

# The Ascent

**EASTER 2023**

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# Easter tide at Ascension

# Wash One Another's Feet



By Mark Stevenson, Parish Deacon

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**T**he feet of Jesus and his disciples would have been hardened, filthy. So different from most of our feet, soft, sheathed in cushioned leather. This cultural disparity can make the commemoration of Jesus' washing the feet of his disciples on Maundy Thursday appear awkward, outdated.

Foot washing was a necessity in the time of Jesus. Sandals were open, roads dusty, dung strewn. But it was also an act of hospitality. Providing water and a towel was an act of courtesy to guests; likewise, failure to provide it could be taken as an insult. Only servants washed the feet of others. Herein lies the symbolism of the ritual foot washing in our Maundy Thursday service.

*"[Jesus] got up from supper, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him."*  
(John 13: 4-5)

Imagine the scene. It is the last meal Jesus will share with his disciples on earth. The joyful cries of "Hosanna" earlier in the week have given way to whispering and foreboding. Jesus and the twelve, including Judas, are celebrating the Passover together, but tonight evil hovers close to the Son of Man. Judas has set the trap that Jesus will soon knowingly spring. But not before a final teaching, by example, by the Master.

It would have been very clear to the disciples that Jesus washing their feet was an extraordinary act of humility, the act of a servant. The horrified Peter strongly protests, "No, you shall never wash my feet." But Jesus replies, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." This admonition is fraught with meaning. No part with me: No part of my shame or glory; no part of my ministry to the poor, the sick, the imprisoned, the refugee, the Kingdom. Here, Jesus is looking beyond the upper room, the garden, the cross. "Unless I wash you, you have no part in me."

Judas is still in the room at the time of the foot washing. It is impossible to imagine the moment when Jesus knelt before Judas, looked him squarely in the eyes, took hold of his feet to place them over the basin, poured water, washed, dried, moved on. This is perhaps one of the most powerful examples of "Love your enemies."

*"If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you too ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example - you should do just as I have done for you. I tell you the solemn truth, the slave is not greater than his master, nor is the one who is sent as a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you understand these things, you will be blessed if you do them."*



## Maundy Thursday

Thursday, April 6 @ 7:00pm

Service of Holy Eucharist with foot-washing  
All are welcome

When I was ordained a vocational deacon, I was handed a strip of cloth to place across my arm. It is called a maniple. I was told that it represented the towel that Jesus used while washing the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper. I was told it represents humility and servanthood. All Christians - figuratively or literally - are called to have that towel on our arms. Humility and servanthood are at the very heart of the foot washing ceremony on Maundy Thursday, and they are in our DNA as followers of Jesus. ■

# Liver Transplant Need for Peter Foster...God at Work!

By Hannah Foster Quinn, Ascension Vestry

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**This article provides an update on our brother in Christ, Peter Foster, who is also my biological brother. Peter is currently in a unique situation of need, and we are calling upon our church family for prayer and discernment.**

Peter was born with a chronic liver disease and has done amazingly well for 24 years. He grew up attending Ascension, participating in youth group, and serving as an acolyte and crucifer, before heading off to college and then starting graduate school this past fall. Peter has continued to make Ascension his church home whenever he is in Pittsburgh with our family. This past December, however, his liver took a sharp downturn leading to multiple hospitalizations. It's clear that Peter now has end-stage liver disease and needs a liver transplant. He took a medical leave from law school and is currently undergoing pre-transplant testing and preparation at UPMC.

Recently, Peter's hepatologist told us his liver is not recognizable as a liver and that it's a "small miracle" it has worked so well for so long. We've been living under the grace of that knowledge for many years, believing that God's loving hand has been on Peter and will continue there forever. We are so thankful for the body of Christ at Ascension and for all who have prayed for Peter throughout his life.

At this juncture we are humbly asking for immediate prayer for Peter and his medical

team and prayer that someone might discern a call from God to donate a portion of his or her liver to Peter.

Advances in liver transplant surgery and the liver's unique ability to regenerate allow people to donate part of their liver to someone in need. While the surgery is not without risk, it's considered very safe and a God-given solution to the lack of sufficient organs from deceased donors. Peter's doctors prefer he receive a transplant from a living donor to reduce the risk of his disease becoming critically dangerous while waiting for a cadaverous organ.

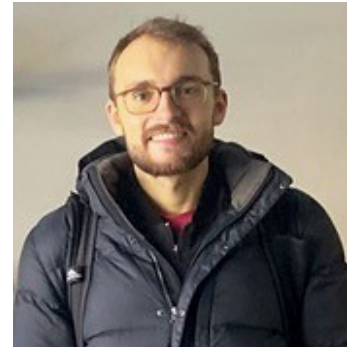
We thank God that UPMC is at the forefront of liver transplantation and the world leader in living-donor transplant surgeries. Sadly, no one in our nuclear family meets the criteria for donating to Peter which includes having an O blood type (either O+ or O-) and being 18-55 years old.

