

The Ascent

MAY 2021

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Rebuilding

Letter from the Rector

Rebuilding...



By Jonathan Millard, Rector

jonathan.millard@ascensionpittsburgh.org

The long winter of the global pandemic is thawing. Signs of spring are everywhere. As we rejoice at the sight of leaves on the trees and the smell of cut grass, I am reminded of God's promise to Noah after the great flood: "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease" (Genesis 8:22).

Many of us have prayed the appointed collect, "In the Time of Any Common Plague or Sickness" (from the 1662 BCP), as part of Morning Prayer for more than a year. I invite you now to join me in giving thanks to God for the provision of effective vaccines and improved treatments. As we honor those in the medical and scientific communities for their extraordinary work, as Christians we also give thanks and praise to God who is the Lord our Provider.

After the flood, God said to Noah: "Go out of the ark... be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 8:16-17). Likewise, after the pandemic, we are to come out of our isolation and be fruitful and multiply – though in a different way! Our task is to be harbingers of the Good News of Jesus as we share Christ's healing with a broken world. Then it is God who produces the fruit, and we get to see the multiplication of those coming to faith in Him.

After the resurrection and before his Ascension Jesus commissioned his disciples (that includes us) to "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 that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the ends of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20). These are our marching orders!

After the exile of the people of Israel in Old Testament times, God called upon Ezra and Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. We hope and pray that the worst of the pandemic ravages and restrictions will recede so we can resume life together. The challenge before us now, like God's people returning from exile, is to rebuild. Rebuilding in our context may need to happen in a variety of ways. I want to address just three.

1. Rebuilding Our Relationships

The past year has strained many relationships – in our nation, in families, even in our church family. The stresses and strains of politics, pandemic, racial tensions and violence have taken a toll on so many lives. Let these things not keep us apart. Rather, as I shared in church on the Second Sunday of Easter, may we heed these words:

“Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” Hebrews 10:23-25

I am reminded that our hope as Christians is not in politics or programs, but in the risen Lord Jesus Christ who loved the world so much that he gave his life for us. Our God is faithful. We have seen his faithfulness again and again. Whereas it is so easy to provoke one another in negative ways, the author of this letter to the Hebrews exhorts us “to provoke one another to love and good deeds... encouraging one another.” Eugene Peterson, in *The Message*, puts it this way: “Let’s see how inventive we can be in encouraging love and helping out... spurring each other on” (Hebrews 10:24-25).

- Do you have repair work to do in a relationship in your family or at church? If so, I urge you not to delay. Pray for the one(s) with whom there is any brokenness, then seek to be reconciled.
- How might you encourage someone this week? Think of one or two individuals and pray for them, then send a note, speak a word of kindness, offer to help out, etc.

2. Rebuilding Good Habits

The restrictions and forced separations of the past season have been hard. For many months most of our congregation has had to participate in worship remotely. Many people are eager and excited to be able to be back together again in person. And yet, I also know a few folks who have confessed to this being quite hard to do. We have become used to a leisurely Sunday morning routine, with church on YouTube, a coffee in hand – all from a comfy couch!

The writer to the Hebrews, however, warns against, “neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some.” Surely, now is the time for us to rebuild good habits as we make being in church together week-by-week a top priority.

- I wonder, what other good habits do we need to be cultivating post-pandemic? In addition to healthy habits around exercise and eating, let us also press into good rhythms and routines of silence, solitude and prayer.

3. Rebuilding Ascension’s Stones

Work on our buildings has continued throughout the pandemic. The exterior masonry cleaning and repointing, the refinishing of the Nave floors, and I hope by the time this is printed, the installation of the new pews, will all be completed. Such amazing progress!

Yet ahead of us lies a bigger and more challenging rebuilding project. We will be to expanding the Parish Hall, creating new restrooms and improving our buildings so that they may better serve our mission and calling to welcome our neighbors and reach the nations with the saving love of Christ. This has been the underlying theme of our *More Than Stones* campaign.

The architects are working hard with a team from Ascension to develop the plans that were presented in August 2019. In the coming months we are hoping to finish the capital campaign. I am excited to continue casting the vision and working with teams of parishioners to complete the task of visiting every household. We plan to invite each person to participate in this project. Of the projected costs of \$8.2 million, \$5 million has been pledged from members and friends of our church family, and a further \$2 million allocated from our Endowment Fund. This leaves us with \$1.2 million more to raise.

When the people of Israel returned from exile, the task of rebuilding the temple and the walls of Jerusalem seemed daunting. Yet each family played their part as they came together to rebuild the walls stone by stone. Each person worked and gave in thanksgiving because they trusted in the Lord.

- If you have not yet made a pledge to our *More Than Stones* campaign (perhaps you are new to Ascension and have not yet been asked), will you begin prayerfully to consider how much you might give?
- If you have fallen behind in your giving or have not yet started to give to the campaign, can you get back on track? We are happy to help if you have any questions or concerns.
- Will you continue to work and pray for the completion of this rebuilding project at Ascension?

I close with words of encouragement from the prophet Isaiah, as we embark upon the rebuilding of our relationships, good habits, and the completion of the *More than Stones* project:

“The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable...

those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”
Isaiah 40:28-31

Your’s in Christ,

Jonathan +

A Vista..New Life in Christ

By Marilyn Clifton Chislaghi, Director of Ministry

marilyn.chislaghi@ascensionpittsburgh.org

Years ago, when I was brand new to my position as Parish Administrator, Jonathan Millard walked into my office and asked if I had recruited a boat bearer for our upcoming All Saints Service. I smiled and told him “I’m working on it.” He left my office. I immediately began ‘to work on it’, went to my computer and googled “boat bearer”. Not a cradle Anglican and relatively light in my liturgical preferences, I had absolutely no idea what he was talking about. I have since learned what a boat bearer is, and in fact that role has since been renamed to ‘incense bearer’, someone who accompanies our ‘thurifer’ (I had to learn that term too) on festive days when we use incense around the altar. And good news – we did have a ‘boat bearer’ on that Sunday and have had at every All Saints Service since!

