

The Ascent

SUMMER 2021

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Restored, Renewed, Refreshed

Letter from the Rector

Restored, Renewed, Refreshed



By Jonathan Millard, Rector

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On Saturday, May 22 the staff and vestry (twenty-five people), met together for our annual retreat. We spent time together in silence, prayer, reflection, and worship. We broke bread together – over a delicious lunch and at the Lord’s Table. We also shared, listened, discussed, and brainstormed.

We began the day with Morning Prayer and reflected together on John 15:1-11 where we read of Jesus’ teaching about the vine. Jesus says: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower.” In these verses, we read about dead branches being removed, healthy branches being pruned to grow more fruit, and the importance of obeying our Lord’s commandment to love. All of this is rooted in the charge to “abide in Jesus.” Unless we abide/dwell/live in Jesus and he in us, we cannot bear fruit. This set the backdrop for our first session where we paused, reflected, and prayed about our experiences of the pandemic these past fifteen months - both personally and corporately. We discovered that among those gathered there had been a wide variety of experiences, ranging from very difficult to quite positive. Among the personal reflections, themes of

relentlessness, loneliness and tiredness were repeated. Among the corporate reflections, the theme of resilience was especially highlighted.

Having taken to time to look back, we then turned our attention to looking forward. We thought about the next four years at Ascension, noting that four years is typically the amount of time a person is in high school or college. While much can happen in that time frame, it is also a relatively short time. We were reminded of Jesus sending out his disciples to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal (Luke 9:1-6). We thought about **Recovery, Rebuilding, Renewal** and **Revival**. Of course, we cannot timetable revival, but we can prepare

our hearts and minds, set our priorities, work and pray – setting the stage for what only God can do by the presence, power, and release of his Holy Spirit.

What was clear, as we looked to the immediate twelve months ahead, is the need for us to be intentional about our **“Recovery”** after the cumulative effects of pandemic; political, racial, and social unrest; separation; and suffering. The temptation, and perhaps our “Achilles’ heel” at Ascension, is to rush ahead – with a sort of frenetic - bigger, better, faster - approach to life and ministry. But that is not what we see when we look to Jesus. Though amazingly hard-working, Jesus always had time for people. He would repeatedly take time to withdraw from the pressing crowds to rest and pray - either alone, or with a few of his closest friends.

Personally, I have sustained an injury and need to recover. As I write this article, I am about to undergo surgery for the repair of a torn distal bicep. (The story of how it hap-

pened is neither impressive nor heroic – I was lifting a chair, while vacuuming!) I know that my recovery will take time and patience, and, possibly, physical therapy. Likewise, for us as a church family, we have sustained injury over the course of being apart. **Regathering** as God’s people will take time and patience and likely will need the “therapy” and repair work of **rebuilding** relationships; **restoring** good habits of prayer, bible reading, silence and solitude; and **renewing** our practice of being together in church week by week and reaching out to our neighbors with the love of Christ.

Sometimes it takes a global pandemic, the loss of a job, a broken relationship, or a

physical injury for us to realize our need to be **re-stored, re-freshed, and re-newed**. I pray that we will all take time this summer to be intentional about our recovery. I pray that

we will find refreshment and renewal in body, mind, and soul.

Hear these words of God:

“In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.”

(Isaiah 30:15)

Jonathan +



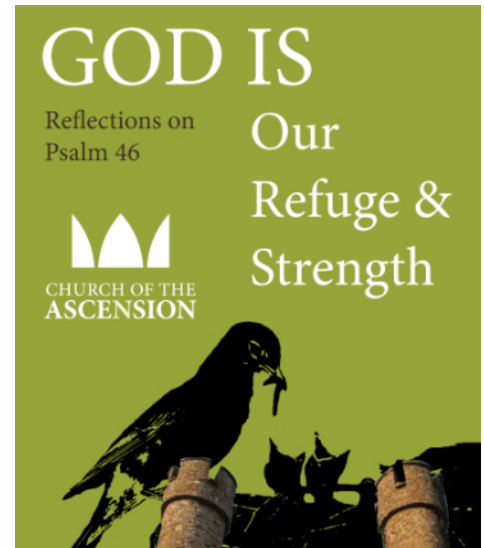
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Refreshed in Community

Annual Parish Retreat: Oct. 1-3

This year we plan, God willing, to return to the Laurelville Retreat Center in the beautiful Laurel Highlands – just an hour from Pittsburgh. Our parish family has been going away together for the last 30 years or more and this is one of the highlights of who we are and what we do together at Ascension. We are so excited to be able to return and regather in this place that has meant so much to so many.