If you feel called to be considered as a donor, or know someone who might be receptive to serving as a donor, the following link provides more detailed information and the ability to register for evaluation at UPMC: <https://www.upmc.com/services/transplant/liver/living-donor>.

Please know in advance how much we appreciate your prayers for Peter and our family and for considering donation as appropriate.

In Christ,

Hannah on behalf of the Foster & Quinn Families ■



Peter after taking medical leave from law school in January.

# The Rector's Sabbatical



By Jonathan Millard, Rector

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**A**ndrea and I are deeply grateful to have been granted a period of sabbatical leave beginning on April 23. With the inclusion of vacation time, we will be away from the parish until August 12.

The last three years have been unusually challenging for many people, me included. Five things stand out as being especially demanding for me: spearheading the More Than Stones capital campaign; overseeing the search and calling of our Assistant Rector; leading the congregation during the global pandemic; navigating a season of polarizing social and cultural upheaval in our nation as it has impacted our congregation; and, serving the diocese during a time when we were without a Diocesan Bishop.

In all of this, I have been blessed to have had the encouragement of the wardens, vestry, staff, fellow clergy, and congregation – so many of whom have worked tirelessly in our midst. Andrea has also been a tower of strength. Nevertheless, the burden of these challenges has rested not insignificantly on my shoulders. While we have known the sustaining hand of God and give thanks and praise for his provision, power, and presence in our lives and in our congregation, Andrea and I also find ourselves more than ready for a season of extended rest, refreshment, and reflection.

Alongside the difficult things, there have also been many joys and encouragements. We met and exceeded our goals in the capital campaign and the new parish hall is scheduled for completion by the end of the year. We have been blessed to welcome Kevin Antlitz and Jess and Josh Bennett to our staff team, and Daniel and Rebekah Behrens as Missionaries in Residence. We have welcomed many new individuals and families to our congregation, and our ministry to those from other nations has continued to flourish. Alex Banfield Hicks and Marilyn Chislaghi were each able to have much-deserved sabbaticals last year. We also have a new bishop! I realize in writing this I am just scratching the surface of the many ways that we have seen God at work among us and, while all the glory goes to God, the faithful work of our ministry leaders, staff, and volunteer, is truly remarkable and for which we can all give thanks.

The framework for our time away might be likened to an extended Examen. St. Ignatius of Loyola developed a series of Spiritual Exercises in the 16th century to be practiced daily by Jesuit priests. These practices are commonly referred to as the Daily Examen. The exercises focus on being aware of God's presence; reviewing the day past with gratitude; recognizing moments of consolation and desolation; and, looking ahead with hope for tomorrow. Using the lens of the Examen I am looking forward to reflecting on my time as rector of Ascension. I want to remember what has been, evaluate what is, and discern what lies ahead.



In addition to time for rest and renewal, there will also be time for us to invest in relationships with family and friends that are so dear to us both here and in the UK. God-willing, this will include time with my Mum (celebrating her 89th birthday in June) as well as time with my adult children and members of Andrea's family.

Before we begin our sabbatical, we will be joining a Diocesan team of delegates to GAFCON (Global Anglican Future Conference) in Kigali, Rwanda. Considering significant challenges in the worldwide Anglican Communion, this will be an important gathering of bishops, priests, deacons, and lay leaders from around the world. We covet your prayers for this conference as well as for our sabbatical. ■

# Rest. Refresh. Restore.



By Andrea Millard, Director of Prayer Ministry & Leadership Development  
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**I** am so grateful to have been granted a sabbatical, along with my husband, Fr. Jonathan. This is my first sabbatical after twelve years serving as an Anglican priest. There are several ways in which this gift of rest and refreshment will be restorative and life-giving to me:

- *Stopping and resting deeply.* Putting down the many roles and responsibilities I have at Ascension (and with the Diocese and Province) for this season is a truly welcome break. Resting for me includes walking, hiking, reading, napping, and spending “non-productive” time visiting with family and friends.
- *Engaging in a guided retreat.* Having another person guide me in an extended time of spiritual reflection is a gift I am looking forward to receiving. I love doing this with and for others (and why I enjoy offering Soul Care), and I am excited for someone else to hold sacred space for me. To do this, we will have a week-long retreat in a cathedral town in Wales with plans to join the community’s rhythm of worship, receive spiritual direction, and engage with their “pilgrimage” resources. Also, I am looking forward to reestablishing patterns of bible study, prayer, and journal writing.
- *Spending time with family.* COVID put a wrench into my pattern of heading to New England once a quarter to nurture family bonds. I look forward to visiting with my siblings on a non-holiday or “special event” occasion, which have been the only times I have seen them in the past several years. It is also a priority for us to spend time with Jonathan’s children and family in England, especially his Mum, whose health has been declining.
- *Reading for pleasure.* This “hobby” has taken a backseat amid an over-filled schedule. I delight in reading for pleasure, and I look forward to leisure time in which to enjoy this pastime.