In my various roles at the church over the years I have scheduled many boat bearers. Indeed, I have been one of a few responsible to schedule many people for roles of all types – chalice bearers, readers, intercessors, counters, ushers, greeters, welcome table hosts, hospitality hour hosts, counters, security personnel, altar guild, prayer ministry. Each of these ministries is core to making our Sunday Services work and all have experienced challenge during the pandemic. Some ministries have been completely dormant for over a year and we face the task of rebuilding.

This past month I have sent emails and made calls to resurrect usher and greeter teams for our 9am, 10am and 11am services. This is detailed, nitty-gritty, in-the-trenches kind of work. It does not have a lot of glory to it. I pull up my lists – do we have people to greet this Sunday? My colleagues Andrea and Stacey are

doing the same thing in their zones – do we have readers, intercessors, altar guild team members, a complete tech team? It’s ‘small stuff’ that turns into ‘big stuff’ when we don’t have the right personnel in place on Sundays.

I like Vistas – a beautiful view from a high place. I go on a walk most days along a pathway that provides a vista of the valley below and the sky beyond. In the morning I see the sun rise. I sometimes see the fog burn off in the valley below. In the evening it’s all about the moon and the stars. My walk is beautiful and gives me a daily reminder of the big picture within which I live and move.

On Easter Sunday morning I witnessed another Vista – a joy-filled scene as we celebrated our life together in Christ with baptisms. It was a big picture moment – a beautiful view from a high place. I worshipped at the 9am outdoor tent service where baby Vivian and elementary-aged Zechariah were baptized. What joy was present! What a sight to see Vivian lifted high after her baptism. What a moment to witness Zechariah plunged beneath the cold waters of baptism and brought up again alive in Christ!

This was a renewing Vista moment for me. It was a reminder of why I do what I do in the ins and outs of my everyday work life. It gives me energy to go about the nitty-gritty work of rebuilding our Sunday ministries. It gives me a reason to pick up that phone. And, hopefully, it gives those who participate in these ministries a vision of their role within the whole of the story.

New life in Christ – let the rebuilding begin!



Upholding Core Values in Children's Ministry

By Catherine Slocum, Director of Children's Ministry
catherine.slocum@ascensionpittsburgh.org

I remember being seven years-old and seated at the Rodemann's dining room table. It was a table adorned with china, silver and crystal and our family had just finished enjoying our first course of Sunday lunch. Very suddenly, Mrs. Rodemann, who was seated at the head of the table, blurted out in a powerful voice, "I'm bored with talking about church politics. Let's change the subject!"

Being surprised to hear a grown up use the word "bored," I was jolted out of what could only be described as a state of being mesmerized. I certainly was not bored. I had been holding a silver spoon an inch away from my eyes so that I could see the patterns of my eyeballs in the curved reflection of the spoon; my eyes appearing small and then big and then bigger as I moved the spoon back and forth across my refectation. That little game had so captured my attention that I had lost all sense of time, and the adult goings-on of a Sunday lunch.

Mrs. Rodemann's declaration didn't just jolt me out of a mesmerized state, it caused our entire company, which included my parents and three siblings, as well as Mrs. Rodemann and her family, to look afresh at who might shift our conversation. My older sister then looked to me, noticed what I was doing, and half laughingly said, "look at what Catherine is doing with her spoon."

I felt caught and then embarrassed. I quickly put my spoon down next to my plate. Without missing a beat my younger brother picked up his spoon and tried to see his reflection in it. My parents responded quickly, "Jon, put that down, that is not how we behave at the table."

The conversation turned back Mrs. Rodemann who announced, "let's talk about women's liberation."

This small memory remains with me all these years later. There were values being taught that day. Behaving well when being hosted by church members was a value my parents held as a clergy family. And they used our daily gathering at the dinner table as an opportunity to teach certain values. For example, while eating a meal we learned that we could:

- *love our neighbor* by keeping our hands to ourselves,
- *be grateful* by saying *thank you* to God and to whomever



prepared each meal,

- *take care of our bodies* by eating all of our vegetables daily rather than the more desired ice cream that was occasionally served as a treat.
- *be polite* by including the word please when asking for the salt or the pepper.

A well-balanced delicious meal accompanied with pleasurable conversation with loving people brings deep satisfaction to our hearts and flourishing to our lives. Being intentional to cultivate lifegiving values in our neighborhoods, church or in our children's ministry program brings a taste of heaven.

As we enter a new season of being able to worship in person and rebuild our children's ministry on our church campus it's a great time to highlight some the core values we uphold. Some of the staple ingredients of our values include, offering grace to each other, being kind, attentive and prudent and having an appreciation for beauty all with a robust dash of fun!