Our theme this year is: GOD IS our Refuge and Strength. Taking Psalm 46 as the foundation for our time away, we will be exploring themes of Remembrance, Renewal, and Rest. Whether you are new to Ascension, have simply never attended one of these weekends before, or you have been many times – you won't want to miss this time away. Suitable for people of all ages and stages of life – come single, married, on your own or with friends – this is for you! More details will be available in the summer and registration opens in August. For now, hold the date in your calendar!



Invitation to Membership: Aug. 14

At Ascension all are welcome! Membership, however, is required of those seeking to serve in worship ministries – leading prayer, reading, serving communion. It is also required of all seeking to serve in our discipleship ministries – teaching children or youth, leading a community group. And it is required of all in leadership roles on vestry and subcommittees of vestry (finance, missions, discernment). Leaders lead from a commitment to a shared vision of the gospel, and membership is an express commitment to that shared vision. There are other good reasons to become a member – join the class and find out more!

If you would like to investigate membership, or just want a better understanding of Anglicanism or Ascension, you are invited to the next **Explore Ascension** class which will be held IN PERSON on **Saturday, August 14 from 9:30 a.m. – Noon**. Childcare will be provided. Please email Marilyn to register at marilyn.chislaghi@ascensionpittsburgh.org.



OWLS Luncheon: Jul. 8

Join us on Thursday, July 8 from 12:30 – 2:30pm for a luncheon with our guest speaker, Lynn Cox. Lynn will address the question “Why Should Racial Reconciliation be a Deep Concern for the Church?” She will help us consider and share our responses to this timely, important question. Lynn served for many years as Minister of Education & Care at Eastminster Church in East Liberty before joining Ascension with her husband, Richard. Plan on joining us under our tent! Enjoy a delicious meal, thought-provoking conversation and the company of friends old and new! To register, email Ann Tefft at tefft.ann@gmail.com.



Summer Soul Care: Returning & Rest

By Andrea Millard, Director of Prayer Ministry & Leadership Development

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For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel:

*In returning and rest you shall be saved;
in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.*

Isaiah 30:15

This summer we are offering three Saturday mornings as “quiet mornings.” Many of us have experienced loss over the past year and this pandemic season has been especially difficult for many people. To attend to our souls, each session is designed for us to join together in the presence of the Lord to enjoy a peaceful, restful experience. Each gathering will include space for silent prayer, scripture reading, and individual reflection. Think of it as a mini retreat for the soul.

A special feature of this summer series will be original pieces of art (often with the artist present) that have been selected to inspire and encourage our hearts. As we gather together in the presence of Jesus, we will invite his healing grace to flow into those areas of our lives that need a restorative touch of his love and peace.

Register for one, two or all three. Space is limited. Join Mother Andrea Millard and friends as we meet in the Hunt Courtyard 9:30 - 11:00 a.m. on the following Saturdays:

June 19 – A Lens of Loss, with Andrea Millard

July 31 – Catching Sight of God: The Icon of the Eagle of Patmos, with Becca Chapman

August 21 – Love for the Prodigal, with Wes Williams

Register using [THIS LINK](#) or on our church website under the announcements section.



Leading on Empty - The Importance of Being Refreshed

By Marilyn Clifton Chislaghi, Director of Ministry
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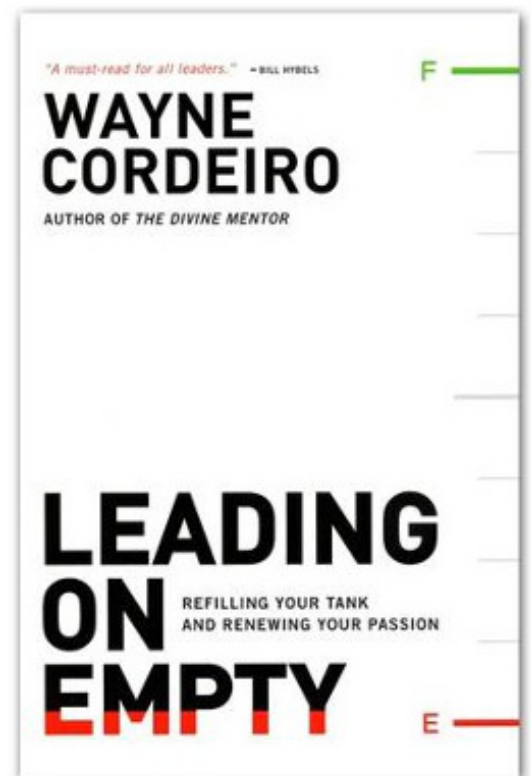
In the fall of 2017, while on a two-week vacation/retreat in the UK, I read a book by Wayne Cordeiro that has had an enduring influence on my life, *Leading on Empty, Refilling your Tank and Renewing your Passion*. I was meandering around a bookstore in the crypt of Holy Trinity Brompton in Central London and picked up the book. Looked interesting. A couple days later, my husband Charlie and I were at Lee Abbey retreat center. The director of our week mentioned that he keeps two copies of this very book on his desk at all times. My ears perked up. It seemed to me to be a word from the Lord that it was an important read for me.