The word of the Lord, through prophet Isaiah, summarizes my anticipation: “In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.” (30:15) Thank you, Ascension, for the opportunity for me to rest, be refreshed and restored. ■

## Music & Worship Arts

# Designing a Resurrection Mosaic



By Anne Melnyk, Parishioner and Local Artist

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**I**'ll be honest. It took me a while to appreciate religious art. I love going to museums, but I would rush through the medieval paintings. You know the ones - when baby Jesus looks like an old man standing up in Mary's lap. In that period, works of art were under the firm control of ecclesial authorities. The advent of the Renaissance brought new liberty for artists to create their own compositions, although the controversy didn't instantly disappear.

A great old master oil painting that illustrates this transition is "The Feast in the House of Levi" by Veronese. I first stood in front of this massive, towering giant of an oil painting back in 2004. The painting was highly controversial in 1573 because, according to Wiki, "Veronese's interpretation of this biblical event contained a noticeable amount of secular and profane imagery, which was deemed inappropriate to the subject. The painting is packed with figures and ornate Roman architecture, including a man with a nosebleed, multiple slaves, and drunken Germans. These figures were seen as inappropriate to include in a religious work of art. According to the Church, religious events should be portrayed as close to how they occurred as possible, without additions by the artist."

I feel for the artist here who was just trying to portray the biblical story from Luke:

*"And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them. But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, 'Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?' And Jesus answering said unto them, 'They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.'"* ([Luke 5: 29-32](#)).

Much of my artistic life has been spent doing graphic design, which means trying to please a client while also exerting my own artistic and creative ideas. It sort of feels like a throwback to the controversies that beset artists in centuries past!

However, the good news is that despite a somewhat jaded ecclesial history, I am happy to create an Easter mosaic for Church of the Ascension. I have enjoyed Ascension for many years and feel like I have a long history here. My parents would bring my twin sister and



me to the city from the 'burbs to see 'Parable Player' drama productions. As teens we were involved with Happening - a Diocesan youth event that often met at Ascension. Ascension was widely known, even in those days, for having many parishioners who were artists.

I have enjoyed doing mosaics ever since I moved to Jackson Street and my neighbors, Suzy Salo and Beth Claussen, taught me how to do it. There is never a bad mosaic. Gluing broken glass or ceramic shards together on a piece of wood is always interesting. It seems daring to smash things and make beautiful art out of it! And what a representation of our lives as Christians.

So, during our Lenten season I will be in my basement putting together this art piece that will hopefully represent the ashes put on our foreheads and the new life offered to us through Jesus at Easter. The mosaic will be on display from Easter Sunday. I hope you enjoy it. And to those who participated in the smashing, I hope you can find your contributions. ■



# Taizé Service: Slowing Down & Worshiping Together



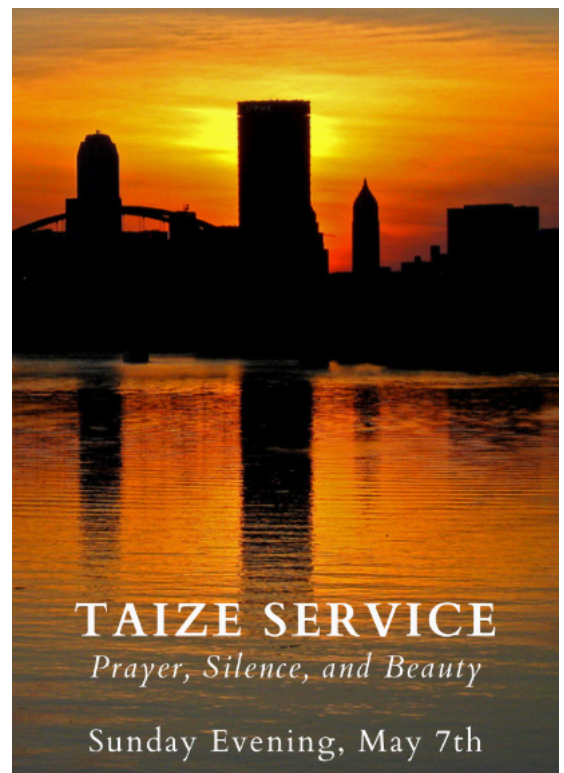
By Chris Massa, Director of Music and Worship Arts  
[chris.massa@ascensionpittsburgh.org](mailto:chris.massa@ascensionpittsburgh.org)

**T**here will be a special worship gathering on Sunday, May 7 at 6:00 pm. Rather than simply telling you about the service, I'd like to give you an idea of what it will be like.