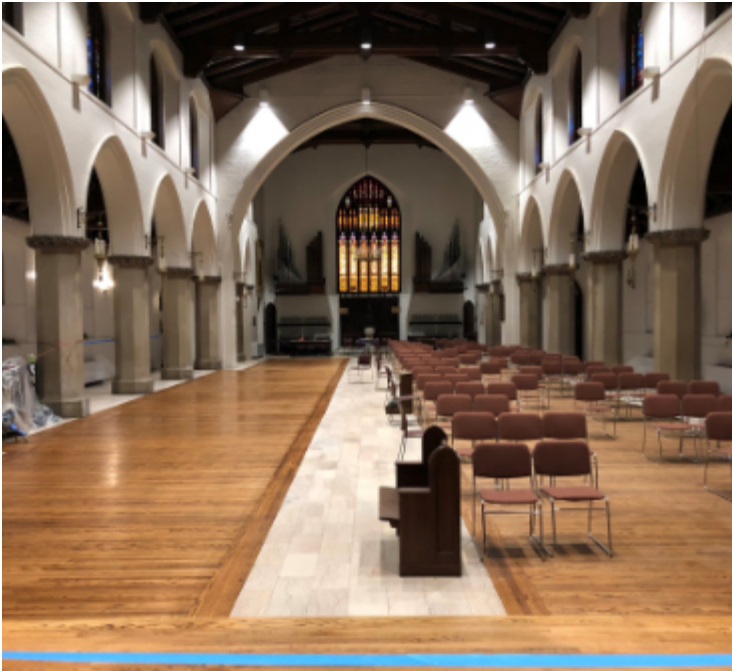
This spring we will be creating a video resource to help communicate these values to our kids and families. This will serve as a helpful tool to orient us in our life together. If your child would like to be a part of the video series, please contact me!

Re: Building!

By Karen Gowdy, Director of Administration

karen.gowdy@ascensionpittsburgh.org

We are well into the refurbishments of our historic building promised by our More Than Stones campaign. As I write this article, the floors in the nave are being redone. The masons are finishing work on the tower. Next week, the pews will be installed and the project manager for the stained-glass window repairs will arrive to begin his work. We are negotiating a contract for the rewiring of our sound and video systems. And we are in discussions with the architects to develop more detailed plans for the Parish Hall expansion. So much is in process that will hopefully be completed or underway by the time this article is published. So, instead of more words, how about some pictures!



Music & Worship Arts

Against the 'Rule of Thumb' - Worshipers Made Resilient!

By Chris Massa, Director of Music and Worship Arts
chris.massa@ascensionpittsburgh.org



When you step into a new role, particularly when it is a leadership role, the rule of thumb is that you don't make any changes for 18 months. It is best to keep things the same and take the time to develop relationships and build trust, so that when you do need to make changes, you have some relational capital saved up.

The COVID pandemic did not give Elise and me this luxury. We stepped into our new roles in music and worship arts in June of 2019. Less than a year later, we were having to pull the plug on various initiatives that we were trying to start or working to sustain. The music team was reduced to a barebones operation, leading songs to an empty nave so they could be recorded for a live streamed service. The desire for artists of various disciplines to join in fellowship was relegated entirely to Zoom. My first official act as choir director was to suspend practices, and the choir itself went from a vibrant ensemble of more than thirty voices to a group of committed volunteers lending their voices to a virtual choir.

More than a year has passed, and things are on the move. By the time you read this, choir rehearsals will have relaunched,

albeit with various precautions in place – we are singing outside and masked. The music team is gradually returning to something of its former energy, still recording for the live stream, but leading (and singing!) in person at the outdoor tent services. And, while worship artists continue to gather online, plans are being hatched for in-person gatherings and opportunities to see, hear, and engage with what Ascension's artists have been working on during this season. It is not back to normal, but it is being rebuilt, and it is inevitably being rebuilt into something different than what it had been.

There is an urgency that I hear in people's voices, a desperation to share and serve, a deeply felt need to worship together, and it is subtly but noticeably different from what I have heard in the past. My prayer is that God would rebuild this ministry into what He wants it to be—a vibrant community of unashamed worshippers, using the gifts of art and music to glorify the triune God, made resilient by the lessons of the past. Please join us.

The Winds Blew... But it Did Not Fall

By Ann Tefft, Director of Ascension OWLS Ministry
tefft.ann@gmail.com

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. Matthew 7:24-25

The OWLS Ministry first gathered for a pilot luncheon on a Sunday in January 2015 to discuss how we could come to better know each other, use our gifts and experience to support our church community and reach out to our neighboring community. At this meeting we chose the name OWLS to describe ourselves - Older, Wiser and Lively Saints - dedicated to deepening our faith and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. It turned out the commitment level of those who said they were interested was genuine! In the early months of 2020, we regularly had 60 attendees at our gatherings.

Since March of 2020 OWLS has been battered by the winds and turmoil of COVID. But as Jesus stated so clearly, a ministry built upon Him, our Rock, will not be destroyed. We are very excited to announce that OWLS will reopen in May, first in our tent and then back to the Parish Hall once safe. As we rebuild, we want to enhance this ministry with worship music and a fresh set of objectives:

1. Luncheon fellowship to provide recognition, warmth, intellectual stimulation and fun to our senior church family
2. Outreach to attract new seniors to our church
3. Education, worship, and prayer to enrich our trust in Jesus Christ

OWLS luncheon meetings will be held the second Thursday of every month beginning May 13. These meetings are the ideal time and place to invite your friends, many of whom need love and hope. Invite them to "come and see" what we have to offer them. Each meeting will begin with fellowship as we share a delicious hot lunch at a bargain price of \$15. The first time a new person arrives lunch is on us!



While our programming is not yet firmly set for the coming year, we foresee a festive Strawberry & Cream Celebration of Summer, a Texas BBQ, learning about the Lives of Saints, discussions about Racial Reconciliation, and a fuller understanding of our Jewish Roots. Music will be integrated into each meeting as we give thanks for all our blessings.

Beginning in the fall there will be an additional OWLS meeting on the fourth Thursday of every month. This meeting will be a Bible study for those interested in going deeper. More on this at a later date!

