

The Ascent

LENT 2022

ASCENSIONPITTSBURGH.ORG



Lent and Holy Week Schedule



Fasting

Each week, we will invite you into a different fast. You can track with each of the fasts in the “Our Lenten Fasts” section of the Daily Prayer booklet which will be available at Ascension on all information tables. More information on Lenten Fasts can also be found in Kevin Antlitz’ article on pages 4-5.

Prayer and Worship

In addition to Sunday eucharistic worship, we will offer one other opportunity each week of Lent to gather for prayer and worship. Childcare is available for these opportunities. While not required, it is helpful if parents register for childcare in advance using the link at www.ascensionpittsburgh.org (News & Events).

Ash Wednesday: March 2 with services at Noon and 7:00 pm

(7:00 pm live stream; childcare both services*)

Suggested fast for Ash Wednesday: Food/a Meal

Christians have traditionally fasted from all food on Ash Wednesday. As we enter the Ash Wednesday service in silence, our physical hunger reminds us of our weakness and points to our greater hunger for and dependence on God. If you cannot fast the entire day, consider fasting from lunch.

Lent 1: Sunday, March 6 with services at 9:00 am and 11:00 am

Suggested fast for Lent 1: TV, Music, Media

This week, forgo the typical media inputs. Turn off the TV, Netflix, and video streaming altogether. Drive without the radio and leave your headphones at home. What is it like to increase the silence/decrease the media inputs in your life? Spend the time listening for the voice of God.

Opportunity for prayer and worship:

Soul Care on Saturday, March 12 at 9:30 am. The theme will be “The Return of the Prodigal.” Register to participate at www.ascensionpittsburgh.org (News & Events). Childcare available*. For more information on Soul Care, see the article by Andrea Millard on page 15.

Lent 2: Sunday, March 13 with services at 9:00 am and 11:00 am

Suggested fast for Lent 2: Sweets and Treats

This week, resolve to fast from all sweets or desserts. This could range from lattes in the morning to chocolate in the evening. As you do so, note what happens inside when you deny yourself something you really want or crave.

Opportunity for prayer and worship:

Evening Prayer on Wednesday, March 16 at 7:00 pm. Childcare available*.



Lent 3: Sunday, March 20 with services at 9:00 am and 11:00 am

Suggested fast for Lent 3: Social/News Media

This week, refrain from checking Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and your usual news sites. Try to limit your use of the internet outside of work. What is it like to unplug, to not obsessively check email/social media?

Opportunity for prayer and worship:

Sunday, March 20: Taizé Service at 7pm. Childcare available*. For more information on Taizé worship, see the article by Chris Massa on pages 10-11.

Lent 4: Sunday, March 27 with services at 9:00 am and 11:00 am

Suggested fast for Lent 4: Spending

This week, resolve to spend nothing on yourself but what is absolutely necessary. Buy as little as possible. Try to eat cheaply, avoid eating out or buying coffee or drinks. Seek to save more than usual. Reflect on the ways in which the things you own end up owning you. Consider giving what you saved this week to those facing real need.

Opportunity for prayer and worship:

Wednesday, March 30: Evening Prayer at 7:00 pm. Childcare available*.

Lent 5: Sunday, April 3 with services at 9:00 am and 11:00 am

Suggested fast for Lent 5: Coffee/Drinks

Choose to refrain from coffee, alcohol, and/or all drinks but water this week. Pay attention to what happens when you deny yourself something you routinely enjoy. When you experience the desire for the thing from which you are refraining, spend time connecting with God in prayer.

Opportunity for prayer and worship:

Saturday, April 9: Soul Care at 9:30 am. The theme will be "The betrayal of Judas". Register to participate at www.ascensionpittsburgh.org (News & Events). Childcare available*.

Holy Week Begins Sunday, April 10

Suggested fast for Holy Week: Your Choice

Reflect on the ways in which the things you own end up owning you. Consider giving what you saved this week to those facing real need. The passages from Sunday's lectionary are about sacrificial, self-giving love. With this in mind, consider how you can forgo something you enjoy in order to serve someone else. Perhaps this is not reading or watching TV or exercising so you have more time to serve your spouse or housemate by doing needed chores. Maybe it is making a meal for your neighbor or spending an evening serving in a local ministry. Ask God to help you think creatively about giving up so you can give to others.

Holy Week Worship:

Palm Sunday – April 10 with services at 9:00 am and 11:00 am including Palm Processional. Childcare available; no Children's Ministry program.

Maundy Thursday – April 14 at 7:00 pm. Service available by live stream. Childcare available*; no Children's Ministry program.

Good Friday – April 15 from Noon – 1:30 pm. Service available by live stream. Childcare and Children's Ministry program*

Easter Vigil – April 17 at 6:00 am. Service available by live stream; no childcare.

Easter Sunday – April 17 with services at 9:00 am and 11:00 am. Childcare available; 11:00 am livestream; Children's Easter Egg Hunt between 9:00 am and 11:00 am services.

