

The Ascent

MAY-JUNE 2022

ASCENSIONPITTSBURGH.ORG



Fearfully and Wonderfully Made



By James Scannell
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Dear Church Family,

I am planning on interviewing several people with disabilities in the next few months.

These people are often pushed to the side and their voices are not heard. I hope this column helps us all know and love one another better. I've called it "Fearfully and Wonderfully Made" because I think that some members of the body are viewed as defective when in fact we are all beautifully made by God.

My first interview is with Hannah Lam. She types on her phone to communicate and I use a letterboard. It was one quiet exchange!

Note: Hannah attends the 9:00 am service and James the 11:00 am. They met participating in the disability ministry.

J: Hi Hannah. I am so glad to talk to you today. Please tell me how you came to Ascension.

H: I came to Ascension by someone from Achieva emailing that they were looking for more girls. [Achieva is a nonprofit organization that provides various comprehensive services and support for children and adults with disabilities and their families.]

J: So interesting. How do you like it here?

H: I am so peaceful and I love songs.



J: Love it that you feel comfortable and peaceful at church. Tell me more about your disability.

H: I am an 18p. It is part of the 18p chromosome disorder where I miss a part of the chromosome arm.

J: How does this affect your life?

H: I always have to have my ID along, otherwise I will be called a kid.

J: I think that sounds frustrating. I wonder what else is hard about it.

H: Sometimes I will have to wear mature clothes.

J: How do you spend your days?

H: Normally I work in the morning from 10 am to 2 pm. I love walking and watching TV.

J: What would you like people in church to know about you?

H: I am smart in math and numbers.

J: So interesting. I'll bet people don't give you credit for how smart you are. I'm glad you know it. I'm curious, what helps you feel belonging?

H: Going to work and Starbucks and church are my favorite places to go.

J: I'm so happy that you feel connected. I'm wondering if there is anything else you'd like people to know?

H: I got a degree in accounting.

J: Wow. I had no idea. That's so great. I think we're good. Thank you, Hannah, I'm so glad we talked.

H: Yeah, me too.

Music & Worship Arts

Remembering the Way



By Elise Massa, Assistant Director of Music and Worship Arts

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Throughout Eastertide, our Stations of the Cross (among other artwork) will line our glass hallway until Pentecost. Why keep the stations visible past Good Friday? Shouldn't the Easter season shift our focus to the celebration that Jesus is victorious over death, and that he offers that same victory to his people?

While we certainly lean into Christ's victory and joy during the Easter season, this should not cause us to lean away from the painful realities that still mark our daily lives. We hope that this glass hallway gallery will provide a physical practice to help us to remember:

- To remember that Jesus rose from the dead only after he suffered The Way of the Cross.
- To remember that we too, as the Body of Christ, regularly walk our own roads of suffering with the hope of the Risen Savior set before us.
- To remember that there are those in our community who are poor in spirit, who mourn, who struggle financially, and Jesus calls them blessed and heirs of the Kingdom of God (Matt. 5:3-4, James 2:5).

So let us remember The Way of the Cross this Eastertide. And just as Christ has been raised, let us remember that he also will raise up the poor, the brokenhearted, the last, the least, and the lost. And that is Good News!

Be Transformed More and More



By Kevin Antlitz, Assistant Rector
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In Romans 12:1-2, Paul exhorts the Christians in Rome to respond to the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ by devoting themselves to the Lord in counter-cultural ways. This is an incredibly rich passage.

Here's my attempt at a Peterson-Message-esque translation of it:

"So I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, empowered by the mercies of God, to offer your entire lives, in every sphere of life, as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is the true and fitting way to worship Him who has done so much for you. Do not continue on a trajectory of being conformed to the patterns of this present age, but be transformed more and more by the renewing of your minds, so that you can discern and approve what the will of God is – that which is good, and pleasing and perfect."

One of the ways we hope to help Church of the Ascension live these verses out is through Theology Pop Ups (TPUs). These Pop Ups exist to provide an occasional space for spiritual formation that complements the rhythms of the

church year. Our vision is that they would help equip the saints to grow up into Christ by engaging with timely questions on theology, spirituality, and culture.