Finally, if you need a vaccination appointment, please contact Ann Tefft (412-526-1107) so the church can assist you in getting one. We have people willing to make appointments and give rides to appointments.

We Could Not Imagine

By Nate and Erika Twichell, Directors of Agape Year
natetwichell@hotmail.com

Agape Year is a missional gap year for recent high school graduates. There is a close partnership between Agape Year and Ascension.

One of the things that Erika and I have stressed to our Agape Year Missional Fellows over the past four years is that when we trust God enough to leave our comfort zones, He is faithful to meet us there in ways that we could never expect. He may not meet us in ways that are easy, or that we think of immediately as good, but it will be far greater than we could imagine. It turns out that this year, those words of challenge and encouragement were for us.

We had to rebuild our gap year program for 2020 - 2021. A year ago, as COVID shuttered several of the ministries we had volunteered with for the past three years, we wondered how we could possibly run Agape Year. We were afraid. I can remember that Erika and I spent a lot of time in prayer asking God to enliven our imaginations. We did not want to cancel our program this year, but we just could not imagine what a year would look like with so many changes.

God answered our prayers. Doors opened to ministries that we had not engaged with before. We mourned that we could not sit and eat with our houseless friends, but stepped into a new food pantry ministry in our Northside neighborhood. We mourned that we could not enter Pittsburgh Public Schools to come alongside kindergartners learning their letters, but we rejoiced at a new opportunity to assist those same students with their distance learning. We mourned that we would not be able to travel to Thailand, but doors opened for a deeply formative service opportunity in Eastern Kentucky.

It would be easy to say that we had to rebuild our ministry this year, but the truth of the matter is that God did the rebuilding. He built Agape Year 4.0 into something far better than we could have asked or imagined. It has not always been what we would have wanted or expected. And it has not always been easy, or what I would describe as good. But why settle for good when God is ready to do so much more!? Our rebuilt year has stretched our imaginations and taken us into a place of greater trust in Him.

We are witnesses to His care. We are witnesses to His provision. We are witnesses to His imaginative rebuilding work in us. Ask us about it! We would love to share our story.





Church of the Ascension Youth Group: Seasons, Seniors and Summer!

By the Rev. Alex Banfield Hicks, Director of Youth and College Ministry (Deacon)

alex.banfieldhicks@ascensionpittsburgh.org

There has already been lots of temporary rebuilding at Church of the Ascension Youth Group (CAYG) in different seasons of COVID, from the 2020 Spring YouTube livestream series, the summer back yard bible studies and the fall 'porch pods.' But it did feel more like rebuilding this Lent when we returned to the physical building of Ascension, with masked youth group meetings based in the ventilated Parish Hall. The 'I AM' statement series finished before Easter, but now we are launching a new seven-week series called 'Esther After Easter.'

I am thankful for new leaders, new CAYG-ers registering, and new bug screens in the Parish Hall windows allowing lots of warm breezes throughout so that we can rebuild safely. Senior Church Tours are back again – although we're doing them a bit differently this year. We are also looking forward to seeing Josh and Jess Bennett step forward to oversee a six-week series for CAYG this summer. A service trip to Harrisburg and a bike trip to Washington DC are also in the works! All the details of CAYG programming can be found at www.caygonline.com.



With Great Delight I Sat in His Shadow...

By Keira Fuener, Director of Special Needs

keirafuener@gmail.com

As an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the young men.

With great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.

Song of Songs 2:3-4

When asked to reflect on how Ascension's special needs ministry was going to rebuild, I felt an overwhelming desire to list the ways that God has provided for us during this time. I am deeply grateful to the volunteers, caregivers and special needs Friends in our group that kept us connected. Through weekly Zoom calls, texts, personal letters, birthday cards and Valentines, our friendships deepened. God blessed what each person could offer and *"his fruit was sweet to my taste."*

In some ways, Zoom provided a surprisingly intimate setting to learn about each other. Now we know each other's homes better: names of family pets, a Friend's artwork on the walls, caregivers from a Friend's group home or seeing a treasured blooming orchid. *"With great delight we sat in God's shadow"* and allowed God to bless us. Even for a family that struggled with Zoom, God provided a unique connection to the church and a new, miraculous communication pathway. Although there were certainly hardships, struggles and losses, I am more confident now than ever that, *"His banner over me (us) is love."*

It is rare to fully understand God's work among us while we are still living it. But at this moment, I think I am beginning to understand more of the reality that we are Christ's body – whatever the circumstance. I have experienced in a new way that blessing each other is real! Our Friends with special needs are really good at blessing! God's spirit was with us, even on Zoom! And listening to God's Word with our Friends was both grounding and groundbreaking: we imagined the Holy Family as loving and imperfect caregivers, the search for the Pearl of Great Price as wonderful as the search for seashells and much more!

As we re-enter our more typical church setting, my prayer is that we retain the sense of *"sitting with great delight in God's shadow,"* knowing that God is inviting all of us to his banquet table! Please pray with me:

- That we will be creative in maintaining our fellowship, even as people begin to go to different services or churches again
- Zoom allowed us to partner with family and paid caregivers in a new way. Please pray that these new relationships will be a blessing to all caregivers who might find attending church difficult.
- For the continued integration of people with special needs into our church family

If you want to know more about the Special Needs Ministry, or get involved, please contact me. All are welcome! Upcoming dates:

- May 23: Cooking with Jonathan Sewall for Shepherd's Heart at Noon
- Early June: Outdoor games event under the tent



A Smile on the Face of God

By LuAnn Pengidore, Director of International Ministry

PittsburghEnglish4U@gmail.com

In April 2020, the international ministry was forced to move online except for weekly outdoor hikes. Now, a year later, we are planning to rebuild in-person relationships with a few in-person class options as well.