Often when vacation time comes around, I'm feeling pretty 'done' – I need to completely unplug because I'm tired and spent. Almost too spent, too tired, too exhausted and a bit 'undone'. Vacation becomes recovery for the next round. Time to catch up with my kids and family and the 'rest of my life.' Time to re-establish life priorities that had gotten out of whack. It reflects a rhythm of life that is not great - work till you drop, replenish, then start the whole thing again.

The insights of this book helped me take steps to change this rhythm to something healthier. One of the take-aways of the book is that we juggle many balls, or areas of life that need daily investment of time and heart. Cordeiro proposes that others can do 85% of the tasks associated with these balls, others can do an additional 10% with some training, but only I can do a cherished 5%. Drop a ball in that 85 - 95% and it will likely bounce back with a bit of help. Drop a ball in the 5% and it might shatter. These are my unique responsibilities. That got me thinking – what areas of my life need daily investment of my time and my heart? What is my unique 5%?

Wayne Cordeiro had to press the 'pause button' because he came to a point of physical, emotional, and spiritual crisis. The book tells the story of Wayne finding himself sitting on a curb by the side of the road, sobbing. He was an extreme A-type pastor who had worked himself to complete and utter burnout – in fact to a heart attack.

This book tells of his way back to life. Some of the book made me smile because it was a bit too intense for me – a Myers/Briggs ENTJ, a "Driver" personality, coming back to health with a 20-point plan for how to rest and refresh! Nonetheless, I reread



Wayne's valuable insights regularly. Here are a few:

- My soul is like a battery that discharges each time I give life away, and it needs to be recharged
- The importance of 'finding still waters' as well as rhythms of cadence and sustainability
- Life is a 'notebook' which is read and reread, with lessons extracted and future assessed
- There are things unique to me that 'fill my tank' and others that 'drain my tank.' What are they?
- Solitude is a chosen separation for refining the soul; isolation is craved when you neglect the first
- Discernment of calling brings focus
- Other lessons - not 'overproducing,' stewarding energy, scheduling rest
- Write down my vision for "my best life".

So, what did I do? How did this book change me? The important practice that I put into place upon reading the book has been a quarterly retreat day, either at home or someplace special, to review what I have come to call my 'personal dashboard' to evaluate my life balance. A 'personal dashboard' sounds a bit corny, but it works for me! This dashboard consists of those areas of my life that are my unique 5% and they are:

- My Spirit - a vibrant relationship with Christ
- My Spouse - a healthy and deep relationship
- My Family - authentic family relationships as we (hopefully) are close to God and one another
- My Friends - time to enjoy life in the community and company of friends
- My Health - a physically healthy body
- My Vocation - my calling in Jesus and how I work to live it out
- My Mind - a healthy and creative mind that is fed
- My Finances - the stewarding of resources God has given to me and Charlie

During my retreat day, I take a prayerful look at these areas and assess how it's going. I lay aside all my electronics and get out some special notebooks reserved for this purpose. I look back and remember. I read what I wrote last year and the year before. I see hopeful signs of growth. And I also see areas that need growth. Each quarter I 'red circle' an area or two that needs attention.

On one retreat, I noted my relationship with my mom who lives in Canada had grown too distant. So, I began to call her once a week and it's a practice that is sustainable and I continue to enjoy. On another retreat, I noted that I felt a bit like an administrative machine with no creative inputs. I decided to read a good book at least once every two months. Another retreat, I noted my lack of sabbath – I decided not shopping on Sundays would be a practice that would mark out the day for me. Sundays are now about sabbath – reserved for worship, rest and fellowship.

My new practice with my '8-point dashboard' isn't perfect. Sometimes I haven't gotten to my retreat day 4 times a year, but 3. Still, it's a healthy way forward. It gives me a steadier walk through the dailies, reminding me of life priorities, providing regular 'course corrections' on what matters most. God is good. He has given me this one life to live and a particular calling within it. My prayer is that I will be faithful, with His help, to number my days aright. May you be blessed as you consider the same.



Church of the Ascension Youth Group: Refreshed Through Service

By Alex Banfield Hicks, Director of Youth and College Ministry

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Join our Team!

While big group full-face photos were a challenge during the pandemic, this smiling band of CAYG leaders are looking to add to their number this fall. By September, it looks like all the teens who want to get vaccinated will have been able to do so, and so we will be back into the swing of large and growing youth group gatherings! If you'd be interested in leading a small group, playing games, praying and singing with the teens of youth group, then get in touch! Middle School aged (11-14) meet on Friday nights and High School aged (14-18) meet on Sunday nights.