In this article, I will highlight three upcoming TPUs during Eastertide and Pentecost and the Ascension members who are helping to lead them.

Feasting on the Word: Training in Inductive Bible Study and Lectio Divina led by Robin Capcara

When? Saturday, May 14 9:00-10:30 am and 11:00 am-12:00 pm

Where? Hunt Rooms.

During Eastertide, we are hosting two back-to-back seminars to help you learn how feast on God's word. The first session (9:00-10:30 am) will cover the Inductive Bible Study method. This is ideal for those who want to learn how to study the Bible for themselves or to help lead a Bible study.

The second session (11:00 am-12:00 pm) will focus on Lectio Divina, which is a different, more contemplative way of engaging with Holy Scripture. Feel free to come to one or the other or both!

No experience is necessary. This will be a good refresher for the seasoned Bible student and a great introduction for someone newer to reading the Scriptures. We do ask that you sign up with the online form to insure we have enough space for everyone.

Here's a little information on Robin:



Robin has been a member of Church of the Ascension for 31 years (!!). She raised both of her kids here. She was on staff at Ascension from 2002-2008 as Director of Adult Formation. Over the years, she has served in more ways than we have space to describe here and currently serves on the vestry and Parish Discernment Committee.

For work, Robin serves as the InterVarsity Pittsburgh Team Leader for Graduate and Faculty Ministries. Her primary focus is ministering to university faculty at Carnegie-Mellon, Pitt and Duquesne universities where she equips Christian professors to be salt and light at the university.

Behold the Glory of the Lord: Maxo Vanka Mural Tour co-hosted by Nathan Van Patter and Father Kevin

When? Sunday, May 29 at 4:00 pm

Where? St. Nicholas Croatian Catholic Church, Millvale, PA

Join us for a private tour of one of the hidden gems of Pittsburgh: the remarkable Maxo Vanka murals in St. Nicholas Croatian Catholic Church. Vanka, a Croatian artist, painted these stunning and powerful murals. The murals weave together Christian themes applied contextually to the times and are a radical protest against the forces of death and destruction in the early 20th century including WWI and Fascism.

The private tour for Ascensionites will be co-hosted by Nathan Van Patter. The cost is \$5 per person (the money goes towards restoring and maintaining the murals). If the cost is an issue, don't let it stop you from joining us! Just let us know and we'll happily cover it.

Here's a little information on Nathan.

Nathan is a member of Ascension and serves as a Community Group leader. He has been a social worker for the last ten years and in his spare time he devotes himself to making art (some of which was showcased in the nave during Lent) about his neighborhood. Maxo Vanka is a primary inspiration for Nathan's own artistic work. Vanka combined religious themes with humanism in a way that



did credit to both – making spirituality visceral and humanism transcendent. Inspired by this, Nathan hope to get to where he can do the same with his art. Nathan visits the murals every few years as a touchstone to help him remember why he paints and will be a remarkable resource for us on this tour.

Book Discussion of *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* by Gordon Fee co-hosted by Ginger Weeber, Jess Bennett and Father Kevin

When? Wednesday, June 8 from 7:00-9:00 pm

Have you ever wondered about the role of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life? Or the role of the Spirit in the Old Testament? Have you ever wanted to learn more about the fruit of the Spirit or spiritual gifts? Have you ever wanted to have a better grasp of the Trinity

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, then you should join us in reading and discussing Gordon Fee's excellent book on the Holy Spirit. You'll need to order a copy of the book (there are plenty of used copies available online). If the cost of the book is an issue, let me know and we'll help get you a copy.

We will meet during the season of Pentecost. Stay tuned for an online sign-up sheet. Once we know who is joining us, we'll arrange a mutually agreeable time.