Starting in May the team is thankful to offer 8 summer classes per week and 2 Bible studies - most online but a few in person. On Monday mornings, Jess Bennett and Timmy Podnar will offer a high intermediate class in person, either outside or safely distanced with masks. Ann Tefft will lead a Bible study at the church on Thursday evenings. LuAnn Pengidore and Denise Cox will lead an advanced in-person cultural class at Ascension. This will enable students and teachers, who are willing, and who have been vaccinated, to enjoy each other's company again, while not dropping the other online options so suddenly.

The team will also continue enjoying the great outdoors where we laugh with families and talk one on one with students in a relaxed way. Our pictures show one such recent event over Palm Sunday. We hosted 36 people for an Easter Egg Hunt. They came from Japan, China, Venezuela, Kazakhstan, Russia, the Ukraine and Brazil! When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on his donkey on that inaugural Palm Sunday, he immediately became distressed that the temple was not fit to be a place of prayer for all nations (Isaiah 56:7). We hope our little event with people from across the globe put a smile on the face of God.



Community Groups Have Weathered the Storm

Ascension Community Groups are core to our life together. If Sunday morning is 'big church', then Community Groups are the way we gather together as 'small church' to form bonds of friendship, to pray, study scripture and serve. While it has been challenging, our groups have weathered the pandemic well. Some met outside, even during winter months. Others gathered online or kept in touch regularly in some way. Who would have thought you could do a 'games night' over Zoom?

Surprisingly, some groups even added new members to their ranks during the pandemic. Again, surprisingly, we have had new groups form during the pandemic. Many groups are tak-

ing tentative steps toward meeting together in person once more and, hopefully, we will be able to resume some type of normalcy in the months ahead.

We are deeply grateful to Karen Stevenson for her work among us as Interim Assistant Rector, specifically as she has shepherded our Community Groups during a very difficult period. Some of the fruit of her work is below as she has provided a colorful and helpful synopsis of current Community Groups at Ascension. Thank you! Karen will pass the baton of leadership to Kevin Antlitz, our incoming Assistant Rector, when she wraps up her work with Ascension at the end of April, in anticipation of Kevin's arrival in mid-May.

Ben Avon/North Hills

Leader: Jeanne Kohn (jeanne.kohn@ascensionpittsburgh.org)

When: Bi-monthly weekends, men/women's prayer meetings, alternate weeks, both groups together twice a month. Have moved in COVID to meeting only for prayer and support. Very stretched parents so this is a gift to the parents.

Description: Our group meets for a simple meal, Bible study, family worship (Compline), and fellowship and prayer one Friday night and one Sunday night a month. This is a very kid-friendly group, and many families have children who attend the middle-school or high school youth group while the group meets. Younger children play in a different part of the house while the adults study scripture and pray. In addition, once a month the men and women meet separately for prayer, men on the first Sunday of the month, women on the third Sunday.



Community of St. Andrew - Morningside

Leaders: Chris Massa (chris.massa@gmail.com) and Elise Massa (elise.massa@gmail.com)

When: Bi-monthly Tuesdays, men/women's accountability alternate weeks, both groups once a month

Description: Our group is focused on introducing and practicing Anglican spiritual disciplines. Members agree to a communal rule of life (a holistic pattern of Spirit-filled practices to deepen one's faith in shared community) and make a year-long commitment to the group. Guests can visit the group prior to commitment. This cell meets the first and third Tuesday evenings of the month, with discipleship groups meeting on the other Tuesdays (2nd - men, 4th - women) for all St. Andrew members. While we are discussing how best to resume in-person meetings, our group currently uses Zoom for all gatherings in addition to Slack for various conversation topics. As an entire community, we have bi-weekly movie/game nights and celebrate the Anglican feast days!



Community of St. Andrew – O'Hara Township

Leader: Scott Bowles (shbowles@gmail.com)

When: Cell meetings on the first and third Tuesdays of each month, plus women's discipleship on the second Tuesday and men's discipleship on the fourth Tuesday.

Description: Our group is focused on the liturgical rhythms and spiritual practices of the Church. Members of the Community of St Andrew agree to a rule of life (a devotional discipline that intentionally orders one's time and activities so that one can deepen in the faith) and make a year-long commitment to the group. This cell of the Community of St Andrew meets every other Tuesday (the other cell meets in Morningside). Men's and women's discipleship occur once a month with both cells combined on Tuesdays.

During this pandemic, our usual meetings occur on Zoom, and we have been staying in contact through Slack and optional Zoom-facilitated events every other Friday evening. Cell meetings have started at 8:30 pm during the pandemic, for sake of parents getting kids to bed. Once we are able to return to in-person meetings, we will presumably go back to our former start time of 6:00 pm, with childcare and a shared dinner.

Eastern Suburbs Group

Leader: Marilyn Chislaghi (marilyn.chislaghi@ascensionpittsburgh.org)

When: Every 2 or 3 weeks on Sunday evenings for meal/study/prayer; COVID via Zoom for support/prayer

Description: In non-COVID time, our group meets every second or third Sunday evening in Monroeville for a meal, Bible study and prayer. The group is comprised of mostly older adults, although all are welcome. During COVID-tide, the group meets via Zoom to catch up with one another, chat, and share prayer requests.



Community Groups, Cont.