SUMMER OPTIONS
2021

JOIN US FOR A WEEK OF
SERVICE AND FUN WITH
FRIENDS IN

HARRISBURG
JULY 18-23
2021

\$250
NINE PLACES AVAILABLE
PARTNERING WITH YOUTHWORKS

HAITI H2O
HOPE TO OPPORTUNITY

Biking
FROM
D.C.

July 29 -
Aug 7 2021

Celebrating a New Partnership!

By Chris Kirkland, CCO Associate for Graduate Student and Young Adult Ministry

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This summer, Ascension is entering into an exciting new partnership with the Christian Medical and Dental Association (CMDA). The CMDA is a national network created to help support medical and dental students and professionals in their walk with Christ and to train them to use their talents for furthering the Kingdom of God.



Josh Cochran, a fourth-year dental student, who currently serves as the student president of the local CMDA chapter, describes the purpose of the CMDA: “It is a community of people who walk together as both a person in the medical profession and as a person of faith especially in terms of medical ethics, mission and fellowship.” Arriving in Pittsburgh as a newly married, ‘fresh out of college’ dental student, he found that meeting a group of like-minded students in the CMDA was like a breath of fresh air. “Dental and medical school is a really trying time. We are constantly under the pressure of being evaluated...It’s very easy for us to derive our identity from our performance. The opportunity to meet and study God’s word and pray together has been an essential opportunity for me. It is a chance for community.”



Ascension already has ties to the CMDA through some of its members who are medical professionals such as Dr. Noel Jabbour, who is a UPMC professor of Otolaryngology and director of its residency program. When he was a student, he was likewise involved with the CMDA and echoed the value of the CMDA’s community, “Fellowship is really important. Medical school is a very stressful time and having people who share your worldview while you are studying and navigating this new vocation can be very beneficial.” He added “It’s like having a piece of the church go with you...Encouragement during this period is very important; together reminding one another that God cares about us and is with us and is in control.” He shared that personally he, “developed some really deep friendships with fellow believers

in that space. I was in a Bible study with them for four years, and we have remained close for 14 years after the fact.”

This partnership offers a new ministry opportunity for the Ascension community. Dr. Jabbour noted that Ascension is well-positioned to serve the students of the CMDA, “Having a home base church might be helpful for those without a church home, offering a place to be welcomed when coming to a new city. I think medical school is a time when students don’t have much to give, but being in a church family is really helpful. It’s definitely a receiving period of life.” Join us in praying for these Christian students in a demanding field; that we might best support and care for those who are training to care for us.



Renewed in the Wilderness

By Leah Hornfeck, Associate for Youth and Campus Ministry

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This summer, two of our Venite Pitt students, Alex Randall and Lucca Spence, and one of our college-aged students, Benjamin Calvetti, are going on the CCO summer opportunity “Leadership & Discipleship in the Wilderness” (LDW). This course consists of six weeks of backpacking in the beautiful and demanding wilderness of Wyoming where students enter into an immersive experience away from the everyday distractions of life and become part of an intentional, intensive, learning community.

The purpose of the trip is to grow in Christ-like leadership, worship, servanthood, and practice of spiritual disciplines. Students who have been part of this course in the past have come back with a stronger faith in Christ and a deeper understanding about how to lead and care for others.

I chatted a bit with Alex, Benjamin, and Lucca before they left for their trip, and I wanted to share with you what they had to say!

What drew you to LDW and made you want to go?

Alex: Honestly, I saw an opportunity to get away from PA for a while and jumped at the chance. I've enjoyed my experiences doing outdoorsy things in the past and wanted to have something exciting to look forward to in the summer. Not only do I get to do that, but hopefully I'll make some friends and grow a lot along the way.

Benjamin: I love the outdoors and honestly just about any opportunity to get away from technology. This program seemed to me a great chance to get away and clear my mind from so many things that distract, and thus, hopefully, see more clearly who God is and how He's present in my life.



Top to Bottom: Alex Randall, Benjamin Calvetti

Lucca: For me, LDW serves as a beautiful collision of interests. I truly love nature and all of the wonders it holds; while I have had much experience in the past, whether during my time as a Boy Scout, or with my family in the great outdoors, I can safely say I have never done anything quite like LDW before. It will be a true adventure of unprecedented length and distance up until this point.

What are you hoping to get from the course and bring back with you to Pittsburgh and into whatever is coming down the line for you?

Alex: I think the biggest area I'm hoping to grow in is perseverance and positivity even in the face of hardships. I tend to really enjoy challenging things when I feel confident and they are going relatively well, but when things start to fall apart, I tend to disengage and retreat. I'm hoping that this experience will not only challenge me but help teach me to keep working, trusting in God, and plowing forward through hardships.