Here's a little information on Ginger:



Ginger has been a part of Ascension since 1990. She and Dave raised their children here. Ginger has served in a number of ways at the church and she currently is serving as the Rector's Warden. For work, Ginger has served on staff of Coalition for Christian Outreach (CCO) for her several decades. She has served as Regional Director, Intern Director,

Summer Training Director, First-Year Staff Training Coordinator, Leadership Development Coordinator, and she now works in Development.

Who Will Go?

By Nathan Twichell

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Erika and I first touched down in Chiang Mai in January of 2018. We left behind familiar Pittsburgh, blanketed in snow and ice, and stepped out of the airport into warm air, thick with the unfamiliar sounds of motorbikes and open-air taxis. The next morning, we worshipped with our Thai brothers and sisters at Saint Andrew's Anglican Church. As the sounds of Thai worship songs filled the chapel, I gripped Erika's hand and said, "We have to get folks from Ascension here!"

The Kingdom of Thailand is a country of almost 70 million, 95% of the population being Buddhist, with less than 2% of Thais knowing Jesus. Being a Christian in Thailand is not physically dangerous, but it does come at a huge social cost. Christian converts are often ostracized by their families, and much of the country's holidays and public celebrations are centered around Buddhism. In front of many homes and businesses are spirit houses, small shrines for the spirits of the land, sometimes filled with figurines representing a family for customary ancestor worship. Chiang Mai is also home to more than 200 Buddhist wats, or temples. Thailand is what is considered an unreached nation, and is a country in deep need of the Good News of Jesus Christ. God is moving in the hearts of the Thai people.

Saint Andrew's was planted by the Anglican Diocese of Singapore almost 8 years ago. In the face of difficult cultural challenges, the church has grown into a vibrant family that shares meals together, encourages each other in discipleship, and shines the light of the Gospel in the surrounding community. Their love for each other and zeal for missions is inspiring. We want you to come with us and see for yourself!

In mid-January 2023, Ascension will be sending a team of up to 8 parishioners to Chiang Mai to support the work of Saint Andrew's, working in two very different sites. First, we'll encourage our Thai brothers and sisters in Christ, and read children's books with the students at the church's English language preschool and kindergarten. The school serves predominantly middle-class families who desire for their children to learn English, the overwhelming majority of whom have

never heard the name of Jesus. We'll also take an overnight trip to the rural area of Omkoi. Here, the Anglican Church in Thailand runs a discipleship home for kids from surrounding villages who have to travel to Omkoi to attend high school. The students here are from a long persecuted ethnic minority, the Karen. This area experienced deep poverty, but also a greater acceptance of the Gospel.

So who should go? This trip is for anyone over 21 who has a desire to see the global Anglican church, a heart for children, and a desire to serve. We'll enter with the posture of learners, eager to learn how our brothers and sisters minister in this unique context. The trip will require flexibility and adaptability as things usually don't go according to plan when serving cross culturally. But if you have a desire to see the heart of God in and through this amazing culture, this trip is for you. Each participant will be expected to raise their support for the trip, and as part of our preparation, we will be coaching participants in support raising.

Before our departure, we will meet together eight times, to prepare for support raising, to prepare our hearts and attitudes as learners, to serve together locally, and to spend time with our friends in Chiang Mai virtually in cultural and language prep.

If you feel God's tug at your heart to come and see what God is doing in Thailand, would you pray about applying? The link for the application is in the announcements, and on our website. As much as we wish for everyone to be able to participate in this trip, space will be limited!

Apply using this link: <https://forms.gle/kcMZAkan767SHwvz9>

Travel dates: January 13-22, 2023

Application due: June 30, 2023

Support raising goal: \$2,000

More information: natetwichell@hotmail.com



Music & Worship Arts

Letting Veronica Walk By: How Our Preferences Can Get in the Way of Worship



By Chris Massa, Director of Music and Worship Arts
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If you have attended Good Friday services here at Ascension, you have most likely experienced a version of the Stations of the Cross. While the Stations is an ancient prayer practice, my first exposure to it was as a student at a campus ministry retreat.