East End Group – Morningside

Leaders: Josh Sateia (joshua.sateia@gmail.com) and Meg Sateia (meg.sateia@gmail.com)

When: Every other Tuesday at 7:00 pm

Description: Our group, a second cell of the East End group, meets at a home in Morningside. We are comprised mostly of young adults but are open to anyone looking for community. Currently, the group has been meeting every other week using Zoom to share resources, sermon questions, and has been able to have community together even through the distance. Recently as the weather has improved we have been able to enjoy socially-distanced meetings outside. We recently finished up our study of “Sacred Rhythms” by Ruth Haley Barton and have moved on to working through Mother Tish Warren’s new book, “Prayer in the Night”.

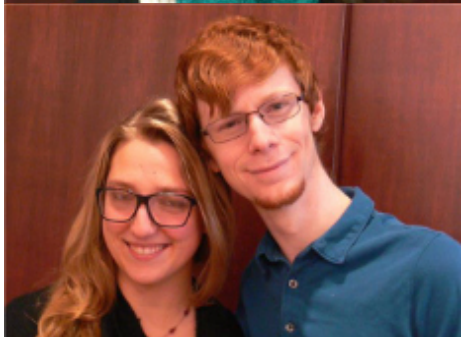


East End Group – Point Breeze

Leaders: Lorna Williams (lorna_m_williams@yahoo.com) and Caelan Mayberry (cdmayberry1@gmail.com)

When: Tuesdays, at 7:15 - 9:00 pm, COVID weekly Zoom/ outside dependent on weather

Description: Our group meets in Squirrel Hill/Point Breeze for Bible study and prayer weekly on Tuesday night. We are focused on studying scripture each week as well as taking time to break into groups for prayer. We regularly plan fellowship meals or gatherings and hope to return to our every month schedule as COVID conditions are improving. Most recently we finished a study on Esther and are currently working through the book of Daniel.



Edgewood Group

Leaders: Fr. Joel and Dr. Karen Scandrett (jscandrett27@gmail.com).

When: Weekly on Sunday evenings (COVID: Zoom Bible/book study and prayer every other week (2 hrs.), Zoom group intercessory prayer on opposing weeks (≤1 hr.)

Description: Our group of middle-aged adults normally meets every other Sunday evening for food, Bible or book study, and prayer. While at home during the COVID-19 outbreak, the group has been meeting weekly by Zoom for additional support (see above). As the weather warms, we hope to meet again outdoors on our study weeks.



Edgewood/Forrest Hills

Leaders: Nate Van Patter (nsv5001@gmail.com), Matt Ulrich (ulrichms@gmail.com), Kate Ulrich (kateulrich8@gmail.com)

When: Saturday 5:00 pm every-other week, COVID-times is 1 hour Zoom Sat. at 8:30 pm every-other-week

Description: This group is family-oriented including a short children's lesson with every in-person meeting. In non-COVID times, we meet every other Saturday from 5 pm-7 pm. Various families host in the Forest Hills, Edgewood and Wilkinsburg area. During the pandemic we are doing an adult Zoom time from 8:30 pm-9:30 pm every other Saturday. We alternate between different areas or types of study. Sometimes we use the Daily Office liturgy. Most recently we have been discussing a book, "The Good and Beautiful Life" by James Bryan Smith. Early in COVID-times, we created a group chat where we keep each other informed of prayer requests and other goings on. It has been a great source of support. In addition to the Zoom meetings, when the weather allows, we have outdoor gatherings including campfires at each other's homes, often in groups of either men or women.



Greenfield

Leaders: Jordan (markleyja1@gmail.com) and Brenna Markley (brennamarkley@gmail.com)

When: Pre-Pandemic- Every Other Tuesday Evening at 6:30 pm.; Pandemic: Variable

Description: We are a mixed group with couples (some with kids and some without) and singles. Previously we met to share dinner and pray evening prayer together. During the pandemic we are meeting outdoors in back yards and in Schenley Park when we can, and connecting over email to share prayer requests and life updates when we cannot.

Highland Park/Morningside Group

Leaders: Rob and Donna Martsof (martsoda@ucmail.uc.edu or drmartsolf@roadrunner.com).

When: Bi-monthly Thursday nights

Description: Our group is an intergenerational group that meets every other Thursday night for Bible study and prayer. We have continued to meet throughout the pandemic either online, outside in person, or some members in person while others are online. We are currently studying the book of Revelation using a study guide written by John Stott. We share praises and prayer requests via an email thread prior to the meeting and we spend at least 30 minutes of our meeting praying for the expressed concerns and praises.



Community Groups, Cont.

Internationals

Leaders: Barbara Franzen (b.neznarf@gmail.com) Co-leader: Timmy Podnar (tnpodnar@gmail.com)

When: Saturday evenings from 7:30-9:00 pm

Description: International students and visitors are specifically invited to this group. It is an opportunity for non-Christians to discover what Christians believe and for Christians to grow in their faith. This is achieved through studying the Bible, open discussion and developing friendships. It is also an opportunity to practice English. Any level of English speaking is welcomed. Because of the pandemic we have been meeting virtually on Saturday evenings from 7:30-9:00 pm. The evening always begins with a time for getting to know each other. We are currently studying the book of Romans and are enjoying the questions which arise from studying the text. The evening closes with a time of sharing prayer concerns and a closing prayer. Surprisingly, we have really enjoyed reconnecting with some who have moved away!! At the moment this includes individuals in California, North Carolina and Venezuela.



Men's Group - Wednesday

Leader: R. D. Wilkes (rdwilkesyl@gmail.com)

When: Weekly on Wednesday at 7:00 am (in COVID this is Zoom) for 1 hour

Description: Our group normally meets every Wednesday morning at 7am to share our lives with one another, study Scripture, and pray together. Men of all ages and stages of life are welcome! We continue to meet virtually on Wednesday mornings using Zoom. We meet together to study/discuss scripture for the first half hour and then use break-out rooms to split into two rooms (smaller groups) for sharing and prayer. When COVID restrictions are lifted we will recommence with meeting at the church.