**Childcare: Registration for childcare for many Lenten services and events is helpful but not required. Link to register for Childcare or Children's Ministry programming for special services and events available at www.ascensionpittsburgh.org (News & Events).*

An Invitation to Observe a Holy Lent



By Kevin Antlitz, Assistant Rector
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In this article I want to orient the church to the season of Lent and invite each one of us to participate in a series of communal events and practices as a way to observe a Holy Lent together.

Lent is the forty or so day sojourn that begins with Ash Wednesday and marches along for 40 days (not including Sundays). The Lenten journey perks up during Holy Week, swells in intensity during the Triduum (three-day period of Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday) and reaches its ultimate climax in the empty tomb on Easter or Resurrection Sunday.

The word “lent” stems from the Old English word for “long” and the German word for “spring.” During the six-ish weeks from Ash Wednesday to Easter, the days grow longer and we enter into spring. We begin in the darkness and dearth of a long winter and arrive in the light and renewed life of spring. This is indicative of the Lenten journey where we are to trace the steps of Jesus as he walks from life through death to life.

Traditionally, Lent is a season of repentance and preparation. This season provides us with the invaluable opportunity to inventory our lives – our desires, our mindset, our habits – and then reorient them. We turn from ways that lead to death and turn to ways that lead us to life. Lent also provides us with the opportunity to prepare for the yearly celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus at the end of Holy Week. Over the centuries, a few practices have been central to repentance and actively preparing to celebrate the resurrection. The three practices at the heart of observing a Holy Lent are prayer, almsgiving, and fasting.

To help us press into these practices, we are offering at least one event each week of Lent where we can gather for prayer and worship. You can see the schedule on page 2.

In the rest of this article, I want to press into the practices of personal prayer and fasting. To get the most out of Lent, we are inviting you to a renewed engagement with God through prayer using the *Daily Prayer* booklet as well as to a rhythm of communal fasts. Lent is a great time to invest more time and energy into your prayer life. It is also a great

time to begin to develop the practice of fasting. I'll share more about this in a moment but want to stress now that fasting is not required. The keyword here is "invitation." Participation is not mandatory! Nevertheless, we do hope you'll consider participating as you are able.

If you don't have much experience with fasting, let me share a little bit about this neglected spiritual discipline and why saints through the ages have regularly practiced it. In his book *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster defines fasting as "abstaining from food for spiritual purposes." He distinguishes fasting from something like hunger strikes or dieting to lose weight. The former is done to draw attention to a worthy cause or perhaps gain political power and the latter is used for a physical purpose (and perhaps sometimes for vanity). Fasting, however, is focused on spiritual goals like cultivating humility and dependence on God.

The spiritual practice of fasting was central to the lives of the earliest Christian believers but is largely neglected today. According to the *Didache*, a 1st century church manual, the early church made a habit of fasting twice a week throughout the year. We would do well to retrieve this discipline as fasting can have a profound impact on our spiritual lives.

The practice is most often linked with humility in the Bible (see Psalm 69:10; Ezra 8:21, and Joel 1:14; 2:12, 15). By forsaking food, we remind ourselves of our ultimate dependence on God. Fasting takes our utter dependence upon God beyond mere words and cultivates dependence through the use of our bodies.

Fasting is also connected with repentance (see 1 Samuel 7:6; Nehemiah 9:1-2). We might even think of fasting as a way of training ourselves to repent – to turn from and turn to. When we fast, we are reminded of our weakness and sinfulness. Sometimes these are connected, sometimes they are distinct. But both remind us of our utter dependence on God. By fasting, we seek to turn our desires from attachments to the world and direct them to God himself.

I want to be clear that fasting is not commanded in the Scriptures. That said, Jesus assumed his followers would fast (Matt 6:16 "...when you fast"). So, this is not a "thou shalt" kind of thing. As it turns out, the Bible has more to say about how not to fast than the particulars for how to do so (see Isaiah 58). As the Pharisees in the Gospels show us, there is often a temptation for fasting to devolve into legalism. This temptation is to be faced and resisted. We fast to grow closer to God, not as a means to curry God's favor or as some sort of Christian virtue signaling.

So how will all of this work? Each week, we will invite you into a different fast. One week might be abstaining from food, another might be from social media, another from coffee or alcohol. You can track with each of the fasts in the "Our Lenten Fasts" section of the Prayer Guide. One thing to keep in mind is that we never fast on Sundays. Sundays are always "feast" days in celebration of the resurrection (and hence Sundays are not technically included in the 40 days of Lent).

Finally, a few words of instruction and caution. First, if you are new to fasting, I encourage you to start small and work up (e.g., begin by abstaining from one meal rather than food for a whole day). Second, if you have had serious eating issues in the past, you should approach fasting with great caution. Consider fasting from a particular type of food (i.e., meat, dessert, snacks, etc.) rather than all food. It would also be wise to ask a trusted friend to join you in this and track with you to ensure you're not slipping back into destructive habits of thinking and acting. Fasting with spiritual friends and sharing this experience together is always better than fasting alone. Lastly, for all of us, it is important to consult your doctor before fasting as certain medical conditions may make it unsafe to fast.