I found the practice itself beautiful, but as is probably not uncommon for those from certain evangelical traditions, I was somewhat confused by the sixth Station: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus. The retreat leader must have anticipated that this would be the case, so he had a response ready before a question was even asked. “Veronica isn’t a biblical figure,” he said, “but don’t let that get in the way for you. If Veronica bothers you, just let her walk by.”

At the risk of stating the obvious, “worship” is a very good thing. It is, in fact, one of the primary callings and purposes of the Christian life. However, it can also be a bit of a nebulous concept, and I wonder if “worship” is a word that is somewhat misused. We may visit a church and say that the worship was either good or bad, often based on the music, the sermon, or any of the other elements that make up a worship service. We may even use the term “worship”

to describe a style of music. And when something happens that we don’t like or were not expecting — i.e., a song or style of music, the quality of someone’s speaking or singing voice — we may say that we struggled to worship, or even were unable to worship.

Without getting too far into the weeds about how good, bad, or inevitable this may be, I want to suggest that when we use the word “worship” in this way, we’re not actually talking about worship at all. We’re talking about personal preference.

The Bible has a lot to say about worship, and a brief survey will uncover vast riches. But there is no place in the Bible where it says we should only worship when things are aligned with our personal preferences, when the things around us are as good as they can be or to our taste. Quite the contrary, in fact. In Habakkuk 3:17-18, we hear the prophet going into some detail about how everything is going wrong, how nothing seems to be working out for him:

“Though the fig tree does

not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails, and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold, and there is no herd in the stalls...” And how does he respond? Is his worship of God hindered or limited by his circumstances? Not at all. “Yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the



artwork from the Stations of the Cross from the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Portland

God of my salvation.” Habakkuk is not talking about a worship service here, but I do think his willingness — more than that, his desire — to worship in any and all circumstances is relevant and instructive for us. Perhaps, in our own contexts, we may imagine something like this: “Though the songs were unfamiliar and the sermon was too long; though the singer was off-key and the prayers meandered; though a screen was in the way and there were typos in the bulletin, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation.”

Sometimes I wonder if we have turned worship into something like gardening — add just the right amount of water, pray for sunlight, and hope that worship is the end result — while it should be something more fluid, more flexible, less fragile than that. Worship is too good and too important a thing to be dependent upon our circumstances — upon whether our personal preferences are being met. Of course, we should strive to bring our best, and those in

leadership roles should always be seeking to hone their talents so that they are bringing the best they can to the Lord and the Church. (It’s also worth differentiating between those elements of a service that are distracting or not to our taste and those that are heretical—something that may require discernment and sound pastoral guidance—but that is outside the scope of this article.) But let’s not confuse the bringing of good gifts with a kind of worldly perfectionism, or with a desire for everything that happens to be suited to our tastes. We may wish Veronica wasn’t part of the Stations of the Cross, but she’s still there, whether we like it or not. But let’s not let that keep us from the duty, the calling, of worshiping the God of our salvation.

Spring Soul Care



By Andrea Millard, Director of Prayer Ministry & Leadership Development
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9:30-11:00 am, Hunt Rooms/Courtyard
 Saturday, May 21 & June 18

Soul Care mornings are designed for reflection and contemplation. Our mornings together feature a slower pace where we engage in active listening, intentional reading, and quiet meditation on God’s holy Word.

If the weather is nice, we meet in the courtyard (if not, we meet in the Hunt Rooms).

We begin and end each gathering in silence, and throughout the morning we leave plenty of space to linger in the presence of the Lord together.

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



Flexibility and Fellowship



By LuAnn Pengidore, Director of International Ministry
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*As for man, his days are like grass;
 Like a flower of the field, so he flourishes.*

*When the wind has passed over it, it is no more,
 And its place no longer knows about it.*

*But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to
 everlasting for those who fear Him,
 And His justice to the children's children,*

*To those who keep His covenant
 And remember His precepts, so as to do them.*

*The LORD has established His throne in the heavens,
 And His sovereignty rules over all.*

*Bless the LORD, you His angels,
 Mighty in strength, who perform His word,
 Obeying the voice of His word!*

-Psalm 103:15-20

We bless the Lord for his work in the International Program. Our goal is to offer internationals excellent English classes two to three times a week, to connect them to each other and the church (if they wish), and in doing so, to come alongside them in all areas of life.