When you enter the nave, the lights will be dimmed. The space will be still, quiet. You may want to look through the bulletin, but I'd suggest that you just sit, relax, and be still. Choose a passage of scripture or a line from a hymn or song to meditate on. Close your eyes and think about your breathing. Remind yourself that you are in the presence of a holy God, and that he desires to be present with you.

The service may begin with a piece of instrumental music, or perhaps with a poem - maybe both. Scriptures will be read, and music will be sung. The music will be from or inspired by the Taizé tradition - short, repetitive, sung prayers that you will be invited to join in. In lieu of a traditional sermon, Father Kevin will lead a reflection on a piece of art, then we will pray and sing together some more. And the service will end in much the way it ended: with music and stillness.

I don't think there is anything wrong with big, colorful worship services - I love Christmas Eve and the Easter Vigil. But I also believe that there is real value in slowing down, being still, and doing less. This gathering is an opportunity and an invitation to do just that: less. I hope you can join us. ■



## Music & Worship Arts

# Transitions



By Chris Massa, Director of Music and Worship Arts  
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**I** was honored to step into the role of Director of Music & Worship Arts in the summer of 2019. While I assumed many of the responsibilities right away, Jeanne Kohn thankfully agreed to stay on as organist and help me ease into the role of choir director, which I was to assume in the fall of 2020. The pandemic ensured that things did not go according to plan, but through it all, Jeanne was a great encouragement and a tremendous resource. Jeanne's willingness to continue as Ascension's organist for the two or three years following her retirement as Director of Music was a blessing and an answer to prayer, and she has done so gladly and capably.



And so, with gratitude for all she has meant to the church and this ministry, it is bittersweet to announce that Jeanne will now be retiring as organist. As was the case in 2019 when she stepped down as Director of Music Ministries, her last Sunday in an official capacity will be Pentecost Sunday, May 28.

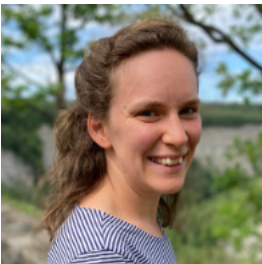
Among the many things that Jeanne has done during her tenure is foster a spirit of worship through a variety of musical styles and genres, and it is vitally important that this legacy is continued and built upon. To that end I've come to believe that the best solution is not to hire one outstanding musician to play the organ, but to hire two.

Neither is a stranger to our congregation, and I'm delighted to introduce them to you in their new capacities.



Gary Harger will be serving as our primary organist. Gary began organ studies at age 15 and went on to study German and Education at Calvin University, where he continued to take organ lessons. He moved to Pittsburgh in 1983 to teach German and English at Trinity Christian School. After earning a Master's in German Language and Literature, he spent 30 years in the Pittsburgh Public Schools, retiring in 2021 after 37 years of teaching. He currently studies organ with Dr. Ann Labounsky at Duquesne University and has completed the service playing exam and colleague exam with the American Guild of Organists. The father of three grown daughters, a longtime member of our choir, and an avid cyclist and traveler (he's in Germany as I'm

writing this), he loves daily walks in Frick Park with Brenda, his wife, and Simon, their hopelessly codependent golden retriever.



Heidi Mayhew will be serving as choir accompanist and assistant organist. Heidi has played piano her entire life and holds a bachelor's degree in Piano Performance with a Certificate in Piano Pedagogy from Indiana State University, where she won the student concerto competition. Starting in high school, she served for eight years as the organist at World Gospel Church in Terre Haute, Indiana. Since graduation she has been a freelance accompanist for choirs, instrumentalists, and vocalists - all while maintaining a piano studio and being, in her words, a "full-time mama" of three. In addition to accompanying the choir and playing the organ, you may have seen Heidi accompanying other musicians (including her husband, Stephen, who is a gifted

violinist and violist), playing with the kids' choir, and dancing. ■

# Singing the Liturgy Together



By Chris Massa, Director of Music and Worship Arts  
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**W**orship services have been sung, in whole or in part, for a very long time, dating back at least to the 9th or 10th centuries. For well over 1,000 years, musicians have been coming up with new and different ways of singing the liturgy. Many did not put their name on what they wrote - Gregorian Chant is almost completely anonymous. Others have written pieces that, while they use the text as the liturgy, are not intended for corporate worship - Bach's *Mass in B Minor* is one well-known example. There is still a rich tradition of singing the communion liturgy and of composers writing Mass settings that are specifically intended to be sung corporately.