I hope you'll join us and participate in some of these events and practices. I am praying for God's grace in each of our lives to help us observe a Holy Lent.

The Drama of Lent and Easter



By Deacon Mark Stevenson
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Lent/Ash Wednesday – Desert

“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After he fasted forty days and forty nights he was famished.” (Matthew 4:1-2)

The Judean Desert, also called the Wilderness. Framed by mountains and the lowlands of Salt Sea. Redolent with history. Jesus knew that Moses had looked out across this wilderness to a land he would never enter. David sought refuge here when fleeing King Saul. Dry, very dry. Awaiting Jesus, three temptations from the devil. The temptations are real, very real: food, idols, power. The world’s ashes. We understand. Hunger, exhaustion. Constant prayer to the Father, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.” 40 days and then relief, real relief from Angels. 40 days and 40 nights. And this is only the beginning.

“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” (*Book of Common Prayer*)

Palm Sunday – Hosanna

“But some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.” He answered, “I tell you, if they keep silent, the very stones will cry out!” (Luke 19: 39-40)

The Triumphant Entry. This must surely be it, the arrival of the Messiah. Millenia of pent-up hopes and dreams come pouring out. Hosana in the highest! Liberation from Roman oppression. “Blessed be the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” The prophecies fulfilled right here, right now. “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” But, already an ominous tension in the crowd. The Establishment is uneasy, frightened, angry. The crowd is too large, too enthusiastic. “Tell them to stop!” they shout. But Jesus knows. “I tell you, if they keep silent, the very stones will cry out!”

“Therefore, I invite you to follow our Lord this Holy Week, from his triumphal entry, through his suffering and death, to the glory of his resurrection.” (*Book of Common Prayer*)





Maundy Thursday – Love

“Just before the Passover Feast, Jesus knew that his time had come to depart from this world to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now loved them to the very end.” (John 13:1)

Heaviness. The weight is unbearable. Can barely breath. Even the familiar faces around the table are distorted. Except his. The foot washing does nothing to lessen the tension. There’s a meal. Bread and wine. A brief respite. But what did he say about betrayal? No, it couldn’t be. Let’s get outside where we can breathe. Then a blur of torches, dull steel, blood, shouting. “Run for your life. Run for your life!” But where? There is no place to hide tonight.

“Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your heart by faith, with thanksgiving.” (*Book of Common Prayer*)



Good Friday – Sacrifice

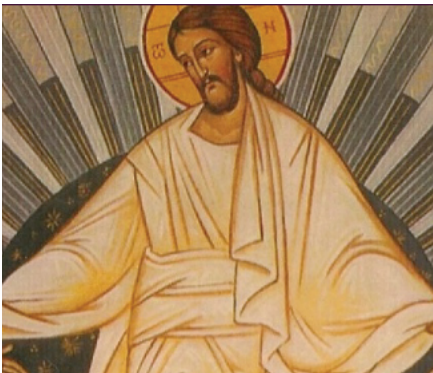
“They brought Jesus to a place called Golgotha (which is translated, “Place of the Skull”). They offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. Then they crucified him.” (Mark 15:22-24)

Mary, the mother of Jesus, stayed until the bitter end. She could have escaped the carnage at any time. “Please, no more.” No one would have blamed her. But she stayed to the bitter end. Other women stayed with her. God bless them. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and Mary the mother of Zebedee’s sons. They need to be remembered. Heroes of the faith. They were there when they lowered the broken body down. Barely recognizable. Please, for pity’s sake, John, take her home.

“Behold the wood of the cross, on which was hung the world’s Salvation.” (*Book of Common Prayer*)



Holy Saturday - Silence



Easter Sunday – Alleluia

“But the angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised, just as he said.’” (Matthew 27: 5-6)

The Lord is Risen! The Lord is Risen indeed!

Gracious and loving God, as we move through the great Drama of Lent and Easter, help us to comprehend the incomprehensible and to express the inexpressible. Amen.

Ash Wednesday

Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.



By Jess Bennett, Ascension Fellow
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I participated in my first-ever Ash Wednesday service eight months pregnant with my first child. I wasn't raised in a liturgical church tradition — and wasn't sure I wanted to settle into one! — but here I was, in the little seminary chapel, receiving a reminder of death on my forehead, while my soon-to-be-earthside babe was happily kicking and throwing elbows in my womb.

The connection wasn't lost on me. New life is being brought forth from within me, and I am reminded that that same life — my own, my unborn child's — is but a vapor, that appears for a little while, then vanishes.

Almighty God, you have created us from the dust of the earth: Grant that these ashes may be for us a symbol of our mortality and a sign of our penitence, that we may remember that it is by your grace alone that we receive the gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

It's now four years later, and Ash Wednesday is just as uncomfortable for me. Especially right now — I mean really, a ritual reminder of death in a pandemic? Must we?

