

The Ascent

LENT 2023

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Lent at Ascension

Raising Future Leaders for the Wider Church



By Jonathan Millard, Rector

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Made to Flourish

Ascension has long been a church that raises up and equips future leaders – both lay and ordained. During my time as Rector, I have had the joy of walking alongside thirty people discerning a call to ordination (nineteen men and eleven women). As I have watched many of these people go off to seminary and become ordained, I have often thought, “if only we could keep them at Ascension for a couple of years to more fully prepare and equip them for a lifetime of healthy, flourishing ministry and *then* launch them for service in the wider Church.”

An answer to that yearning is on the horizon. Over the course of the last twelve months, the leadership at Ascension has been thinking, praying, and exploring ways that we might launch a robust clergy training program. I am delighted to share that this dream is about to become a reality.

We became aware of an opportunity from our Assistant Rector, Fr. Kevin, who went through a *Made to Flourish* sponsored Curacy Program in Washington, DC. In March 2022, the Vestry unanimously endorsed Ascension’s application for a *Made to Flourish* start-up grant. (You can learn more about *Made to Flourish* online: <https://www.madetoflourish.org/what-we-do/pastoral-residencies>.)

One of the core ministries of *Made to Flourish* is the establishment of Pastoral Residencies. They describe it this way:

“Just as teaching hospitals provide real-life experience for young, talented doctors, a pastoral residency provides an irreplaceable learning laboratory for seminary graduates to grow in leadership, preaching, administration, and godly character.”

At Ascension, we will be calling our Pastoral Residents, “Curates”. *Curate* is a word often used in Anglican churches to describe a newly ordained member of the clergy who is in training. The word historically has been descriptive of a person who is entrusted with the care or “cure” of souls.

As part of our application for the *Made to Flourish* grant, our Senior Warden, Ginger Weeber, wrote:

“In a culture where fewer and fewer people grow up in the Church, and many (sixty-percent or more) who do grow up in the Church leave after high school, I believe deeply in the importance of raising up young leaders to reach the next generation. The church leadership and staff are committed, gifted, experienced people with deep faith, who are well able to carry out this Curacy Program. The congregation has a high degree of theological and biblical equipping, with a day-to-day living out of their faith in their work, family, and communities. We recognize our church is situated in such a way and in such a place that we are able to have an impact on the culture around us: universities, cultural institutions, hospitals, the tech industry, and more. We are called to prepare the next generation to reach people and influence institutions for the sake of Christ and His Kingdom.”

I am mindful of our Lord’s injunction, “To whom much is given, much is required” (Luke 12:48b). Equipping leaders for the wider Church is one way that we are responding to this call. I’m delighted that Marilyn Chislaghi will be our coordinator and liaison with the *Made to Flourish* team as we implement our Curacy Program at Ascension.

Just before Christmas, we received notice that we have been awarded a \$250,000 *Made to Flourish* grant to help us launch our Ascension Curacy Program. We will start with one curate in 2023 and add a second curate in 2024. Each curate will serve among us for two years. Over the course of the next decade, God-willing, we will be able to train and send out twenty new clergy to serve the wider Church.

Announcing Our First Curate: The Rev. Jess Bennett



Our Ascension Fellows Program (ending this summer), with Josh and Jess Bennett, has been a wonderful learning experience for us. I am delighted now to share that The Rev. Jess Bennet has accepted our invitation to be our first Curate! Mother Jess will begin her two-year Curacy on August 1. Happily, Fr. Josh will continue to worship with us, and I have invited him, starting this summer, to join our team of Liturgical Assistants.

Five Fridays at 5:00

The Observance of a Holy Lent



By Kevin Antlitz, Assistant Rector

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Every year, God's people gather on Ash Wednesday to commemorate the start of Lent. The celebrant begins the service with these sobering words:

"Dear People of God: The first Christians observed with great devotion the days of our Lord's passion and resurrection, and it became the custom of the Church to prepare for them by a season of penitence and fasting. This season of Lent provided a time in which converts to the faith were prepared for Holy Baptism. It was also a time when those who, because of notorious sins, had been separated from the body of the faithful, were reconciled by penitence and forgiveness, and restored to the fellowship of the Church. In this manner, the whole Congregation was put in mind of the message of pardon and absolution set forth in the Gospel of our Savior, and of the need that all Christians continually have to renew our repentance and faith.

I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, 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."

To help us observe a holy Lent, we have several offerings for the church. In addition to recommending a series of fasts (see our Prayer Guide) and encouraging individuals to participate in the Rite of Reconciliation (see Mt. Andrea's article), we will also be offering a service of Holy Eucharist during the week.

The services will be every Friday in Lent excluding the first Friday. That means there will be five of them (March 3, 10, 17, 24, and 31). The services will begin at 5:00 pm on Friday and they will last no more than an hour.

Here's what you can expect in these services. The mood of the services will be quiet and contemplative. Each week, those gathered will pray through a psalm of lament as well as the Great Litany (see pages 91-96 in the 2019 Book of Common Prayer). Our clergy will offer a brief meditation on a Lenten theme such as fasting, self-examination, or the wilderness. We will provide plenty of space for silence and contemplation and each service will end with the celebration of the eucharist.