When many of us hear the word "Mass," we immediately think of the Roman Catholic church. Technically, any Eucharistic service can be referred to as a Mass, and a musical version of the liturgy, whether it is from Catholic tradition or not, is almost always called a Mass setting. Settings written specifically for the Anglican tradition are referred to as Anglican Mass settings.

I am writing four Anglican Mass settings. My goal is that any of them can be sung in a contemporary, traditional, or blended setting - using a guitar, a piano, a music team, an organ, a choir, or any

combination of these. This means that they can be sung at the 9am or 11am services or even at home or in a community group. In this way, I hope these Mass settings will be uniquely appropriate to our worship at Ascension, reflecting some of its breadth and variety.

There is another sense in which I hope these Mass settings will be appropriate to Ascension: I am naming them after the portions of our building that commemorate people who are a part of our shared history. Each of them will be, in some way, connected to the person and the space. My goal is that the *Smith setting*, named after the Minnie Smith and the education wing, will be particularly usable for families and children. The *Paton setting*, named after The Rev. Ann Paton and the contemplation garden, will be gentle and contemplative. The *Bailey setting*, named after Dr. Ken and Ethel Bailey and their namesake parish hall, will likely be in the original languages: Latin and, in the case of the "Kyrie," Greek. The *Carlucci setting*, named after Christina Carlucci and the Carlucci Commons, is being shaped by a desire for musical hospitality, crossing lines of style and genre to be as musically inclusive as possible.

If you would like to find out more about Minnie Smith, Christina Carlucci, Ken and Ethel Bailey, and Ann Paton, after whom we named spaces, we have incredible video resources on Ascension's YouTube channel on the More than Stones playlist. ■



Minnie Smith



The Rev. Ann Paton



Dr. Ken and Ethel Bailey



Christina Carlucci

# Music Team Open House



By Elise Massa, Assistant Director of Music and Worship Arts

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**T**here's more to the sound of Ascension than what you see on a Sunday. Our music team desires to live a philosophy in which we have a rotation of leaders, vocalists, and instrumentalists serving in unity, grace, and joy! Don't see your instrument up front? It's because we don't know what you play! God has placed the full sound of our church within the congregation, and we have a sneaky suspicion that we're only hearing a small portion of it.

That's why the Music Team is hosting an Open House on Wednesday May 24 from 7:00-9:00 pm. During our time together, we'll give some background about the ministry, pray together, and have a giant group rehearsal! We're particularly in need of bassists, guitarists, harmony singers, string/wind players, and anyone else who may be interested! Music will be sent in advance to those who sign up. There's no obligation to join. Instead, this is your opportunity to be bold, meet some of the team, and see what it means to serve in this ministry. Sign up by emailing our Directors of Music and Worship Arts, Chris or Elise Massa. We'd love to meet you! ■



# 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, April 22 & May 20

Soul Care mornings are designed for quiet reflection and contemplation. These mornings feature a slower pace to engage in active listening, intentional scripture reading, and meditation on God's holy Word. And if the weather is nice, we will meet in the courtyard (otherwise we will meet in the Hunt Rooms).

We begin and end each gathering in silence, and throughout the morning we offer plenty of space to linger quietly in the presence of the Lord. Feel free to check out one or both of our spring offerings:

April 22 with Lynn Schrott

May 20 with Brian Janaszek

To register, check out the News & Events page on our website. ■



# The Lord is Risen Indeed!



By Daniel Behrens, Ascension Missionary in Residence

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**O**n Easter we joyfully proclaim, “Christ is risen!” Put another way, he did not stay

dead! He is risen and that means he is doing stuff in the world. I wonder where you see Jesus at work in your life. For me it is easy to despair about the world and the times we live in - to live like everything is simply decomposing. But Jesus is alive! Jesus is at work and God’s purposes are advancing. My family has been engaged in ministry with Ascension for just over a year now as

**Missionaries in Residence. I want to celebrate a few ways that I have seen Jesus at work in this first year together.**

First, I see Jesus at work stirring people here at Ascension to care for refugees. This movement began years ago, but I get to see it taking shape in people embracing new volunteer opportunities, and especially in our community co-sponsorship pilot program. I have been blown away by all those who have been willing to participate in training meetings, complete clearances, and start tackling the chaotic work of helping refugee families to resettle. I am especially thankful for Charlie Chislaghi, Kate Fisher, and Kelly Shane who have poured countless hours into gathering this team. The risen Jesus is at work, helping us to see, feel compassion for, and serve those who seek shelter in Pittsburgh.