Lucca Spence

Benjamin: I hope for confidence in who God has made me, to know and recognize the lies that I so quickly believe about myself and battle them instead, and to return with a new sense of what it means to love and serve God as a faithful witness in my normal, everyday life.

Lucca: I am currently studying environmental science in college in hopes of getting a job that places me in the heart of nature, ideally where I can share the beauty of God's creation with others. This experience will be my first step into the tangible realities of what that kind of life might involve. Also, ever since starting college, I have begun to take the steps God has set before me to make my faith my own. Along this path, I've run into the ever-present question, what does it mean for me to be a believer in Christ? One thing I have found is that being and doing shape the person that I am; my thoughts and actions are both foundational and transformational to who I am. Knowing that, LDW is the perfect opportunity to take a step back from the patterns of my life and really examine them from the outside while being in a constant Christian community of being and doing.

I can't wait to see them and hear all about their experiences when they return at the end of July. But in the meantime, would you join me in praying for Alex, Benjamin, and Lucca? Pray that God would work mightily in and through them during this course and beyond.

Church of the Ascension Youth Group: Youth Refreshed Together

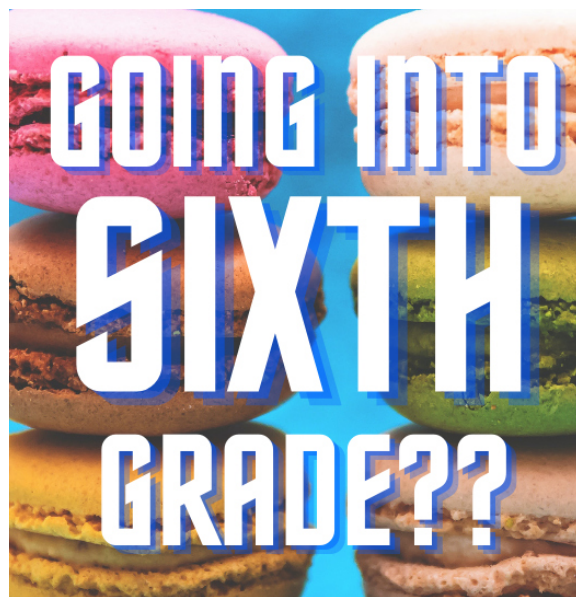
By Alex Banfield Hicks, Director of Youth and College Ministry

alex.banfieldhicks@ascensionpittsburgh.org

Know a rising sixth grader? Do they want to join youth group this summer?

Our hope and prayer is that rising 6th graders at CAYG (Church of the Ascension Youth Group) make good friends over the summer, before they walk in to their new schools in the fall. They will probably also make CAYG friends entering 7th and 8th grade too! To this end, we have five CAYG weekends, starting Friday, June 18, plus two bonus social events to which all are invited (mini-golf and ice-cream on June 29, a pool party on July 24).

A normal CAYG Friday sees folks arrive at Ascension at 6:30 p.m., get welcomed into a small group under the big tent, engage with a great talk (this series is on relationships, at school, at home, and in the wider community), play games, pray together and get a chance to sing outside! Parents then collect at 8:30 p.m. Our youth group is served by a wonderful team of clearance-approved volunteers from Ascension overseen by Alex Banfield Hicks. If you're interested, contact Alex!



Agape Year

By Nate Twichell, Director of Agape Year

natetwichell@hotmail.com

The Twichells are celebrating 5 years as missionaries sent from Ascension. They will be hosting a table on Sunday, June 20 where there will be the opportunity to learn more about the ministry of Agape Year and ways that you can be involved in the work of discipling young adults. Agape Year is a missional gap year for recent high school graduates. There is a close partnership between Agape Year and Ascension.

Erika and I are exceptionally honored to get to do the work that we have been given to do. As missionaries called to the work of discipling and mentoring young adults, we take the job seriously. Our year moves at a rapid pace from September through May: shuttling our Fellows from one service opportunity to another, digging into God's word, sharing meals together, sharing life together, seeing God at work in His church domestically and abroad. Summers are full of recruiting, tweaking the program, and visiting supporting churches.

This year marks our fifth year in ministry together. Looking back at the start of it all, we threw ourselves into the work with reckless abandon. I remember the complete exhaustion we felt at the finish of our first year. We were doing good work, so of course we would pour our whole selves into it. This pattern repeated through year 2 and year 3. A year ago, Erika and I were meeting with a ministry coach who told us that we were dangerously close to burnout. He told us that we needed to make some serious changes in our lives before it was too late. I don't know that those are words anyone wants to hear, but they were exactly what we needed to hear. So, we set about making this a different kind of year, and hopefully, a year that modeled for our Fellows a way of living in our busy times that looked winsomely different than what they were seeing around them. But this would require doing something that does not come naturally for us.