Most of us have, in the months since March 2020, grieved loved ones as they have *returned to dust* — whether by sickness, tragedy, or in peace simply because it was time. We have attended funerals or watched via live stream or ZOOM. Our healthcare workers witness death daily. Serving as a chaplain this year in a trauma ICU, I've met with countless individuals who have escaped death only by an inch, or for whom death is an impending and likely reality. We can't get away from thinking about death.

Life is but a vapor, we know that now more than ever. And yet, we as the church will gather once again to receive this *symbol of our mortality and sign of our penitence*. But something I love about the collects in our prayer book is that there is always a “*so that...*” Whatever it is we are praying for, it is *so that* some result may come about: greater intimacy with God, reconciliation with one another, amendment of life — and so it is with this collect. In this case, we receive the ashes *so that we may remember that it is by your grace alone that we receive the gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ our Savior*.

Ash Wednesday is an opportunity to think about death, yes. But, I'm learning, it's even more so an opportunity for meaning making. On Ash Wednesday we are reminded, whether we like it or not, that death touches us all — that we are thoroughly *mortal* — and yet, that our mortality is not all there is. We are marked, in ashes, with the sign of the cross: facing the reality that each of us will die, but our deaths are hidden in Christ. And in turn, our futures are hidden in his resurrected life. In Christ, we are dust, but not merely dust. We die with him; we will rise with him.

This Ash Wednesday, my two preschoolers will clamor forward with us to receive the symbol of their mortality, launching us into the forty days of Lent. All of us, young and old, the weak and the lively, those of us who think ourselves invincible and those of us still wiping tears of grief over loved ones lost — all of us are marked in ash and invited to reckon with its truth.

Reconciliation of Penitents



By Andrea Millard, Director of Prayer Ministry & Leadership Development
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Confession is an important part of our Anglican spirituality. It is something we do each week as we gather for corporate worship and, for those who pray the daily office, it is a daily spiritual practice.

Lent is particularly suited for confession as it is a season of penitence. Penitence is feeling or showing regret and sorrow for those things we have done wrong. In our Ash Wednesday liturgy, we are called “to the observance of a holy Lent: by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and almsgiving; and by reading and meditating on God’s holy Word” (BCP 544). Lent is a season for repentance and reconciliation.

Lent is a good time to meet with a priest for an individual appointment of confession, reconciliation, and forgiveness. Regarding the Rite of Reconciliation (confession), there is a helpful Anglican saying: “All may, none must, some should.” So, while there is no obligation to participate in this Rite, there is freedom and healing that comes from confessing to a priest who bears witness to our true repentance and commitment to amendment of life. There is healing in hearing the words of absolution and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, following Jesus’ commands of love and life to “go and sin no more” (John 8:11). Indeed, our liturgy for Reconciliation of Penitents is found within The Rites of Healing section of The Book of Common Prayer (223-4).

How to Participate: The Rite of Reconciliation is an individual, one-on-one time of prayer with a priest who will pray, listen, counsel, direct, and comfort the penitent. We use the 2019 Book of Common Prayer’s liturgy for this appointment. It is typically scheduled as a 15-20-minute appointment at Ascension.

How to Prepare: Come as you are. There is no prescribed process for preparing for the Rite of Reconciliation. However, if you want ideas for preparing, you might consider one of these suggestions:

Pray through the “Confession and Litany of Penitence” found in the Ash Wednesday liturgy (547-549);



prayerfully pause on those petitions that speak to matters in your life; ask the Lord to grant you a new and contrite heart. Share with the priest.

Ask the Lord to bring to your mind those sins that are interfering with your relationship with God and others (things that have offended against God’s love and holiness); express sorrow for those sins (contrition); and, by God’s grace, resolve to change, to make “amendment of life.” Share with the priest.

Pray “The Great Litany” (91-99), prayerfully pausing on those petitions that feel like invitations to greater examination of conscience. Share with the priest.

To ask any question about this Rite or to make an appointment, feel free to reach out to any of our priests:

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Music & Worship Arts

Lifting Our Voices During Lent



By Chris Massa, Director of Music and Worship Arts
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On Ash Wednesday, we will be invited to observe a holy Lent by means of “self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and alms-giving; and by reading and meditating on God’s holy Word.” In addition to what it may mean to set apart Lent as individuals and families—a topic that is beyond the scope of this article—here are two ways that music will be used to help us set apart our corporate worship services during this season.

Singing Our Prayers: Music of the Community of Taizé

Founded in 1940, the Community of Taizé is an ecumenical Christian monastic community and music plays a key role in their life together. Specifically, they sing their prayers through short, simple songs that are sung several times in a row—repeated, as if on a loop. Through this repetition, one is frequently able to move beyond the music, the words becoming our corporate prayers.

Anglicans are no stranger to repetition; in many ways, repetition is at the heart of how we worship, both individually and corporately. Most people don’t attend special services (i.e., Ash Wednesday, Christmas Eve, etc.) year after year looking for a new experience. Rather, we keep coming back to experience the same thing again, to step into a rhythm of worship that is deeply rooted in history, doing something that has been done many times before. In other words, while the music of the Community of Taizé may seem unusual on the surface, it touches on many of the things that already inform our worship.