Second, I see Jesus at work bringing Christians from around the world into our lives. This past year Rebekah and I have met Christians from Lebanon, the Congo, India, Nigeria, Cuba, Venezuela and even



Afghanistan, not to mention the amazing Sudanese congregation which has been worshipping at Ascension on Saturday afternoons. These brothers and sisters are breathing fresh life into the American church, and they remind me that the Gospel of Jesus really is good news to people of all nations.

Third, I see Jesus at work saving people! Yes, Jesus is still in the business of rescuing sinners! I have had the privilege of helping with the discernment and preparation of a few people who have come to Christ through the International Ministry. I get to hear firsthand how people with very little past exposure to Christianity can sense God’s presence in worship, in Bible study, and in the warmth of people at Ascension. Jesus is still pursuing people, rescuing people from Satan’s power, and bringing them into his kingdom! That is a good reason to get out of bed in the morning!

I am so grateful to be part of what the risen Jesus is doing in Pittsburgh! Let’s keep moving forward to discover what he has for us this Easter season and in the year ahead. “The Lord is risen indeed!” ■

# Confirmations on Ascension Sunday



By Kevin Antlitz, Assistant Rector  
[kevin.antlitz@ascensionpittsburgh.org](mailto:kevin.antlitz@ascensionpittsburgh.org)



***Confirmation with Bishop Alex  
 Ascension Sunday, May 21***

**A**ccording to Acts 1, Jesus ascended to heaven 40 days after he was resurrected. Since at least the fourth century, Christians around the globe have celebrated the exaltation of Jesus where “he is seated at the right hand of the Father” with the Feast of the Ascension. This feast always falls on a Thursday (40 days after Easter) and our church commemorates the feast on the Sunday immediately following.

This year, Ascension Sunday is May 21. This is a big Sunday for our church, not only because we are the Church of the *Ascension*, but also because this is the day the bishop visits for Confirmation. To help prepare us for this great occasion, I am writing about the meaning of this sacred rite.

I have heard Confirmation described as a liturgical rite in search of a theology. This may sound a bit cheeky, but I think there’s a grain of truth to it. Unlike most of the other sacraments and rites of the church (e.g., baptism, eucharist, marriage, etc.), the meaning of Confirmation can be a bit fuzzy. In this article, I want to help clarify what Confirmation is and why it’s so important.

I want to highlight four elements of the Rite of Confirmation. These are confession, commitment, commissioning, and communion. I’ll quickly unpack each of them.

The first element is *confession*. In the rite of Confirmation, confirmands publicly *confess* their mature faith in Jesus Christ. They confess they have been made God’s child by adoption and grace in

baptism. In addition, they confess that they are endeavoring to follow Jesus Christ in faith and repentance.

The second element is *commitment*, and this is closely tied to confession. In this rite, confirmands can (re)*commit* themselves to their baptismal vows. To summarize these baptismal promises, the confirmands renounce the devil, the world, and the flesh and turn to Jesus as Lord and savior and joyfully receive the Christian Faith as revealed in the Scriptures and summarized by creeds. As the confirmands publicly confess and commit to keep their baptismal promises, by the grace of God, the congregation is also invited to commit to support them in their life in Christ.

The third element is commissioning. As the Bishop lays hands on the confirmands, they are *commissioned* to serve Christ and his Church. Although Confirmation is not a sacrament, we nevertheless believe that something happens in the rite. Specifically, we believe confirmands are empowered anew by the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. To be clear, we believe that the Holy Spirit

indwells all Christians. But during the rite of Confirmation, we also believe that confirmands receive a fresh anointing and filling of the Spirit to be equipped and empowered for Christian life and mission.

The fourth element of Confirmation is communion. In this rite, confirmands formally align themselves with the Anglican *Communion* as understood by the Anglican Church of North America (ACNA). This means they are publicly affirming and submitting to the core doctrine and discipline of the ACNA, which includes the Thirty-Nine Articles, the Jerusalem Declaration, and the ACNA Catechism.