On behalf of the staff and clergy at Ascension, I encourage you to come to at least one of these eucharistic services and, of course, you are welcome to come to all. May God meet us in a powerful way as we observe a holy Lent together.



Together on Tuesdays at 10:00 Join the Staff for Morning Prayer



By Andrea Millard, Director of Prayer Ministry & Leadership Development
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On Tuesday mornings throughout the year the Ascension staff team gathers weekly for Morning Prayer. This Lent, we invite you to pray with us! For six Tuesday mornings in Lent, please join us in the Gordon Chapel for Morning Prayer. Come to one gathering or come to all six.

What to Expect:

Each week a different staff member will lead this thirty-minute time of prayer, using the 2019 Book of Common Prayer. (Copies of the 2019 BCPs will be available for use during this service. No prior experience necessary.)

We begin promptly at 10:00 am. Our pattern is simple: we pray (using the Prayer Book liturgy); we read the appointed psalm(s) and scripture(s); we reflect together on what we've noticed or what has captured our attention; and then, we close in prayer.

We'd be delighted to have you join our staff team for this interactive prayer experience.

Dates: February 28, March 7, March 14, March 21, March 28, and April 4.

Time: 10:00 - 10:30 am

Location: Gordon Chapel

If you have any questions, please reach out to me.





The Way of the Cross

An Immersive Good Friday Experience for Kids



By Catherine Slocum, Director of Children's Ministry

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“Is this a feast?” was the cry when one of the children from Ascension’s Kid’s Church program entered the Hunt Room to find five long tables connected together to form a kid’s size rendition of the Last Supper. The tablecloths were the somber and stark white of Holy Week to signify a meal for a king on his way to a Cross.

But there was festivity mixed in with this meal to draw the children back in time to the Passover Feast that has been celebrated by the Jewish people for millennium. The children sat and ate big purple grapes, enjoyed bubbly grape juice, hummus and freshly made whole grain bread torn from a loaf. During the meal, the children were asked if their feet were clean. This opened a way to teach them about the meal that preceded Jesus’ death, his washing of the disciples’ feet, and the meaning of this rendition of the story rehearsed each year by Christians around the world.

After a good meal and lesson on Jesus’ last meal with his friends, adult volunteers washed the feet of each child in the room, mostly to their delight. What followed was a trip to “Dark Gethsemane” (In the New Catacombs of the Church) where a betrayal was acted out, costumes and all. A cross was presented. The children, taking in the Way of the Cross, scene by scene, then got to witness the scary parts, when Jesus was mocked, and when he had to carry the cross. They acted this out by carrying a full size cross as a group and practiced hammering nails in the cross in the beautiful courtyard outside the Hunt Rooms.



With Sight, Sound, Smell, Taste, Action and dynamic teaching, kids experienced an immersive Good Friday that allowed even the “wiggliest” of kids to engage in this complex, tragic, beautiful story that is the foundation for our hope of a new day on Easter. This year, we will enact this service again and we so look forward to your child being a part of this holy learning experience. We look forward to seeing your children in the Hunt Room on Good Friday from 12:00 – 2:00 pm. They are welcome to invite a friend!

Music & Worship Arts

Sing, My Tongue, The Glorious Battle:

Presenting Charles Wood's *St. Mark Passion*



By Chris Massa, Director of Music and Worship Arts
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*Sing my tongue, the glorious battle,
sing the last, the dread affray;
O'er the cross, the victor's trophy,
sound the high triumphal lay,
how, a victim's death enduring,
earth's Redeemer won the day.*

There is a robust and beautiful tradition of singing the story of Good Friday, of choirs and soloists singing the story of Jesus's betrayal, sentencing, crucifixion, and burial. The roots of this practice go back at least to Gregorian chant, and composers throughout the centuries have built on this tradition by using music to retell and reframe the Passion narrative.

Why should we sing the Passion? As aesthetically beautiful as a Passion may be, I'm convinced that its value goes much deeper than that. Simply stated, we internalize words differently when we sing them (or hear them sung) than when they are spoken. Singing the Passion narrative is a beautiful and powerful way of hearing the story of Jesus' final days in a new way, of finding new and surprising facets of the Good News. It is worth saying that, with few exceptions, musical settings of the Passion end at either the death of Christ or his burial, not his resurrection. This should not be interpreted as a desire to ignore or deny the resurrection; rather, it is because a Passion is a piece about Holy Week and Good Friday, not about Easter. Don't worry: There are many other pieces, frequently written by the same composers, about the resurrection.

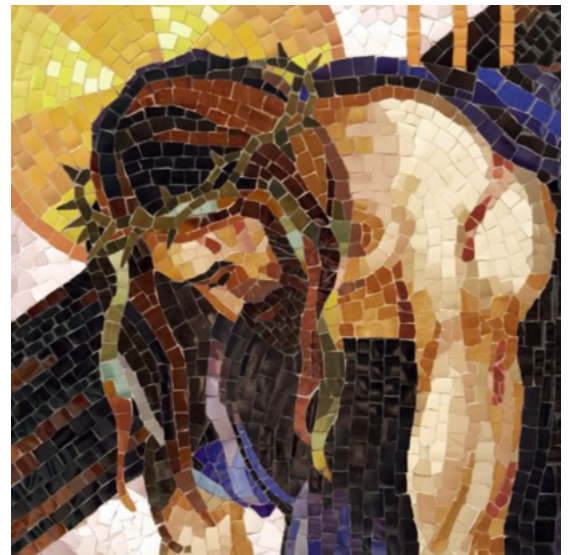
On Good Friday, the choir will be presenting one such setting of the Passion, written by the Irish composer Charles Wood in 1920. The piece is roughly an hour in length, and it will make up the third hour of the Good

Friday service, from about 2:00 - 3:00 pm. This will not be a concert.