We had to invest in ourselves first before investing in others. This feels counter intuitive to me. I want to serve, and if possible, serve out of sight of others! Investing in my own spiritual and physical wellbeing seemed selfish at first. But as we made the investments in ourselves, we saw the fruit in our ministry to others. We built our capacity to serve into something deeper than what was there before. Of course, this isn't



a new revelation. In scripture we see Jesus regularly retreating to quiet places for rest and refreshment. So what did this look like for us?

We set aside a time for the two of us to take a walk together, twice a week. We both committed to a time of reading and journaling each night. We read books focused on our own spiritual health. We dug deeper into the beautiful church community God has given us. We made times of rest and personal retreat a priority. I began training to become a Spiritual Director and soaked up God's invitation to be still and know that He is God. We tried to model for our Fellows that we are embodied creations, made for rhythms of work and rest.

The investment paid off! We start this summer tired from parenting 4 young children through a pandemic, but not exhausted. Our year with our Fellows called on a lot of our reserves, but not all of them. We are ready for our next cohort arriving in September! On June 20th, we'll have a table at all of the services and look forward to connecting and sharing ways that you can support and come alongside our ministry.

Refreshed Through Daily Healthy Habits

By LuAnn Pengidore, Director of International Ministry

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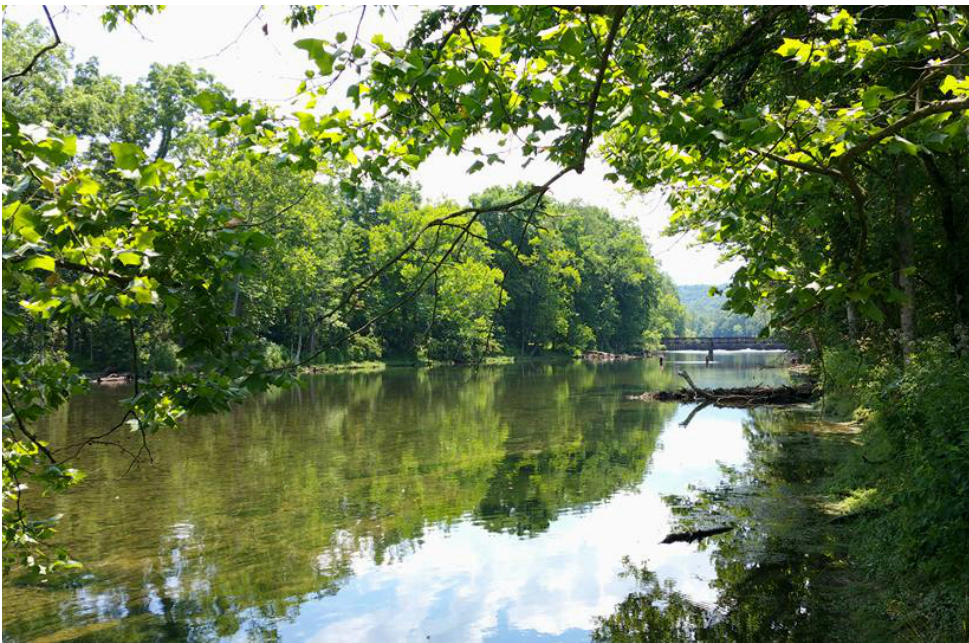


Photo Caption: Photo of the tailwaters of the South Holston Dam, considered one of the country's best trout waters, by David Van Every

My first year of full-time work in international ministry has been during a global pandemic. While it was not an ideal start to full-time work at Ascension, I was motivated to analyze my habits of refreshment - mentally, physically, and spiritually - to combat the frightening news that seemed to grow worse daily. I am emerging from this year in many ways healthier than pre-pandemic. What's been the difference?

Mornings make all the difference for me. Nearly every morning since the pandemic began, I have gotten up, drank a strong mixture of black Moringa tea and bright green Matcha, changed into workout clothes (very fuzzy ones for the winter!), drove to Schenley or Frick Park, and have soaked in the beauty of God's creation. I walked in the forest, smelled the trees, hiked the paths, and read the daily One Year Bible segment on my phone. After I read a paragraph, I prayed about themes as they come to mind - for our country, our leaders, teachers in the international program, certain students, my extended family, and more recently, I am learning to contend in prayer for specific individuals and the church.

My morning routine has been the healthiest and most holistic habit that I have cultivated – feeding mind and body and soul. It wasn't always easy - when I first step out of my car, I feel like my spiritual flame is burning very low and often have no motivation to exercise. I always pray and ask God to help me feel motivated, to understand and grow in passion for his Word. God has always been faithful to fan the flame and bring his Word to life for me and help me enjoy the workout too. It really motivates me the rest of the day.