This Lent, there will be one song during communion each week, and it will be music from or inspired by the Taizé tradition. Through this style of music, you will be invited to slow down, reflect, sing, pray, and repeat.

A brief aside: There will be another opportunity to engage with Taizé music during Lent, particularly a contemplative service on Sunday, March 20 at 7pm. If you love this type of worship, or if you simply want more opportunities to participate in it, don’t forget to put this on your calendar.

Singing the Psalms: Anglican Chant

The book of Psalms (also known as the Psalter) is often referred to as the songbook or hymnal of the Bible. Even a cursory reading of the Psalms makes it clear that they were written to be sung, and many even include specific musical instructions. And yet, in our present day and liturgical tradition, the Psalms are more often read or recited than sung. This is not a bad thing, per se—far be it from me to suggest that reading scripture is ever a bad thing—but I do think that, by



reading them rather than singing, we are missing out on part of what the Psalms are inviting us into. Research has shown, time and time again, that we learn better through music than normal speech. And it's more than just learning—we *internalize* things better, whether they are ideas, information, or scripture, when we sing them.

There are many ways of singing the Psalms, and one way that is unique to Anglicanism is called—this may surprise you—Anglican Chant. By the time you read this, there will be a video posted to Ascension's YouTube channel about how to sing Anglican Chant, so I won't get into the details of it here. Suffice it to say that, rather than reading or reciting the Psalms during Lent, we will be chanting them together. As is the case with the Taizé songs, this is a style of music that may seem unusual, even off-putting at first, but I would encourage you to give it a try, to not give up on it, and to let the Word of God take root in your mind and heart as you do so.

Another brief aside: All of the music (or tones) that we will be chanting during Lent has been written by composers who are based here at Ascension, specifically Andrew Kohn, Emily Misner, and myself. I'm deeply grateful to Andy and Emily for their gifts and their willingness to use them to bless the church.



Introducing Our Newest Liturgical Assistant: The Rev. Lauren Scharf



By Jonathan Millard, Rector

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I am delighted to introduce our new Liturgical Assistant*, The Rev. Lauren Scharf. Mother Lauren has served in the Diocese of Pittsburgh for the past eight years – indeed, Lauren was ordained a priest at Ascension!

Lauren has been engaged in ministry in Western PA for the last eighteen years. She served St. Stephen's Church, Sewickley for many years as Director of Community Life, Women's Director, and, later, as a Deacon. Most recently, Lauren was the Assistant Rector of All Saints, Cranberry. She and her family live in Ambridge near Trinity School for Ministry where she is currently pursuing her Doctor of Ministry degree with a focus on practical discipleship in the local church. At Trinity she also has the joy of teaching "Introduction Theology" to the young business leaders of the Pittsburgh Fellows Program.

Lauren is married to her college sweetheart, Chris, and together they have two children: Caleb (7) and Madelyn "Maddie" (5). They love hiking, playing in the creek by their house, doing puzzles, and snuggling with their dog, Snowflake.



I am so pleased to welcome Lauren and her family among us and look forward to her preaching at our Good Friday service this year.

*Liturgical Assistants at Ascension are clergy who are not on staff but make Ascension their church home and have been invited by the rector to assist in leading worship and preaching from time to time.

Music & Worship Arts

Holy Week Artwork: an Interview with Artist Amy Foster



By Elise Massa, Assistant Director of Music and Worship Arts

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One of the ways that we incorporate visual art into our worship is through our church bulletins. Our bulletin covers serve as a visual companion to lectionary readings, sermons series, or for members to take and practice *visio divina* at home. What you may not realize is that many of our bulletin covers are pieces of artwork designed by artists from within our own congregation! This Lent, Amy Foster (Contempera Studio) will create several new pieces for this year's Holy Week services. In the interview below, Amy tells us a little more about her journey as an artist and the integration of art with her faith.

EM: Tell us how you started your vocation as an artist?

AF: I always knew I wanted to be an artist. As a kid I was always drawing and coloring “outside the lines”. But I thought of my art as the thing that I used to prove my worth, and that was a pretty empty motivator. I would say that my vocation truly began when I surrendered my art over to the Lord as a service for God and Church.

EM: Where does art and faith intersect for you?

AF: To be a Christian is to breathe in and breathe out the creative spirit of God as revealed to us in the Holy Trinity. To be an artist is to do the same. As children of God, and by His grace, we participate in the life-giving creative work of the Trinity every day. God made me to do this in a way that is easily recognized as art, but I would consider every faithful Christian to be an artist, limited only by the amount one is willing to surrender themselves to Christ.

EM: You've done several different styles of visual art. What has inspired you to pursue this form?

AF: I am attracted to this method because of its slowness. You can't rush an egg tempera painting. Coming from the fast-paced world of architecture, it was a relief to take my time with my paintings, to allow God to direct and do the heavy lifting for me when it came to inspiration. I find that I perceive God most clearly in this method because I have slowed down enough to listen. That is what brings me back time and again. It's a very joyful process!

EM: Tell us about the process of making this style of artwork.