This year, our participants stem from 26 countries, including Venezuela, Chile, Guatemala, Mexico, Ukraine, Russia, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Rwanda, Cameroon, China, Japan and Korea (to name a few). The 28 teachers in the program have offered 15 classes and four Bible studies each week. These include Grammar and Speaking, Pronunciation and Advanced Conversation, Beginner English and writing skills for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL).

We have also begun a new in person class, Singing and Pronunciation with Lara McGill.

If I had to choose two words to sum up what this year has looked like for us, they would be flexibility and fellowship. Teachers and students have been flexible as Covid rates have risen and fallen—some have come back to in-person classes (6-8 students per class), while others have stayed online (4-10 per class). Usually, 25-30 students join us twice a month for outings on Saturdays, and it is here that volunteers get to know many of the online students and their families.

During this season of war in Ukraine, we are trying to come alongside our students in prayer after class and help with the collection of money and supplies for Ukraine. The feelings of uncertainty caused by the war in Ukraine have led many students to linger a little longer after our online classes. They have questions such as: Will I be able to get a job here if the economy crashes? Will my parents have the resources to keep me in school? When will I see my home city again? Will my parents be ok?

There is so much to be praying for. On Mondays, during the 10For@4 call, volunteers, teachers and a few internationals pray in faith that God will be a Rock for us and our students during this uncertain time. We continue to pray together for each class by name. We also share prayer requests through a letter sent out to teachers during the week. We have definitely seen answers to these prayers as several students have gotten full-time jobs, babies have thrived after sicknesses, and sick students and teachers have maintained their courage and faith. After the call, we usually have a special time in which volunteers can share what God is doing in their ministry.

Thankfully, we have had many weekly volunteers from OWLS as well as some younger Ascension volunteers who serve as conversation partners for our students. This includes working on fluency or job interview questions. For example, one partner (Melita) helped a student improve her reading so that she passed a nurses-aid test at UPMC and was offered a higher paying job. This has made a significant difference in this student's life as she was previously working a lot of overtime. It is not only the teachers and partners who help our students. The students help each other find cars and better housing as they fellowship at the museum luncheon, after Sunday services, or as they volunteer, cooking meals for Shepherd's Heart.

To be able to share what Ascension is doing and learn from other programs, Daniel Behrens, Denise Cox and I attended a conference in Dallas with SAMS. I also attended the CELT conference (Christian English Language Teachers) here at Ascension in March, and the National TESOL conference at Pitt. It is a privilege to share ideas from this program and gain insight and encouragement from others.

Thank you for partnering in this ministry and helping the new refugee program get off to a good start with Daniel Behrens.

Would you pray for us (especially the Ukrainian and Eastern European students) as we wait to find out what this summer will hold for their countries? Can you pray as we start a new semester in May and June and bring more classes back in person? Can you pray as two students are preparing for baptism? Can you pray as we seek to train new teachers and review the year at a retreat?



A Lenten Path for Kids:

Truth or Lies Desert Board Game



By Catherine Slocum, Director of Children's Ministries

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Every year we inaugurate Lent with the story of Jesus in the wilderness. We took on this difficult passage in Kids' Church by playing the "Truth or Lies Desert Board Game." Using sand boxes, animal figurines, images of the devil and props to make a garden sanctuary we moved through the wilderness together.

Each child was given an animal figurine game piece that they moved through the five levels of the desert aiming to get to the sanctuary garden zone. As we approached each, the paper devil's obvious lies would be called out like "A very stinky camel sleeps in your bed at night." When a child would respond with the truth, "That's not true! I sleep with my little stuffie not a stinky camel!" then we would bury the paper devil in the sand and together call out "Resist the Devil and he will flee from you!" and move on to the next level. We continued fighting lies with truth until we all made it to the sanctuary garden. We found this game to be effective and engaging for the kids learning how to combat one of the main methods the devil uses to trick us. It is our hope that the children will experience a dynamic Kids' Church program each Sunday and we are blessed with a growing team who serve our kids!