The original score makes it very clear that the piece is intended to be part of a worship service, to direct the

listener's gaze to God, not to the musicians. What is more, those in attendance will be invited at various times to sit, stand, kneel, pray, and join in singing. Simply stated, it will be a worship service.

If you love singing, please consider this your invitation to join the choir for this special event. While the choir has already begun looking at the piece, it may be possible for more people to join, either on a permanent or short-term basis. Please talk to me, or email if you're interested. Whether or not you'll be a part of the choir, I really hope you can join us on Good Friday, and that you invite a friend or two. The more time I spend with the *St. Mark Passion*, the more I'm convinced that it is a remarkable work, both musically and theologically, and I'm certain that it will be a powerful and moving experience for all who are there.



Recommendations

Helpful Books



By Josh Bennett, Ascension Fellow
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Regarding Lent, Father Esau McCauley writes, “Our prayers, good deeds, fasts, and Scripture readings earn us nothing. Instead, they are Spirit-empowered means of entering into communion with Christ. They are about sharing the thing itself - the divine life. It's a gift we too easily cast aside.”

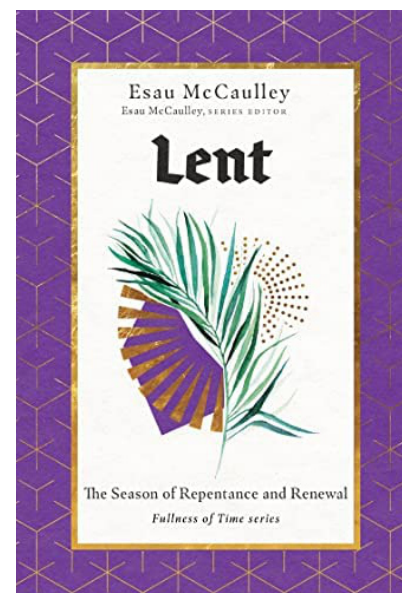
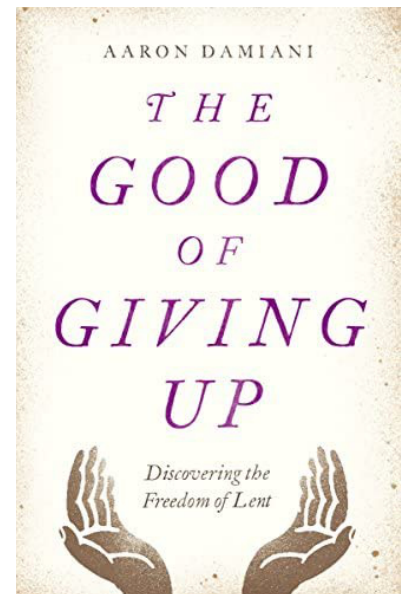
How might we not fall into this trap? The trap of casting aside the good gifts Lent has to offer?

Years ago, while attending Father Aaron Damiani's church in Chicago, I experienced Lent for the first time. As someone who did not grow up Anglican, it was an odd experience. I was distracted by the number of questions I had - both practical and theological. Shortly after, Damiani's book *The Good of Giving Up* was published. In the pages of this short book, I found myself eager to practice Lent. If you are new to Lent or, like me, you need to be reminded why it is we press into this liturgical season, I cannot recommend Father Aaron's book enough. He organizes it in three parts: 1. The Case for Lent, 2. The Path of Lent, and 3. Leading Others Through Lent (which includes a section on leading children through Lent). So many of my questions were answered and practical guidance was given. *The Good of Giving Up* paved the way for my whole-hearted participation.

Just released, Father Esau McCauley's book *Lent: The Season of Repentance*

and Renewal (Fullness of Time series) provides another refreshing and challenging look at Lent. Organized around the major days and practices of the season, he both informs and encourages our engagement. Chapter 1 begins by reflecting on Ash Wednesday and the grace found in remembering our sin. Chapter 2 considers the Lenten practices/themes of fasting, study, renewal, charity and social justice, and confession. Chapter 3 takes the time to consider the prayers (collects) for each week of Lent. Chapter 4, the final move, walks through Holy Week, reflecting on the significance of each day in the life of Christ and our lives here and now. Throughout, Father Esau draws the reader back to the heart of our God revealed in Christ — back to the mercy and grace that is found in Christ and that ought to be found in Lent. He also writes from the perspective of a black pastor and theologian, noting layers of significance and grace many of us may not have considered.