Another habit that refreshes me is to mix up my exercise routine - jumping on a mini trampoline - even for 10 minutes if it is raining or bitter cold, or lifting weights in the park surrounded by trees, or doing core exercises. When I return from doing my park routine, I use my blender to make minty green drinks or creative smoothies such as banana split flavor with no ice cream (I promise!), cherry dark chocolate or mocha banana with spirulina, protein, and ice. If I have time, I prepare something healthy for lunch, so I don't grab quick carbs.

Other 'rechargers' for me include attending community group and praying for each other, listening to morning prayer while getting ready in the morning (or the app Pray as You Go), walking in the evenings up Beechwood Boulevard with friends, or on rare but fun occasions, to take a half day on a Friday to slip away to Moraine State Park with my sister and sit our lawn chairs in the cold water and soak in sunshine and watch butterflies. In the winter on Friday nights, we watched movies and ate cheese and grapes. I also really enjoy doing new activities with our international students like picking berries, biking around the Northside or visiting new exhibits.

As much as Pittsburgh has to offer, sometimes I just need to get out of town and break the routine. So, I go to Berkley Springs and meet up with old friends or even drive to Erie for a day.

The final and probably most important way that I recharge is to take a half morning spiritual retreat alone with God outside or inside a church. Sometimes I do a full day retreat at the Ark and the Dove Retreat Center in Wexford. I have even done a week-long retreat at Loyola or Bethany in order to pray, practice Lectio Divina, and talk with a Spiritual Director. I will be doing that in mid-August this year with a friend of mine - it is mentally and spiritually refreshing - and sometimes helps me to change the course I am on.

David Van Every, who has taught faithfully and consistently in the international program for over four years, has some similar tips on what helps him to recharge. Here is David in his own words: "One thing I do that recharges me is walking in the woods. Not down a well-worn path with trail markers and park benches all along the way, but far, far off the beaten path. Perhaps I'll find a creek to follow and scan its pools for minnows that dart or examine its muddy banks for the tracks of racoons or fawns. Or maybe I'll find a hidden meadow with buck rubs on pine trees along its edge. And if I can do anything like that without having to hack my way home through thickets of thorns, I'll be happy."



It's been a difficult year. I hope you find encouragement in my patterns and I wish you the best in finding your own habits that refresh you, mind and body and soul.

What Forts Teach Us About the Longings of our Hearts:

Reflections on Psalm 46 for Kids

By Catherine and Jay Slocum

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Papasan Forts!

God blessed us with two daughters. Emma is 23, married, and working as a schoolteacher here in Pittsburgh. Lydia is 19 and a rising sophomore at Messiah University. One of the delights of our girls' childhood was building forts in our house. And, perhaps the best forts, from their recollection, were built around our very large, very round, and very green "Papasan" chair that followed us from our first church plant in Hilton Head Island all the way to our ministry here in Pittsburgh.



Mostly made in the corner of our living room, the Papasan fort was more woven than built. A combination of dining room chairs and standing lamps formed into a great round heap that made up the walls of the fort. This structure allowed the Papasan wicker base to take a needed break from serving as a resting place so that it might have the honor of becoming a majestic dome when it was turned upside down and hoisted on top of the fort. With the building now mostly erect, layers of blankets, towels, sheets, and table clothes were pulled from the linen closet and carefully draped over the dome. Though not bricks or siding, this drapery made magical walls and a fort that would always be remembered. And, when the Papasan fort was finally standing, the round green cushion would be laid inside as a floor covering, making conditions perfect for guests ranging from American Girls Dolls to Polly Pockets and even, if he was behaved, our dog Schaeffer.

Inside the hallowed walls of the Papasan fort, there was a refuge from imaginary bad guys, room to color and create, and a feeling of safety in the world of play from all things grown-up; like helping to clean dishes, homework and the drudgery of life as things are rather than how we long for them to be.

At this year's Parish Retreat, we will be reflecting upon Psalm 46. In this Psalm, the poet includes images of fortresses as places that he can turn to as he describes a world that is not as it should be. In this world, no one is alone in a barren land exposed to the elements, unsafe from the bad guys, weighed down by the drudgery of a fallen world. Listen to the words he writes to God's people:

*God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
Though its waters roar and foam*

*and the mountains quake with their surging.
There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy place where the Most High dwells.
God is within her, she will not fall;
God will help her at break of day.
Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;
he lifts his voice, the earth melts.
The Lord Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.*

The Psalmist described God as a refuge, a holy place, a fortress. Like a child at play in her fort, he longs for the safety of the fortress. We believe that we (all of us, we hope) built forts as children, not just because human beings are species that make dwellings, but because we long for a world where we are safe from foaming waters and quaking mountains. Church, and certainly Church Retreats, when they are at their best, are our attempt at imagining the world as it should be, not as it is, even if it is for three hours on a Sunday or a three-day weekend.