A shout out to our Sunday morning team (made up of about 50 folks) who serve on a rotation in the nursery or Kids' Church program. They faithfully share God's love with nearly 100

children who participate on Sunday morning. We also have a weekly prayer group team who gather by zoom each Tuesday afternoon to pray for our families, saying aloud each child's name. In addition to these two teams, we have a nursery auxiliary team who care for our children during gatherings outside of Sunday morning. Please pray for all of our teams! Below are names of our current Sunday morning volunteers and caregivers.

Our Kids' Church teaching team is Jay Slocum, Mari Stout, Tyler Foxwell, Susan Antlitz, Adrienne Von Bloch, Emma and Mike Juday, Bethany and JB Ward and Josh Misner.



Also, our youngest children enjoy a circle time in the nursery when they hear a bible story from our caregiver team. Thank you Enkhlyn Bayar, Grace Shook, Susannah Carlucci, Rachel Steele and Patricia Masso for helping lead this time. We are also praising God for all the support of our assistants in both the nursery and Kids' Church and our fabulous music team; Andrea Huber, Beth Vassallo, Brenna Markley, Brian Von Bloch, Christina Silva, Clay Brockman, Davita Stout, Dabney Robinson, Elise Massa, Elisa Cardosi, Greg and Rebecca Sparks, Heidi Mayhew, Hannah Quinn, Hannah Halfhill, Hayden Suit, Jane Banfield Hicks, Jill Shook, Jen Newhouse, Josh and Jess Bennett, Megan Foxwell, Meg Sateia, Meg Scanlon, Rachel Becker, Rebekah Behrens, Selah Halfhill, Tetiana Savchuk and Wes Williams.

Ascension is greatly blessed with the opportunity to invest in the next generation! If you would like to join in a children's ministry team, please contact me by text or email at 412-977-7714 or catherine.slocum@ascensionpittsburgh.org.

Tell your children about it in the years to come, and let your children tell their children. Pass the story down from generation to generation. – Joel 1:3

C A Y G Church of the Ascension Youth Group: Going the Distance



By Alex Banfield Hicks, Director of Youth and College Ministry
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Everyone is welcome to April 30th's Marathon Eve Lasagna Fundraiser Dinner! Just come to the Parish Hall after Ascension's 5pm Worship Service. \$10 per person entrance cost, which buys you a full dinner! 10s and under cost just \$5.

Proceeds will go to our 'Going the Distance' Fund to support our young Christians as they run the race with perseverance through the transition from youth group to college and beyond.

I look forward to gathering with our Ascension family to share what God has been doing amongst our youth group since the last time we had a Marathon Overnight (2019) and to give a glimpse of what lies ahead! We aim to finish at 8pm.

Youth and volunteers who want to stay for the Overnight and serve at the Marathon on Sunday morning, May 1, need to sign up via our youth group website at <https://caygonline.com/marathon-overnight/>

Coffee and Councils



By Chris Kirkland, CCO Graduate Ministry
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This May, Jubilate Graduate Ministry will be launching its next chapter of the Coffee and Councils series. Last summer, we explored the great debates around The Trinity and Incarnation and the formations of the first creeds of the Early Church.

This summer, we will journey the medieval councils (700 -1500 AD) and wrestle with questions around the relationship between church and state, the nature of the sacraments, and grace and justification. We will explore the social and cultural context driving these debates and scriptural passages that they drew upon. I hope you will join us in May and June for this exploration of theology and scripture through an historical lens!

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 at: 412-716-1617



THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Laurelville Parish Retreat

September 30 – October 2, 2022



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

Website www.ascensionpittsburgh.org

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About The Ascent *The Ascent* is published monthly by Church of the Ascension.
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Kristen Parise, Publisher



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