Ascension clergy and staff recommend both books. Neither is a Lenten devotional, rather they seek to shape our posture as we enter in. Consider choosing just one of these short books before deciding if and how you will practice Lent.



for Lent

Daily Lenten Devotionals



By Andrea Millard, Director of Prayer Ministry & Leadership Development
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For a multi-sensory devotional that features art, music, and reflection, check out Biola University's Center for Christianity, Culture and the Arts online devotional. When you sign-up, they will send you a daily email: <https://cca.biola.edu/resources/collection/devotions>

For a lectionary-based devotional, check out Trinity School for Ministry's offering. It features reflections written by students, faculty, staff, and alumni. It's available both in print and online: www.tsm.edu/media_and_resources

Lenten Soul Care



By Andrea Millard, Director of Prayer Ministry & Leadership Development
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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 engage in the disciplines of prayer, reading and meditating on God’s holy Word. We begin and end our gathering in silence, and throughout the morning we leave space for silence – we fast from words.

Lenten Soul Care provides us with a rhythm of slow, intentional, and focused time with the Lord by reading scripture and quietly lingering in the presence of the Lord together.

If you have not been to a Soul Care morning, Lent could be a great time to check it out. Join us on Saturday, March 18 from 9:30 - 11:00 am in the Hunt Rooms

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



The Rite of Reconciliation of Penitents



By Andrea Millard, Director of Prayer Ministry & Leadership Development
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“Penitent” is a churchy type of word. It refers to one who feels or shows regret and sorrow for those things done wrong. It’s a good Lenten word. Penitents are invited to bring their regrets and sorrows to the Lord, through the Church, using The Rite of Reconciliation (otherwise known as Confession).



Confession is an important part of Anglican spirituality. It is something we do each week as we gather for corporate worship. It is a daily spiritual practice for those who pray the Daily Office – Morning and Evening Prayer.

Confession is particularly suited for Lent. 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.

There is a helpful Anglican saying about this Rite: “All may, none must, some should.” There is no obligation to participate in Confession, yet many experience freedom and healing in this Sacramental Rite. There is something sacred in having another bear witness to our true repentance and commitment to amendment of life. There is healing when those things that block relationship with God, neighbor and self are confessed and forgiven. There is healing in hearing the words of absolution and, by the

power of the Holy Spirit, following Jesus’ command to “go and sin no more” (John 8:11).

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

Preparation: Come as you are. Some people know precisely what they need to confess. Others have more of a vague notion. There is no prescribed process for preparing for the Rite of Reconciliation, however, if you want ideas for preparing, you might consider the following:

Pray through the “Confession and Litany of Penitence” found in the Ash Wednesday liturgy (547-549) before your appointment; prayerfully pause on those petitions that speak to matters in

your life; ask the Lord to grant you a new and contrite heart.

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.”

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

If you have other questions about this Rite or to make an appointment, feel free to reach out to any of our staff priests – Jonathan Millard, Kevin Antlitz, Alex Banfield Hicks, Andrea Millard, Josh Bennett, Jess Bennett; with two of our Liturgical Assistants, Jack Gabig or Lauren Scharf; or with our Missionary in Residence, Daniel Behrens.

What is a Deacon?



By Archdeacon Mark Stevenson
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I am the Parish Deacon at Church of the Ascension. I am also the Archdeacon of the Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh. But what does this mean? Let's start with a definition of terms.

The diaconate refers to the office of deacon or a body of deacons collectively. The root word for deacon comes from the Greek *diakoneo*, to serve. A variation of the word is *diakonia*, servants. This is foundational because service is the basis of our ministries. But at its very heart is the servanthood of Jesus Christ, who says of himself, "...The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve..." (Matt. 20: 27). Deacons emulate, however imperfectly, the servanthood of Jesus Christ.

We trace our origin to post-Pentecostal Jerusalem as described in Acts 6. After the power of the Holy Spirit was unleashed, the infant Church experienced miraculous growth. But this growth led to conflict between Greek and Hebraic believers. The Greeks complained that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

To resolve the crisis, the twelve Apostles appointed a group of seven, all identified as "full of faith and of the Holy Spirit," to take responsibility for the distribution of the food. These seven are honored as the first *diakonoi*, whose call was to serve the poor and the marginalized.

But the diaconal remit quickly expanded. Acts tells us of Stephen, one of the seven, who was a bold preacher

and teacher of the Gospel, who was stoned to death for his witness. Philip, also one of the seven, helped to introduce the Gospel to North Africa by teaching the Ethiopian eunuch.

The diaconate continued to evolve on this foundation. Today deacons still share in the humility and service of Christ to strengthen the Church and the world. In the Church, the body of Christ, we represent him in the proclamation of the Gospel; by assisting the celebrant at the Communion Table, and helping in the distribution, and taking the Eucharist to the sick; and finally, by dismissing the congregation at the end of the service.

But very importantly, deacons are also called in the words of the Ordination service in the 2019 BCP, to "interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world... to encourage and equip the household of God to care for the stranger, to embrace the poor and helpless, and to seek them out, so that they may be relieved." We serve as a bridge between the church and world, our feet firmly placed in both.

What's the Archdeacon? Nothing more than the head deacon, a kind of deacon-to-the-deacons, who serves as a representative to the bishop. One of my roles as archdeacon is to organize an annual Convocation of Deacons, when we gather the deacons from the diocese for fellowship, prayer, and planning. This year we will meet at Ascension on Saturday, April 1 with Bishop Alex Cameron to discuss raising up the next generation of deacons. Please pray for us.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord!