There's much, much more that could be said about the Rite of Confirmation, but I think this is enough to give you a sense of what it is and why it matters. If you are interested in being confirmed next year on Ascension Sunday or just learning more about the rite, please reach out to me or any of the other clergy. We'd be very happy to discuss how you might begin formal preparation for this sacred rite. ■

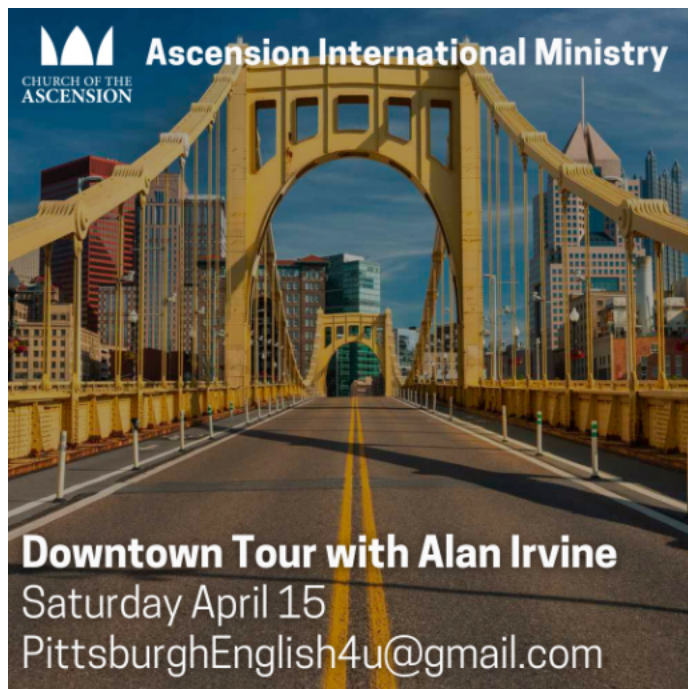
# Drivers Needed!

If interested in driving or just coming along for the ride to chat with internationals, please contact LuAnn at [PittsburghEnglish4u@gmail.com](mailto:PittsburghEnglish4u@gmail.com). The power of our program is in the relationships formed between internationals and Ascensionites. We hope you can join us! ■



**Ascension International Ministry**  
CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION

**Amish Tour**  
Saturday May 27th (drivers needed)  
[PittsburghEnglish4u@gmail.com](mailto:PittsburghEnglish4u@gmail.com)



**Ascension International Ministry**  
CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION

**Downtown Tour with Alan Irvine**  
Saturday April 15  
[PittsburghEnglish4u@gmail.com](mailto:PittsburghEnglish4u@gmail.com)

# Fearfully and Wonderfully Made: An Interview with James Scannell



By Marilyn Chislaghi, Director of Ministry  
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*For this issue James, a young adult at Ascension who has non-speaking autism and communicates via a spelling board, is interviewed by Marilyn Chislaghi. James needed time with each question which were given to him in advance. He spelled them with his mom, Anna Ruhl, who sent answers to Marilyn via email.*

## **What do you want people to know about you?**

I'd like people to know the story of what God did for me. God delivered me from a life of silence into a life where I could proclaim His name. I couldn't talk but I learned the motor skills for spelling to communicate (using a letter board) at age 20 and was finally able to make friends and share my thoughts. I'm so grateful to God who forms new life. I want to honor Him every day.

## **Can you describe your prayer life?**

My prayer life is deep. I see Jesus at various times. I revel in His presence. I picture the people I love in His arms. I see His glory and pray that His light overcomes the darkness and pain in our world. I imagine Him as a clear stream cleansing us. When I am outside, I praise His majesty and His beauty. Hymns help me find the words to praise Him. I think of "Immortal, Invisible, God only Wise" - these are words to meditate on for days! I listen to hymns and organ music and am transported - so much good theology in hymns. They were my solace before I could spell to communicate. I love "Fairest Lord Jesus" - it combines my love of nature and of my Lord.

## **What is your favorite part of the service?**

I love communion the best. I love coming forward and kneeling and receiving. Being blessed in this way centers me on Christ every week. Watching my fellow parishioners come forward every week reminds me of our unity as God's family.

## **What is your favorite service?**

My favorite service is Pentecost. The Holy Spirit gives us life and breath. He moves in creation and sustains order and thriving. He instructs us and is our light in dark places. We celebrate the outpouring of the Spirit by wearing red and visualizing Him as fire and wind and dove.



### Who is your favorite Bible character?

Hagar, because the Lord saw her in her misery. She was abused by Abraham and Sarah, but the Lord knew and spoke to her. He pronounced a purpose over her life and blessed her. However humans may treat us, we can know the Lord sees us. Genesis 16:13 says, "She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: 'You are the God who sees me,' for she said, 'I have now seen the One who sees me.'"

### What is your favorite piece of religious art?

I love the prodigal son painting Jonathan Warren used in a sermon. Rembrandt. The son is desperate - if we all only knew our desperation! The father is full of love and embraces his wayward son. He will never stop loving and welcoming his child. His love endures forever.