AF: With egg tempera, you must take time to prepare the board, to mix fresh paint for every sitting, to place thin layers in small strokes of paint. Egg tempera is both simple and finicky. Skillfulness, in this case, is comprised of 90% patience. I am not an iconographer in the strict



sense of the word, but I am inspired by the way that icon writing brings spiritual meaning into every part of the process. For example, when placing gold leaf, the sizing (glue) is applied very thinly and dries quickly. Before applying the leaf one must draw near to the painting and breathe on it... the moisture is enough to activate the glue again. Underneath that bodily act is a spiritual parallel of God breathing life into us, which we pass onto our own creative work.

EM: Part of your Holy Week series will include your piece "Jesus is Nailed to the Cross". You had made this in 2021 for Ascension's Stations of the Cross. Could you tell us a little about this piece?

AF: I had gone on a walk in the woods that winter, and I often find that brambles, jaggars, and berries give the winter landscape a large portion of its color and texture. They brought to mind the crown of thorns. I realized that Christ took on the curse for us, completely, even the thorns consuming our fields. He was pierced by his own creation in more ways than one. I was struck by this reminder of God's love and decided to use the plants as a parabolic image of the passion. Botanical images will be a running theme in this Holy Week series.

EM: How do you hope your artwork edifies those who might see it, both inside and outside the church walls?

AF: My hope is that the Lord will use my work to edify in whatever way He sees fit. I've observed that most often comes by way of spiritual comforting and conviction, or inspiration to read scripture with fresh eyes. I am always excited to see God at work in the pieces that I've painted, especially when it's in surprising ways!





Church of the Ascension Youth Group: Homemade Cookies and Lent?



By Alex Banfield Hicks, Director of Youth and College Ministry

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On May 22, Bishop Martyn Minns will be at Ascension to confirm a batch of youth confirmands. At one point in the service, he will say: “Now, these candidates desire publicly to confess their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and their commitment to follow him as Lord. They also desire the strengthening of grace through the laying on of hands, that the Holy Spirit may fill them more and more for their ministry in the church and in the world.”

Starting last September, fourteen youth confirmands and their mentors have been meeting up once a month for lunch, after the 11:00 am service at Ascension, to engage with the following questions, as they prepare for May 22.

- Why confess Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior?
- What is the big story of the Bible?
- How might God speak to us through a passage of Scripture?
- What are the ministries of Ascension and how can you get involved?
- What unites the Anglican church worldwide?
- How do morning and evening prayer help unite us to Christ?

I am thankful for the clergy and teachers who have been our guest presenters at these lunches, helping us walk

through these topics together, and for the volunteer mentors who have been meeting up with individuals for discussion and prayer. We are all working together to prepare our confirmands for May 22 and their “ministry in the church and in the world.”

I am especially thankful for Mike Starz and family who have been hosting these events at Ascension, often bringing quality homemade goods to sweeten the experience, like these cookies which were made to honor a birthday of one of our confirmands.

So again, what have these cookies got to do with Lent? Lent reminds us of Jesus’ forty days in the wilderness as he prepared for ministry. Ascension’s Youth Confirmation process is similarly preparing our young people for their “ministry in the church and in the world.”

The truth about these cookies is that this tray didn’t last full for long. Mike took an empty tray back to the car. Man doesn’t live by bread alone, nor by pizza and cookies alone, but by every word from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4, my paraphrase).

As we enter Lent, and maybe look with longing at this photo, remember to pray for our youth confirmands that they learn to depend on God’s word and Spirit in the days leading up to May 22, and for life-long ministry in the church and in the world following this exciting day.

Lenten Soul Care



Saturday, March 12 and April 9
9:30 - 11:00 am, Hunt Rooms

Our Ash Wednesday liturgy calls us “to the observance of a holy Lent: by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, almsgiving; and by reading and meditating on God’s holy Word” (BCP 544). Lenten Soul Care is designed to help us enter the disciplines of prayer, fasting; and reading and meditating on God’s holy Word. We begin and end each gathering in silence, and throughout the morning leave space for quiet – fasting from words.

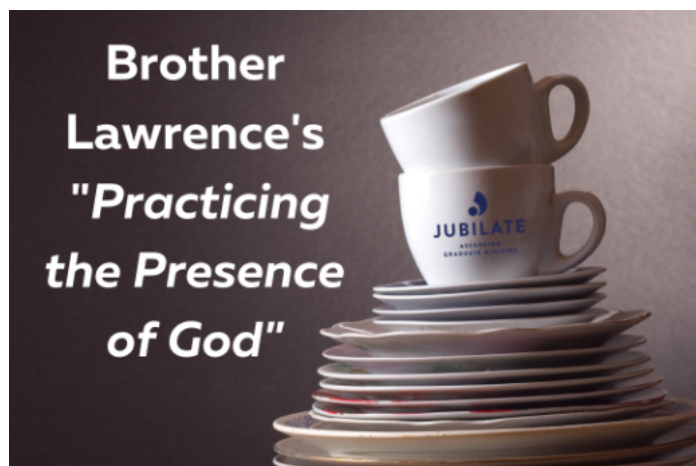
Soul Care provides a rhythm of slow, intentional, and focused time with the Lord by reading scripture and listening for his “still small voice.” We linger in the presence of the Lord together.