Those Who Sow in Tears Shall Reap with Shouts of Joy

By Jen Hemphill, International Ministry Team

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Words that come to mind when thinking about the season of Lent are sacrifice, repentance, mortality, humility, lament. Many Christians partake in the Lenten practice of fasting, giving up time watching television, lurking on social media, eating treats, or drinking alcohol. For those of us who have plenty, giving up anything for Lent gets us in the mind of sacrifice and lament. For those of us who have everything we need, we find it hard to give up anything. We do not like discomfort, even for a season, especially if it reminds us that we are dust and to dust we shall return. We don't want to be reminded of that too often.

But there are people among us, here, specifically at Church of the Ascension in Pittsburgh, who have arrived drenched in sacrifice and humility and mortality and lament. The International Ministry of our church regularly welcomes people whose lives are marked by humility, to a degree most of us cannot understand. Their whole lives have been a daily practice of Lent.

Alejandro and Elaine are two people who have found their way to worship at Ascension through Tim Reed. They

have since been introduced to the international ministry's Conversation Café on Wednesday mornings. They are here from Cuba, where the economy is very bad and working conditions are extremely difficult. Alejandro, though mainly working for a software development company in Cuba, had to carry two other jobs to make enough money to care for his family. He and Elaine eventually escaped by vacationing in Nicaragua and making their way to the US through Mexico, legally. In Wexford, Elaine is a caretaker for a 96-year-old woman, Nana, and through this work she and Alejandro live in a spacious apartment in Nana's family's home. Alejandro has a landscaping job.

Elaine and Alejandro know sacrifice and mortality and humility, but when you ask them how their Christian faith is bolstered, they will tell you the harrowing details of their arrival in the US, highlighting each moment during that terrifying trip where they saw God's direct hand in their safety. They will point out God's provision to their lives now in Pittsburgh. Elaine hopes to take online classes through Trinity to become a priest. They are regular attendees at Ascension and attend the 11:00 am service.

Elaine and Alejandro have much to lament since they left Cuba - they miss their family, their two young children who they had to leave behind, and their church where they both worked - and yet they have arrived here



rejoicing at God's faithfulness. They still have needs: learning to drive, finding fellowship, getting their green cards. But they believe God is providing a future here for them.

Psalm 126 says, *He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.* Elaine and Alejandro's story reminds us of this. And when we practice sacrifice and lament for Lent it can help us to see where there are needs to be met around us. Church of the Ascension is blessed to have a location in Pittsburgh that brings the nations to our doors through the ESL and International Ministries to show us how we can be part of the work of God's kingdom here and now.

Prayer Pointers

Refugee Ministry – For our first community co-sponsorship in partnership with Hello Neighbor would proceed well. For the newly arrived family Ascension will be serving; and, for the leaders who are guiding the effort to help resettle this refugee family: Sarah VanderMolen, Mari Stout, Hannah and Andy Halfhill, Alan Irvine, Tyler Foxwell, and Kelly Shane.

International Ministry – For good relational connections to develop between Ascension volunteers and program participants.

Shelter Meal Ministry – For the preparation of meals offsite now that Ascension's kitchen is inaccessible; and, for the two leaders of this ministry: Jonathan Sewall and Brian Janaszek.

Special Needs Ministry – For the flourishing of all in our congregation with cognitive, developmental, and sensory disabilities.

Legacy – For our seniors' group as they continue to coalesce, grow in their faith, and enjoy monthly lunches and talks together.

Ascension Clergy and Staff – For wisdom as they order their days well to meet the needs of the congregation, their families, their own health, and their relationship with the Lord.

Ascension College Students and Young Adults – For those in this stage of life as they navigate education, jobs, and decisions about their futures.

Parish Hall Construction – For continued safety of workers and good progress on the building.

Jonathan and Andrea Millard – For grace and peace as they prepare to go on sabbatical (after Easter), and that

parish concerns not become overwhelming during Lent (we do not want them to begin sabbatical exhausted).

Bishop Grant and Dr. Wendy LeMarquand – For clarity and provision as they prepare to retire and move to Calgary, Alberta in June.

Chris and Leah Kirkland – For each to be blessed and be a blessing as they complete their time on Ascension staff at the end of May, and that the Lord would guide their steps.

Erika and Nate Twichell – For wisdom and trust as they are in a process of discernment regarding a call to ministry in Southeast Asia.

Ascension Wardens and Vestry – For unity and wisdom for our Senior and Junior Warden, including the incoming class of 2023 vestry, especially while Jonathan and Andrea Millard are on sabbatical April through mid-August.

