Pray with us!

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). 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 September continuing for ten consecutive weeks through mid-November, 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 [andrea.millard@ascensionpittsburgh.org](mailto:andrea.millard@ascensionpittsburgh.org) for details.

## Confirmation Classes Beginning

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. 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 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 October 13). We will kick off the course with a "Meet and Greet" in person (safely distanced) after church on October 11, giving us a chance to meet one another before we move to the platform of Zoom. If you are interested in participating in these class sessions please contact Karen Stevenson ([stevenson@pitanglican.org](mailto:stevenson@pitanglican.org)) or Andrea Millard ([andrea.millard@ascensionpittsburgh.org](mailto:andrea.millard@ascensionpittsburgh.org)).



# Even in the Small Things

By Debbie Kornfield

*Debbie and her husband David are missionaries with OC International and members of Ascension. They often travel back and forth to South America.*

**“The money I would make repairing this car would be great for me, but it would cost you more than the car is worth. Use your money for a new one.” a mechanic said.**

Our 2005 Corolla had failed to pass inspection. I was not dismayed, simply curious. We had given the money set aside for a replacement car to Ascension’s More than Stones campaign. But God has always provided for our financial needs, sometimes in extraordinary Philippians 4:19 ways.

Just about cars, we have four remarkable stories. The first happened early in our marriage. God gave us a car for free! Our credit card company insisted, against all the evidence we provided, they had handled the transaction correctly—but we were never charged!

What would God do this time?

I emailed the inspection details to my husband Dave in Asunción, Paraguay. This was his last trip before COVID-19 grounded him. He replied that once home, he would start looking for another car. We had three weeks before our inspection stickers would expire.

On the way to pick up Dave at the airport, the yellow light on our dashboard blinked off! It occurred to me that we should pursue a second opinion. I told Dave this and he agreed, though doing so shrank by several more days our window for obtaining another vehicle.

Half a week later, I dropped our car with a second mechanic and hung out at a nearby coffee shop to await his opinion.

My phone vibrated. The mechanic. “Your car is ready. Pick it up any time.”

“I beg your pardon?”

He repeated his message.

“It passed the emissions test?”

“Yes, no problem.”



PHOTO CAPTION: “Saint James the Greater Catholic Church (Concord, North Carolina) - stained glass, loaves & fishes” [Nheyob / CC BY-SA](#)

How can that be? We’ve made no repairs since it failed the emissions test a few days ago. I walked to the shop, admired our new stickers, and looked at the bill. The only “repair” charge was \$1.00 for rotating the tires. I asked the mechanic a question. “If this was your car, would you keep driving it, or would you trade it in for another one?”

“I would definitely keep it. This is a great little car, with a lot of mileage left in it.”

I have no explanation. We’re happy to continue driving our great little Corolla and have created another car fund to which we’re adding monthly. Just in case.

But I wonder what God’s plans might be for that money.

# In Their Own Words: Stories From Our International Friends

By LuAnn Pengidore, Director of International Ministry

**G**od has been on the move in every ministry within Ascension and also in the international ministry: providing volunteers, teachers, and students despite difficulties in advertising. Some of our international friends wanted to tell their “provision stories” to glorify God. Here are testimonies from Seine and the “Z. family”, in their own words.

## Seine (China)

“My name is Seine and I am from Beijing. During the pandemic, I have continued to take English classes and join some groups to study the Bible with Church of Ascension online. Fortunately, though staying home a lot, our teachers provided various kinds of special classes for us. For example, we had career classes with Joan Anson that helped us look for jobs and write great resumes. In addition, we have learned some spiritual songs with Ceinwen King Smith and in our Bible studies. Most importantly, we have had some friends to learn and discuss the Bible with and hear special presentations on Paul and Barnabas with Mark Stevenson and Kim and Kirk Wadsack. Those events have improved my English and my faith as well. In this situation with COVID-19, I have realized that human beings are not able to control everything in their environments very well. But when I feel weak, I think about the fact that I have an Almighty God who always gives me power, mercy and love. Therefore, my heart is still full of hope.”