During our Lenten Soul Care gathering on March 12, we will meditate on the theme of repentance. Our focus will be on the return of the prodigal with Andrea Millard. On April 9, we will prepare for Holy Week with a focus on the betrayal of Judas with guest artist, Wes Williams.

If you have not been to a Soul Care morning, this Lent would be a great time to check it out. Come to one or come to both; these are stand-alone offerings.

If you have any questions, please reach out to Andrea Millard. To register, check out the News & Events page on Ascension’s website.

Jubilate Graduate Ministry



By Chris Kirkland, CCO
Graduate Ministry
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During these forty days of Lent, we remember Jesus being tempted and drawing near to God in the wilderness before beginning his public ministry. Following Jesus’s example, this semester the Jubilate graduate ministry is focusing on entering more fully into God’s presence as preparation for the public works that God has given us to do. The group meets on Mondays at 7:00 pm.

Together we are exploring the collected writings of Brother Lawrence known as The Practice of the Presence of God. Brother Lawrence followed a path of spirituality that centered upon being continually aware of God’s presence and entering conversation with God. This resulted in his daily tasks, from cooking in the kitchen to mending shoes, to becoming acts of love for God that drew Brother Lawrence repeatedly back into God’s presence. As we go through this series, we will be discussing how Brother Lawrence’s practices can be incorporated into students’ lives both during graduate school and especially after. This way everything that we do, we may be able to do it for the love of God.

For more information on how Ascension can support you in your graduate studies or can help a Grad student you know, please contact Chris Kirkland.

Celebrating Our Volunteers!



By LuAnn Pengidore, Director of International Ministry

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I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. (John 10:10)

Art and Mari Stormer, a retired couple who have been coming to Ascension for 15 months, are already actively involved in international ministry - Art as a faithful level 0 instructor, weekly conversation partner for three men, and a good friend to students; Mari is a Ted talks instructor, regular conversation partner, and attendee in the current Foundations class with two internationals. Both have helped in the Journeys Bible study last fall, in Robin Capcara's current study of Luke, and have appreciated the opportunity to participate in a Spanish Bible study led by an Ecuadorian woman. What this couple enjoys most about participating in field trips is the opportunity to become older friends to students. Though busy with their grandchildren, Art and Mari also help students take driver tests, and even stay late to take out the garbage at celebrations. In keeping with John 10:10, they help bring life to the full!

Currently, Art is working part-time administering National Assessment of Educational Progress exams, and Mari



is a fill-in nurse at the East Liberty Family Health Care Center. Though not childhood sweethearts, Mari and Art attended the same elementary school in rural, northcentral Ohio. At 25, after working in Malawi and Ecuador respectively, they married and served in Kenya with Mennonite Central Committee where Art taught math and science, and Mari worked as a nurse. More recently, the Stormers were helping Venezuelan asylum seekers in Ohio become adjusted to life in the States. Art retired from teaching at a rural high school in western Ohio, and Mari retired from teaching in Indiana Wesleyan University's RN-to-BSN program.

Mari writes: "Friends in the past have expressed surprise at our passion for



working with internationals; however, God has given us such a love for befriending internationals that it is just fun for us, and not a sacrifice at all. We are thankful for any involvement we can have.” Mari notes that coming to Church of the Ascension has been “a life-saver for us” since many of their new friends are participating in the international ministry in some way. Both Art and Mari enjoy learning about students’ home countries and cultures and have found sharing the basics of Christianity with those who are unfamiliar with the faith to be especially meaningful. Mari adds “I really admire students who risk everything to step into the unknown and challenge themselves in another country.” The pandemic has limited the Stormers’ ability to entertain internationals in their home, but they hope that will change soon.

Like the Stormers, Ann Tefft has been a faithful discussion leader in the international ministry. Currently, she is leading a Bible study with Meg Sateia on Monday mornings online. Mother Ann has most enjoyed the amazing combinations of cultures that exist in the group – which presently consist of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean students. Ann believes that similarities inevitably emerge, and in a way, they work toward world peace in these classes. “I have to admit,” Ann says, “I love being with young people and just hearing how they think.” While Ann doesn’t enjoy using Zoom since “she sometimes feels clumsy,” she adds “it still has been good for me personally to put together Bible studies as a good review, and a discipline to be faithful in preparing well.”

Thank you to the Stormers and Ann and the many volunteers who give of your time each week to love internationals through this ministry. Want to get involved? There are always opportunities. If you would like to assist a Thursday night class, help a new Afghan refugee become comfortable in the city, or teach two women to drive, email LuAnn.