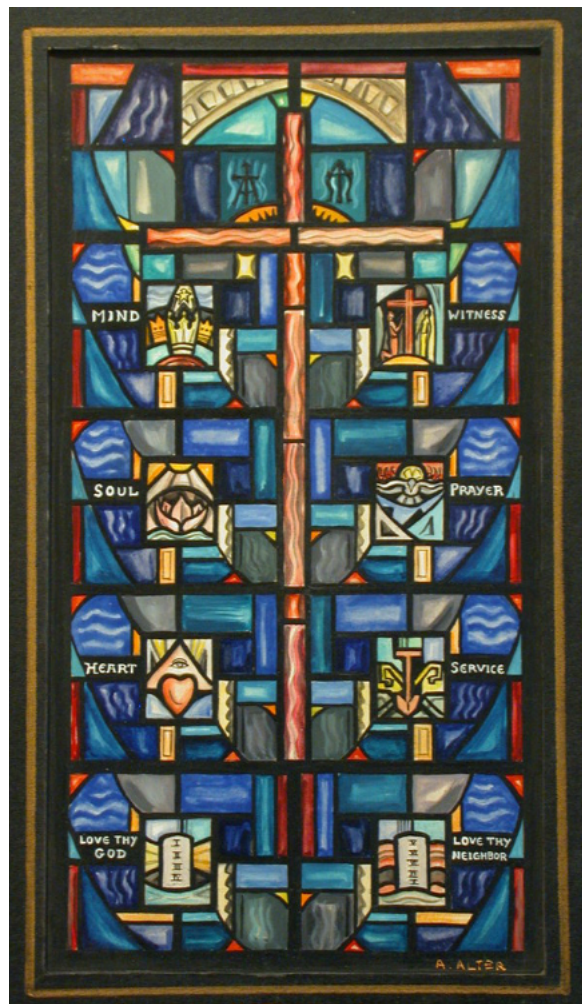
Children's Ministry – For additional teachers and childcare workers to minister to our children as attendance continues to increase.

Youth Ministry – For our youth as they navigate very difficult cultural challenges.

New Believers – For encouragement and joy for those international adults who were baptized at Ascension over the course of the past year; that they

will continue to grow in their relationship with Christ.

The Sick – For healing and comfort for those in our parish who face life-threatening and chronic diseases, and grace for those who care for them.



J. & R. Lamb Studios, Designer, and Alice Alter. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/item/2016677640/.

Anxiety and a Doctorate



By Alex Banfield Hicks, Director of Youth and College Ministry

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In a new article published last week in **JAMA Pediatrics**, researchers from the Health Resources and Services Administration find that anxiety and depression among children ages 3-17 have increased over the last five years.

Even before the pandemic, anxiety and depression were becoming more common among children and adolescents, increasing 27 percent and 24 percent respectively from 2016 to 2019. By 2020, 5.6 million kids (9.2%) had been diagnosed with anxiety problems.

Clearly one's worries don't go away when one turns 17. The Mayo Clinic published that "since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, rates of anxiety and depression among college students have increased substantially. A recent study found that 1 in 3 college students experiences significant depression and anxiety."

This all squares with my experience over the last seven years as Ascension's Director of Youth and College ministries. Those familiar with the Bible might point to Philippians 4:6 – 7:

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

But how can we do this, and help others to do so? How can we learn to pray through our anxieties as a community? And are there particular practices that families can do with pre-teens that might develop a habit of prayer that leads to resilience in the teen years and beyond?

I am very thankful to have just started my Doctorate in Ministry at Trinity School for Ministry, and would value your prayer, insights, and suggestions as I begin the journey asking these questions. May the ministry models that develop be a real blessing to this emerging generation.

Ready, Set, Launch!

An Update on the Refugee Ministry



By Daniel Behrens, Ascension Missionary in Residence
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Hopefully you have heard by now about Ascension's new Community Co-Sponsorship initiative. We are forming a team to walk with a newly arriving refugee family in partnership with Hello Neighbor, one of Pittsburgh's Refugee Resettlement Agencies. I want to share two exciting updates and a brief reflection as this pilot project moves forward.



First, the Legacy seniors group has led the way in gathering some of the household goods that this new family will need! Over November and December, group members selected and donated everyday items, from electric tea kettles to dish towels, which will help furnish someone's first home in Pittsburgh. Thank you to the Legacy group and especially Marilyn Chislaghi and Nancy Drew who organized this service project!

Second, I am excited to share that the leadership of our Co-Sponsorship team is taking shape! Our team leader is Kelly Shane, with support from Charlie Chislaghi, Kate Fisher and me. We then have Point People in the five primary areas of support for our refugee family. They are:

- Pre-Arrival and Welcoming - **Sarah VanderMolen** (sdvander@gmail.com), assisted by **Hannah Halfhill** (hhalfhill@gmail.com)
- Public Benefits & Services - **Andy Halfhill** (andy.halfhill@gmail.com)
- Healthcare - **Tyler Foxwell** (tylerjfoxwell@gmail.com)
- Education & Literacy - **Mari Stout** (macstout@gmail.com), assisted by **Sarah VanderMolen** (sdvander@gmail.com)
- Community Orientation & Engagement - **Alan Irvine** (alanirvine@aol.com)

A huge thank you to these brave volunteers! If you have an expertise or connection which may be useful in any of these areas, please send them a message so they know how to contact you as needs arise!

A question I hear a lot is, "Do we know where the refugee family is coming from?" At the time of writing this article, we do not. Pittsburgh agencies have recently received



families from the Congo, Ukraine, Honduras, Iraq, and Colombia, but our match will depend on the referrals that Hello Neighbor receives after our team is fully trained and certified. At this point, they could be from any ethnic, language, religious, or economic group.