Men's Group - Saturday

Leaders: David Hall (dghall@elfhcc.com) and Jay Gilmer (jaygilmer@verizon.net)

When: Currently Virtually Saturdays at 8:00 am. Non-COVID pattern Everyday Café Saturdays 7:00 am

Description: While in normal time this group meets at a café in Homewood on Saturday mornings, this men's group now gathers virtually by conference phone call every Saturday morning at 8:00 am to study, pray, and share their lives with one another. Men of all ages and stages of life are welcome!



Newcomers to Ascension

Leaders: Tyler and Kate Marwood (tyler.marwood@gmail.com) and David and Jennifer Crosby (jennifercrosby10@gmail.com)

When: Every other Thursday on Zoom at 8:00 pm

Description: The group's life together will be organized (at first) around a series of bi-weekly large group Zoom gatherings, gender-based Zoom gatherings, and other activities designed to support each other and grow together through Anglican practices as a public witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in our lives.

Practically this looks like meeting together every other week on Zoom at first and then finding a time to meet all together, children included, as the weather warms up.



North Hills

Leaders: Philip Motes (pjmotes@gmail.com) and Jenn Motes (jennifer.motes45@gmail.com).

When: Every other Monday, 6:15-7:45 pm

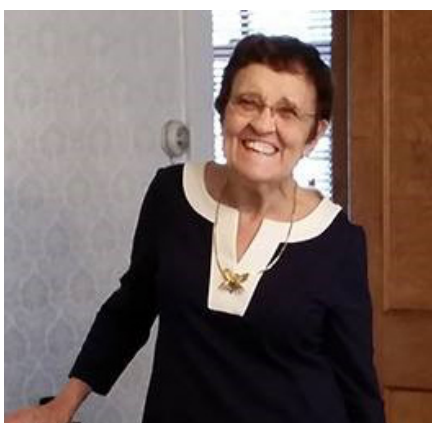
Description: Our group meets every other Monday evening for a meal, Bible study and prayer. During the pandemic, we have been meeting via Zoom to pray together, encourage one another, and play games. Our group never disappoints in the meals we put together at our meetings, so we've exchanged some recipes to try while we can't meet in person. We are grateful for the technology that allows us to stay connected during this trying time for all of us.

Northside

Leaders: Josh Bennett (josh.bennett@ascensionpittsburgh.org) and Jess Bennett (jess.bennett@ascensionpittsburgh.org)

When: 2nd and 4th Tuesday of the Month from 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm.

Description: Our group currently meets outside in our backyard around a fire. The group is comprised mainly of young adults, although all are welcome. Currently we spend our time allowing each person to share how they are doing, to ask for prayer, and then to pray through a Psalm together.



Oakland Group

Leader: Barbara Franzen (b.neznarf@gmail.com).

When: Bi-monthly Sundays

Description: Our group meets every other Sunday evening beginning with light snacks and fellowship. This is followed by worship, prayer, Bible study, and sharing prayer concerns. In normal years the group meets occasionally for potluck suppers or picnics. Having met via Zoom for the past year the group has just recently begun meeting together outdoors.

Community Groups, Cont.

Omni Nova

Leaders: Mari (macstout@gmail.com) and Jim Stout (jmstouts@gmail.com), and Brian Janaszek (bjanaszek@gmail.com) and Jen Hemphill (jen.hemphill@gmail.com).

When: Sundays after the 9:00 am service

Description: In normal times, our group meets every Sunday at Church of the Ascension after the 9am service. The group is focused on growing in prayer through spiritual disciplines, being in fellowship with one another, and understanding vocation in the world as ministry. The group requires a one-year commitment and is open once a year to new members in September. The group is kid-friendly.

Currently, the group worships together at Ascension, and gathers, outdoors, several times a month for fellowship and prayer.

The men and women also meet several times a month in smaller groups for fellowship, discernment, and prayer.



Point Breeze

Leader: Mary Martha Truschell (mmtruschel@gmail.com)

When: Bi-monthly Wednesday nights

Description: Our group normally meets twice a month for Bible study and prayer. During the pandemic, we are meeting weekly by Zoom on Wednesday evenings. The group has a variety of approaches, most recently reading The Screwtape Letters and a Study Guide with references to the pertinent Scriptures. The formal program is organized to adjourn after one hour, but the Zoom call remains open for participants who wish to continue in conversation.

Squirrel Hill

Leaders: Jonathan Sewall (jonathan.sewall@gmail.com) and Laura Irvine (laurairvine56@gmail.com)

When: At noon Sundays. During the pandemic on Zoom in the winter; outside in Paula & Jonathan's back yard when it's warm. After the pandemic, probably at one of our houses in Squirrel Hill.

Description: Our group presently consists mainly of adults with children attending occasionally (Children are quite welcome!) We meet to discuss the sermon or do a Bible study. We always start by catching up with each other, and we always end by addressing concerns and praying for each other. About four times a year (but not during the pandemic), we share a pot-luck meal together, typically on a Sunday. Last summer, in response to the pandemic, we began meeting outside on Sundays, just after the walk-through communion, at the Clemens-Sewall house, which is close to the church. During the cold months we've been on Zoom, but we plan to return to outdoor gatherings when it's warm enough.



South Hills

Leader: Mark Bailey (txdadmark@gmail.com)

When: Saturday, 6:30 pm

Description: Our group meets every Saturday evening for Bible study, prayer, and fellowship. During the pandemic we are meeting via Zoom. This group is kid-friendly and multi-generational with families in many stages of life. We also try to meet for lunch on the lawn after church as weather permits.