The Primary Value of Kindness in Kids' Ministry



By Jay Slocum, Curriculum Developer
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Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Ephesians 4:32)

My Father was a kind man. He was always eager to help others, was quick to smile and even quicker to laugh and was the kind of man who got right down on the ground to talk to a child so that he or she would not feel intimidated by him. When I say he was kind I do not mean the dishonest kindness of saying kind words one does not mean in order to “keep up appearances” or the shallow kindness of always seeming agreeable but not able to be so when it requires sacrifice or grit. CS Lewis called this type of kindness “mere kindness” and contrasted it to the kindness that occurs when we truly love God and others. Once, when our dog Clyde had gotten very old and begin to have difficulty functioning in his duties as a dog, my father declared that he was going to the local large animal veterinarian to “get a needle” so that he could “put the dog down.” Of course, this deeply distressed me, and I asked him why he was ending our dog’s life. His response was brief, as most of his responses, and he merely said, “It’s not kind to let a lame dog suffer. It’s selfish and cruel. He has to be put down.” That he did it himself, holding the large black and white Husky-Lab mut in his lap and rocking him like a baby as the dog went limp and he cried like a baby, is not a memory I will ever forget or a lesson I will forget either. Sometimes kindness is very difficult. But, my father, true to himself, was kind when it was easy and when it was hard.

Pittsburgh’s own Fred Rogers, the legendary children’s minister, once said these fairly well-known words, “There are three ways to ultimate success: The first way is to be kind. The second way is to be kind. The third way is to be kind.” Mr. Rogers, like my father, was a kind man. His kindness cost him, mattered, and was relentless. One cannot watch Mr. Rogers Neighborhood without seeing his kindness seep out into the set, the way the guests were

treated, and his way with children. He valued kindness as a core value, and it showed in the way he carried himself in this world and in the way he did his work.

When the global pandemic shut down in person children’s ministry at Ascension in the early months of 2020, Catherine and I realized, over time, that children’s ministry had both a massive challenge and an equally massive opportunity before it. What has helped us to navigate much of this change have been the core values we adopted in the early months of the pandemic. At first, the list was longer and included Truth, Grace, Kindness, Inclusion, Service, Beauty, Rest, Play, Listening and Hospitality. But, as time passed and repeated experience allowed for refinement, we have rested on Truth, Grace, Kindness, Listening and Beauty as the five core values that the children’s ministry team uses to guide us in shaping lessons, creating Kid’s Church culture and in making important decisions. We could adopt any number of values, but these seem to be both primary and applicable to the ministry that we are forming at this time and in this place. For instance, though Service is crucial to the Christian life, Grace and Kindness create conditions for Service to take place.

Recently, I observed Catherine responding to children who asked to take an extra snack for their brother or sister “Yes, you are allowed to take an extra snack with you if you have a brother or sister.” I asked her why she made this decision. She shared with me that she, “thought it really lined up with our values.” She went on to say that this act of kindness is exactly in line with our values; it was both kind and gracious.

At Ascension’s Kids’ Church, our vision is to create the conditions for kids to want to gather every Sunday to learn more about the love and forgiveness of Jesus. And we are finding that when we create curriculum and classrooms that are filled with Truth, Beauty, Kindness, Listening and Grace, kids delight in the time we share together.



An Invitation from Disability Ministry



By James Scannell

Participant, Ascension Special Needs Ministry

I want to fill you all in on some good work done by people in the disability ministry group. We have cooked for Shepherd's Heart, made muffins for isolated people, wrapped gifts for seniors, put candles in holders for Christmas Eve service, and sorted recycling.

We are delighted to use our hands in the service of the church. We would love to be joined by others who have different gifts that can complement ours—we don't want to be in a ghetto of disability but wish to live our lives in unity with people of all types. Would you consider joining us?



More Than Stones New Building Update



By Jonathan Millard, Rector

jonathan.millard@ascensionpittsburgh.org

Since reporting the good news of completing the goals of our More Than Stones Capital Campaign at the end of last year, we are now glad to be able to move forward with preparatory work for the new construction.

Phase One focused on the Stone Masonry and the Nave and is now almost finished. The only major work left to do is the reinstallation of the restored stained-glass windows. This should be completed in May of this year.

Phase Two will be comprised of the expansion and construction of the new Ethel and Ken Bailey Hall; the addition of the New Narthex; and the creation of the Carlucci Commons. The detailed design work is now complete, and the architects are working on the construction documents. These will be sent out for competitive bidding in the next couple of months and all the necessary permits will be sought. God-willing, we are on target for groundbreaking in July. We expect the whole project to be finished in the autumn of 2023.

Please keep this extensive building project in your prayers:

- for our Architectural Team at Rothschild Doyno Collaborative
- for our General Contractor – Jendoco Construction Corporation
- for favorable bids on the many sub-contracts
- for the necessary permits to be granted in a timely fashion
- for the cleaning out of different areas of the church to prepare for construction
- for patience as we head into a season of physical disruption

NATHAN VAN PATTER

LENTEN ART PIECE

What do you know about Knotweed?




CHURCH OF THE
ASCENSION

A piece of artwork from Nathan Van Patter will be displayed on a back table in the Nave for the purpose of Lenten reflection.

Worship Services **Sunday 9:00 am , 11:00 am Nave Services** with [YouTube](#) live stream.

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