The mystery of their identity reminds me of the Christian tradition of showing hospitality to strangers, Genesis 18 and Hebrews 13:2 are great examples! We might think of a stranger just as someone we don't know, but the New Testament word "xenos" is more specific. A stranger is out of place, far from their home, and particularly vulnerable to being forgotten or actively exploited. When Christians practice love for true strangers - to those from the other side of the world, to whom we have no obvious connection - we get to make the worldwide, unbiased Kingdom of God just a little more visible. And in ways that defy our understanding, we also get to know and love Jesus more deeply (Matthew 25:35)!

It has been humbling to see so many Ascension members eager to participate in just that - welcoming the stranger. I am excited for what is ahead for Ascension in this new ministry!

Through the Fire



By Millicent Smith, Ascension Vestry

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On the evening of Sunday, December 11, 2022, my downtown apartment building was on fire. I walked down the fire escape with two elderly ladies and when we got outside, we could see the flames shooting out the windows of one of the apartments.

As I was standing at the corner, a stranger, slightly inebriated, kept patting my shoulders and asking if I was okay. I said yes and then he said to me, “I’m not a religious person, but I think we should pray.” He cupped his hands and held them out to me. He waited for me to take hold of his hands, which I did. I thought he was going to start praying but realized he was waiting for me to pray. I prayed for the safety of all who were involved in the fire. After thanking this stranger, I walked away thanking God for sending me an Angel who helped me get centered on what was needed at that moment.

Because we weren’t allowed back into the apartment building due the water damage, I was given a choice to call a friend or family member to come get me, or sleep on a cot in the Convention Center. I prayed and asked God to give me a name to call. I called my friends who live on the Northside, and even though it was 12:45 am, the husband came to get me while his wife made up the couch. I stayed with them for two nights. When I found out I still couldn’t get into the apartment building on the third day, another friend said I could stay with her. She offered me her bed while she slept on the floor.

On Wednesday, December 14th, the landlord sent those tenants who still had no place to stay to a hotel on the Northside. I was able to stay at the hotel for several nights until the apartment building manager came to the hotel to inform us that Tuesday, December 20th, would be the last night they would pay for us to stay at the hotel. We were also informed that we could not go back to the apartment building to live, because all leases were cancelled. On December 21st, a third friend extended hospitality to me. I stayed with her and her husband until I was ready to move.

The next day I looked at an apartment a few blocks from church and filled out an application. While waiting for approval of the new apartment, I received my security deposit in the mail along with December’s rent, prorated. That evening I got word that my application was approved, and the apartment was mine. I was able to use the check I had just received that afternoon as my security deposit for the new apartment. On Friday, December 30th, I moved into my new home. Prayer and praise turned a devastating situation into an experience of joy. The Lord provides!

Women's Community Group

By Jen Newhouse, Community Group Leader

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Are you looking for community with other women at Ascension? Want a small group to pray with you in your joys and concerns and to study the Word together?

The Ascension Wednesday Women's Bible Study/Community Group meets on Wednesday mornings from 9:45 -11:45 am, with childcare available. We are open to all women, those who are married and single, and those who have kids and those who do not. Some of us work outside the home, some of us are in grad school, and others are homemakers and/or homeschoolers. We usually study a book of the Bible, but sometimes we will study something topical or read a book together (e.g., on spiritual disciplines).

We are going to be studying James soon. Members do not have to do homework to participate. We do have an optional and more in-depth study guide from InterVarsity which we are using for those who wish to do extra study in preparation for the meeting. Those who have time for the homework enrich the study for everyone!

We also have a Zoom meeting on Wednesdays at 7:00 pm

studying the same material, at a similar pace. Folks who must miss a morning due to illness are welcome to join in on the Zoom. Some of us only attend on Zoom.



We are an open women's group, and we would love to have you check us out! We have room! Please email me with any questions, to let us know you would like to come, to get a Zoom link, or to make childcare arrangements for Wednesday Morning.



Fearfully and Wonderfully Made: A Conversation About Aging, Loss and Hope



By James Scannell
jds2001@icloud.com

For this issue James, a young adult at Ascension who has non-speaking autism and communicates via a spelling board, is interviewing the Rev. Ann Paton, a 90-something retired priest who formerly served at Ascension, beloved by many!

Today I'm going off-road and interviewing Mother Ann Paton. What does this have to do with disability? You may have heard it said that we are all "temporarily able" - if we are lucky. Accidents, age, and illness can affect anyone and suddenly you may find yourself among the fellowship of the afflicted. Ann Paton is fully able in many ways but has macular degeneration and mobility issues which have limited her. She has had to move out of the home she lived in for over fifty years. This is common in old age but is devastating, nonetheless. I say this not because Ann needs our pity - heaven forbid! - but because we all face great losses. She has wisdom about facing loss with grace and godliness.

JS: I'd like to know how aging has informed your experience of God and the church.