Women's group

Leaders: Keira Fuener (keirafuener@gmail.com) and Jen Newhouse (niferm@hotmail.com)

When: for COVID Zoom mtgs Wednesday EVENING 7:15-9:00 pm

Description: Our group historically met weekly at Ascension on Wednesday mornings to share our lives with one another, enjoy snacks, study Scripture and pray together. This is an open home group and women of all ages and life situations are welcome! It's a particularly good group for those with young children because childcare is offered (0-5 yrs) when we meet at Ascension.

During the pandemic we quickly settled into a routine of meeting via Zoom on Wednesday evenings from 7:15 PM to 9:00 PM. We have an email list to which members can send prayer requests and praises. We are currently studying with The Drama of Scripture by Bartholomew and Goheen. We read passages of the Bible and use questions that were published online (created by Zeyl, 2014) relating to Scripture and the text of Drama. While there is strong interest in learning more together, we are very flexible with women in all life stages. There are no homework requirements to attend. Just show up as you are, and God will meet us!



Women's group – Regent Square

Leader: Melita Carter (cartermipo@gmail.com)

When: Mondays 7:00 pm

Description: Our group normally meets every other Monday evening to share, study Scripture and pray. On the fifth Monday we go out for dinner together. During this time of social distancing, the group is meeting every Monday by teleconference.



Community Groups, Cont.

Young Adults Thursdays

Leaders: Greg Sparks (gregsparks1@gmail.com) and Rebecca Ed Sparks (rebecca@thesparks.com).

When: Thursdays 6:30 pm gather and catch up, 7:00 pm sing, study, and pray

Description: Our group is composed mostly of young adults and meets on Thursday nights for a time of fellowship, Bible study, prayer, and worship. During COVID-tide, we are an all-weather/all-season outdoor group. We gather around the firepit to study and discuss books of the Bible (we just completed Galatians) and sometimes topical books written by brothers and sisters in the faith. We enjoy open times of sharing to check in and encourage each other toward healthy hearts, minds, and bodies. As we learn about the different struggles with finances and work and social discord and housemates and education and the mental health crisis that isolation and loneliness have often brought, we are better informed and equipped to support each other in prayer, conversation, and company throughout the week. Our goal is to keep growing each other to be worshippers of Christ, following him step by step and loving him with all of our heart, soul, brain, and body.



A Whole New Thing!

By the Rev. Alex Banfield Hicks, Director of Youth and College Ministry (Deacon)

alex.banfieldhicks@ascensionpittsburgh.org

With his ready smile, engaging conversation and depth of insight, it has not been surprising that the college students of Venite quickly embraced CCO Fellow Chris Kirkland as one of their own. His hard-working attitude, theological clarity and rich Anglican heritage have also persuaded Ascension's senior leadership that one year of Chris (the limit of the CCO Fellows program) is not enough! Thus, I am very excited that he has agreed to stay on and, from June this year, will begin as Ascension's CCO Associate for Graduate Student and Young Adult ministry.

Chris writes: "I am very excited to be serving the graduate population at the Universities of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon. It has been delightful to get to know the many students who are already part of Ascension and I look forward to

gathering with them for a graduate student lunch on the Parish Day Away (Saturday June 12th). Meeting and eating together at Ascension, before driving in convoy to the beautiful Laurel Highlands, we can start to discuss what an Ascension-based graduate community might look like."





Building the Bridge as We Go

By Leah Hornfeck, Associate for Youth and Campus Ministry

leah.hornfeck@ascensionpittsburgh.org



“How are things going with Venite?” is a question I get asked almost every Sunday as I mingle with folks after Ascension’s services. My typical response throughout this school year has been like, “We’re essentially building the bridge as we go across it.” It has been a year full of unknowns. Who is going to be involved? What are we able to do? What are the things that college students really need? Thankfully, these unknowns have not stopped us from pursuing our vision for Venite: to invite college students into a deeper understanding of the gospel, a broader vision of God’s kingdom, and richer relationships within the diversity of Christ’s body. We have found creative ways to keep moving forward.

On Wednesday evenings, we have been meeting weekly outside for our “Beholding Beauty” series, discussing how beauty moves us toward God through prayer and towards others in love. We recently kicked off a new, regular social event called “Dinner & A Story.” We met on a back deck, shared a meal,

and heard testimonies from two students. Chris Kirkland, our CCO fellow, has introduced students to the practice of spiritual direction. This summer, we will be having a regular Bible study for those sticking around Pittsburgh and for Ascension college students who will be back in town.

As the school year closes, I can’t help but look back to the other end of the bridge, back where we started, and just feel a deep sense of gratitude and awe for God’s providence and our student’s steadfast commitment. I feel incredibly hopeful for the future of Venite, and not just the distant future - though that too. Of course, if the past year has taught us anything, it is to hold all plans firmly but lightly because much more is contingent that we may typically realize. So, as we go, we will continue fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, trusting that even when we face disruptions and the bridge begins to sway, he is holding us steadily in his love and grace.

Parish Day Away

Laurelville pool and grounds

Saturday, June 12

Noon – 5 pm

Bring a picnic!



Worship Services

Sundays 9:00 am and 11:00 am Outdoor Tent Services; 10:00 am Indoor Live stream on [YouTube](#) (Register for all services on our [website](#), visit News & Events)

Website www.ascensionpittsburgh.org

Address 4729 Ellsworth Avenue Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Phone/Fax (412) 621-4361 / (412) 621-5746

About The Ascent

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Marilyn Clifton Chislaghi, Editor
Kristen Parise, Publisher



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