This summer, we will be working to build a curriculum for children based upon Psalm 46 and are pretty sure that our time at the Parish Retreat will include building forts. We hope you will join us in Laurelville October 1 – 3!!

Welcome

We are excited to welcome Jay Slocum into a part-time role on our children's ministry team as our curriculum developer. Father Jay is an entrepreneurial speaker, author, consultant, and pastor. He has been a regular guest on Christian radio, has spoken to groups ranging from children to national thought leaders, has written hundreds of articles and two book chapters in the field of Faith, Work and Economics. He has worked as a consultant for The Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation and the Made to Flourish Network. As a seasoned pastor with two decades of family ministry, Jay has delivered more than 500 children's messages, provided years of Bible teaching and curriculum development, and has had a joy-filled ministry of preparing couples for marriage and discipling parents to guide their children into a life of truth, beauty, justice, compassion, and a desire to see God's Kingdom brought to earth.

Jay earned a B.A. in Sociology from the King's College, NY and a Master's in Divinity from Trinity School for Ministry. He has served as an ordained minister in the Anglican Church in North America as a Youth Minister, Church Planter and Rector.

Currently, Jay is working as the owner of The Whistle Bike Shop and as a consultant and documentary host with Wind Rider Productions Studio. During the past two years at Church of the Ascension, he has had the privilege of developing and teaching Sunday School and introducing Sally Lolli and many of her puppet friends to the Church of the Ascension family at Kids' Church.



Music & Worship Arts

Justice, Mercy and Humility: A Creative Journey Through Micah 6:8

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

“He has told you O mortal, what is good;
 and what does the lord require of you
 but to do justice, and to love kindness,
 and to walk humbly with your God”

—Micah 6:8 (NRSV)

What does it mean to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly before God? And not just what it means... How do you do it? How do we live lives of justice, mercy, and humility?

In a world where there is so much justice and cruelty that elevates arrogance and egocentrism to virtues, how do we take a stand in the opposite direction?

The call to live a life that pleases God—a life that, according to Micah 6:8, the Lord requires of us—is not an easy one, and it defies easy answers. In addition to the sermons, commentaries, and expositions on this topic, I’d like to suggest another option: art.

Think of all the times that art has brought scripture to life, all of the instances where an image or piece of music brought ancient words off the page in a new and striking way. We may read and love the Parable of the Prodigal Son; what beauty and humanity are present in Rembrandt’s visual interpretation! This is just one example that comes to mind, and I expect that there are examples from your own life, as well.

This brings me to the Ascension Worship Arts Series. A little over a month ago, a group of artists at Ascension were invited to consider how their work intersects with the three

principles from Micah 6:8—justice, mercy, and humility. The work that was submitted is both excellent and eclectic, ranging from original songs to Anglican Chant, poetry to videography, paintings to a cello suite. These works are the artists’ honest attempts to wrestle with challenging themes. They are testimonies in creativity.

On Monday June 28, at 7:00 p.m. under the tent, three artists will share their work, stories, and testimonies as they relate to the theme of Justice. Two more events will follow on the first Monday of the next two months, each with three more artists, another theme (July 26 will address mercy, while August 30 will tackle humility). Come early and get something to eat from a food truck (starting at 5:30), and enjoy a mini arts festival. And bring a friend, as we hope this will be a particularly wonderful event for those who are artistically minded but may not have a church home. It is our hope that, through various media, we can journey together toward living the kind of life the Lord requires of us. We hope you join us.



ASCENSION WORSHIP ARTS SERIES

JUSTICE - MERCY- HUMILITY
Micah 6:8

Last Mondays
June, July, Aug
5:30-8:30pm

Food Trucks,
Arts Festival &
Artists'
Roundtable

Participating Ascension Artists Include:



Amy Foster
Visual Artist



Debbie Kornfield
Writer



Chris Massa
Musician/Composer



Elise Massa
Songwriter



Emily Misner
Musician/Composer



Faith Thompson
Poet



Stacey Regan
Songwriter



Wes Williams
Songwriter



Ben Wilson
Filmmaker

Kids' Church LIVE!



It was a whole year ago on Pentecost Sunday that we launched our Kids' Church video series! We are now in the midst of creating a Kids' Church LIVE short video series during the summer months. These five videos will focus on our Kids' Church core values and help to orient our children into our new season of life together. The first video in the series is on our [YouTube channel](#).

Worship Services **Sunday 9:00 a.m. Tent Service, 11:00 a.m. Nave Service** with [YouTube](#) live stream. (These service times begin on Sun. July 4.)

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A Worshipping Community;
Equipping God's People; Sharing