AP: Ah, well! Aging has brought me closer to God. It's because as you get old, and I'm extremely old, there are things you can't do anymore. And you find that out. But you learn to say, "OK it's just that way. I can't run and jump and things like that anymore". So, my assignment is to be who I am at this age. Which means just accepting a

reality. Ok, I can't do some stuff I used to do, what CAN I do? So, I go ahead and do what I can do. And in my case, a lot of that is praying for people. There's no reason for me to be still living except for that. OK, that's what I'm here for. I think most churches - and I may be wrong about this - I don't think most churches realize what a powerhouse they have in aging people because we have time. Everybody else is incredibly busy. We're not busy. WE have time — I hear people say I just don't have time to read the Bible. I don't have time to meditate and pray. We've got time to do all that stuff. And that is the beauty of being old. Because you don't have to go to work every day. So, if churches were smart, they would engage the elderly people specifically for that. For praying.

JS: Do you think we ignore the elderly in our church culture?

AP: Yes, we do. The church is missing a great opportunity there. When you're younger you're teaching Sunday school or on the vestry or ushering or something. When you get older you don't do these things anymore. Interestingly enough, there are tons of books on how to raise children and how to be young. There's almost no bibliography on how to be old. So ...it's just a matter of saying, OK I'm not going to be ushering and singing in the choir and teaching Sunday school, I'm going to be the powerhouse that nobody recognizes because I'm praying. And we live in a society that doesn't particularly value meditation.



We value action and productivity. So, you don't get societal encouragement to do the kind of stuff I'm talking about. Nevertheless, it's the most valuable thing you can be doing.

JS: I think that's wise. I wonder how the church can encourage and enjoy the elderly more?

AP: Well, by not ignoring them for one thing! I'm quite serious about that - we value activity and what we call productivity so it's quite easy to ignore quiet, aged people. And I mean it would be nice just to speak to them, to say glad to see you and I'm glad you could come and things like that. It doesn't need to be particularly some kind of dazzling conversation. It's mostly just a matter of making them feel as if they are valued by the church. It's hospitality. Hospitality is a large part of church fellowship. We need each other. We were created to relate

to each other as well as to God. So, hospitality would mean speaking to someone you don't know particularly, just welcoming them, just greeting in whatever form you can. You don't need to speak, just put out a hand to shake.

JS: I'm wondering how you would encourage someone who is facing losses—of health, mobility for example.

AP: Everybody faces losses, I can tell you that. You lose somebody who is dear to you or lose mobility or lose sight. It happens to everybody. So that is the point at which we need to be absolutely convinced that God is love, not that God has some and does it out, but that God IS love. And we need to become more and more convinced of His love for us and that He has not lost track of us. From the book of Romans: "I am convinced that neither life nor death nor angels nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor things to come nor any created thing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

So, we must be confident that he loves us and that he is taking care of us. There was a great theologian in the 20th century, Karl Barth, who wrote nine volumes of church dogmatics. And as he was getting older someone asked him, "Dr Barth, after all your theological studies, what is the greatest thing that you have learned?" And he said, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." That's Karl Barth.

JS: I think so much of what you are saying applies to everyone. I think of people with disabilities, but everyone runs to the end of their rope.

AP: That is certainly true.

JS: Maybe some of us just notice it sooner. Maybe our rope is shorter. Ha ha.

AP: We all don't have ropes of the same length! Good for you. Humor is a great gift of God. People don't think of Jesus as very humorous, but I think he was and remember he was accused of being a wine bibber. You can tell he

wasn't really grim.

JS: I'd love to hear you talk about hope, a Christian virtue we can easily lose.

AP: Yes, "Now abideth three things: faith, hope, and love, but the greatest of these is love." But remember it's the three things: faith, hope and love. Know that when we talk about Christian hope, it is not "I hope it doesn't rain tomorrow." Our hope is certainty. My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. In Christ the solid rock I stand. All other hope is sinking sand. Our hope is what we know is going to happen, so I know that when I die, I'm going to go to be with the Lord. That is Christian hope! It's not something like "I hope we have beans for supper".

JS: I'm so happy we talked. I hope you are blessed in knowing how much you have taught me. I have listened to your sermons and have learned so much. I'm sure people will keep listening.

AP: Thank you.

Campus Ministry

If you are a college student looking to do something special for the season of Lent and wanting to spend more time in fellowship with others, we have a great opportunity for you!

Join us, Chris and Leah, for Friday evening Lenten services at Ascension, and after we'll go out to eat together! We'll decide as a group where we want to go on a week-to-week basis to ensure everyone can get something they'll enjoy. All college students are welcome! If you have any questions or for more information on Ascension Campus Ministry, contact Chris (412-716-1617) or Leah (724-630-0167) Kirkland. Hope to see you there!



Palm Sunday

Sun. April 2 @ 9:00am & 11:00am
All are welcome



Maundy Thursday

Thursday, April 6 @ 7:00pm
Service of Holy Eucharist with foot-washing
All are welcome



Good Friday

Friday April 7
Service (12-2pm) & Presentation of
Charles Wood's *St. Mark Passion* (2-3pm)
All are welcome



Easter Services

Sunday, April 9

Great Vigil of Easter
6:00am

Services of
Holy Eucharist
9:00am & 11:00am



CHURCH OF THE
ASCENSION

Marko Ivan Rupnik (Slovenian, 1954-). Resurrection of Christ (detail), 2006. Mosaic, St. Stanislaus College Chapel, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

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