## The Z. family (Middle East)

“God has provided for us in many ways during COVID since we have two chronically sick boys. God has provided us with a work permit very quickly after applying a second time. Also, God has provided me with a new flexible job that allows me to take my sons with me in the car sometimes and give my wife a break. Finally, when our sons were lonely last year and had no friends, we prayed with people from Ascension and a new boy in the neighborhood came over and brought many others with him for that summer. Thank you for your support of us in many ways—including financially.”





# Thanksgiving Eve Service

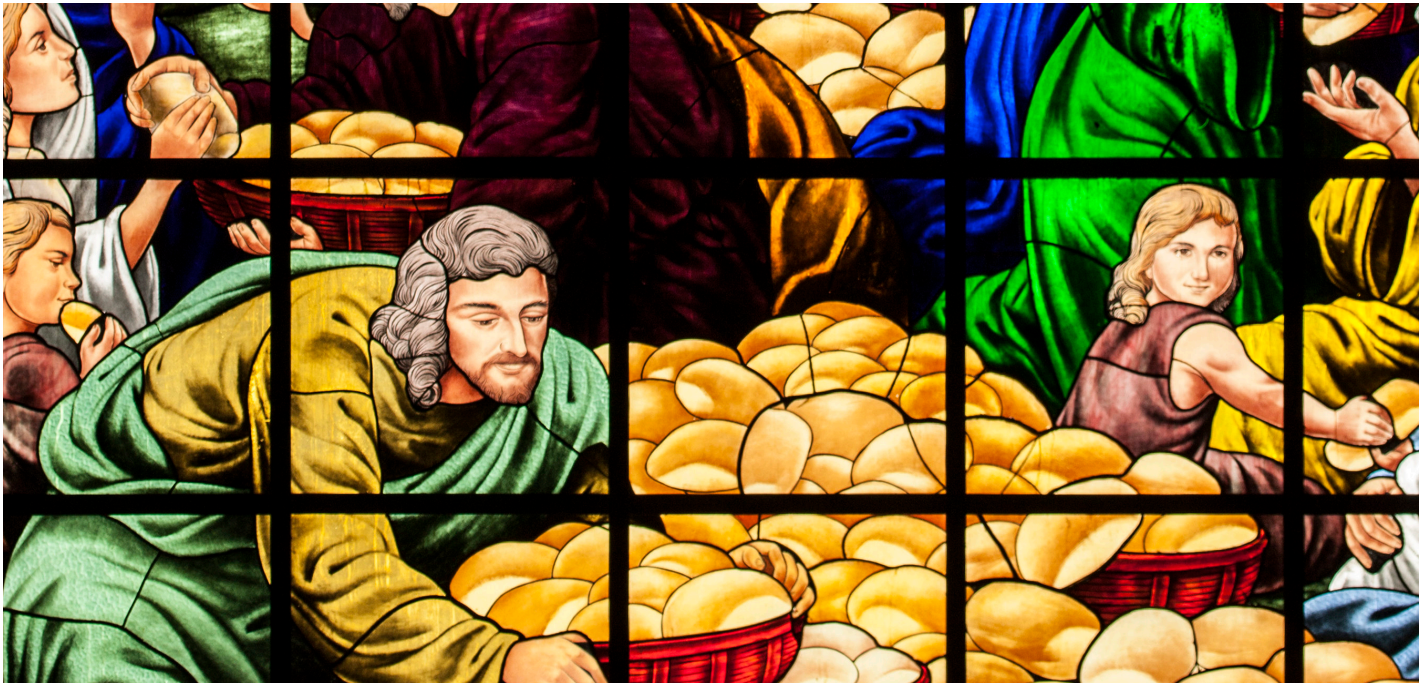


PHOTO CAPTION: "He who comes to Me will never be hungry" by Lawrence OP is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#)

The theme of our parish life this fall is PROVISION. What a better way to celebrate God's provision in our lives than worshipping together on Thanksgiving Eve on November 25. The Evensong service will be live streamed with limited in person attendance. Testimonies from the congregation, including children, are invited and encouraged during the service.

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

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