### What is your favorite gospel story?

The story where friends lowered the paralytic through the roof. It shows the importance of community: we need to bring each other into the presence of Jesus. This takes

energy and courage - lots of effort. It also requires hope. NT Wright says this was in fact Jesus' own house in Capernaum. How great His forgiveness for someone who ruined his roof! He shows His kingship over body and soul in his healings. He is ruler over all domains, material and spiritual.

### What is your favorite prayer in the Prayers of the People?

I love the collect for social justice. It is always good to focus on the poor and the oppressed. They are the apple of God's eye, especially beloved. He aligns himself with them and the church should too.

### Is there anything else you would like to say?

I'd like to focus on Jesus. He is ruler of all creation. If you are sad or defeated, turn your eyes on Him. He has never let me down. He has allowed me to be scorned by my peers and isolated, but He has never left my side. He is goodness and kindness and loyalty. Never, ever forget Him. He is near. People of Ascension, take heart. The Lord is near. ■

# Confidential Praise & Prayer



By Josh Bennett, Ascension Fellow  
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**I**n the Book of Common Prayer, morning prayer ends with what has become one of my favorite prayers, the prayer of St. John

**Chrysostom. Not only does it beautifully draw our prayers together, but it concludes our time of prayer with the declaration that: "Almighty God... you have promised in your well-beloved Son that when two or three are gathered together in his Name you will grant their requests." It is a declaration that God hears us, he sees us, and he will "Fulfill now... our desires and petitions as may be best for us."**

This is our posture as we pray! A posture of trust and hope as we come before the Lord.

This is why, each Sunday, we invite you all, the congregation, to write your prayer requests on the green bulletin inserts so that we can pray for you. Yet what you may not know, and what is truly remarkable, is what happens next.

It is not two or three who pray for you, but *eighty* of your brothers and sisters. Eighty women and men who, not even knowing your last name, join their hearts in prayer for *you* each week. Eighty who receive our *Confidential Praise and Prayer* email and are devoted to praying.

What a gift, to have so many in God's family love us and hold us before the Lord.

And the gift extends to those who pray as well. Martin Luther wrote, "None can believe how powerful prayer is, and what it is able to effect, but those who have learned it by experience."

This is why we want to invite you, not only to submit your requests, but to join the eighty men and women praying each week. It is an opportunity to love and serve our community. It is an invitation to give and to receive the sweet gift of prayer. If you're interested in joining our intercessor team, please email me. ■

# A Tour Through Our Construction



By Karen Gowdy, Director of Administration

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**C**onstruction has been proceeding well. There have been no big surprises and, happily, most of the ‘known unknowns’ (i.e. where is asbestos?) have been settled. Completion time is still set for the end of 2023 or beginning of 2024. Every second Thursday the Ascension Team (Jonathan Millard, Eric Newhouse, Karen Gowdy, Marilyn Chislaghi, Isaiah Bornman) meet with the Architects and Contractors to evaluate progress and make decisions. Please continue to keep the project in prayer, especially as numerous design decisions remain to be made. This Ascent offers a visual tour of construction progress – and you don’t even have to don a hard hat! Enjoy!

If you walked through the basement hallway between the buildings and looked above all the stored furniture, you would see new conduits for new security system wiring. (Photo 1)

Next, you would see that the non-functioning bathroom in the youth wing has been removed to make way for two gender-neutral bathrooms. (Photo 2)

Going upstairs to the parish hall, you would see the ceilings have been removed and new wiring is being installed. (Photo 3)

Continuing upstairs, walls are being moved to redesign the office space to include several more smaller offices, and the last of the knob and tube wiring is being removed. (Photo 4)

Looking outside from above, you would see the foundations of the parish hall extension. (Photo 5)

Walking outside you would see an underground room that will house a new backflow device and the new entrance for our water line which will bring the system up to current codes. (Photo 6) ■





# Dinner and a Race



By Alex Banfield Hicks, Director of Youth and College Ministry  
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*"And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith."*

These famous words from Hebrews 12 present a challenging exhortation to young Christians. They are beginning their life-long race, with eyes fixed on Jesus, and I hope they end up at a Legacy Luncheon, having kept running through the decades.

This image of persevering in a race is also one that we experience very tangibly on the morning of the Pittsburgh Marathon. Since 2016, Ascension's youth group has been running an official "Fluid Station on Fifth". We get to cheer, dance, ring bells and hand out water or some other sponsored hydration drink. And we see runners of all

shapes and sizes preserving in the race!

The evening before, after Ascension's Saturday evening service, we also host a dinner for the congregation. You get an easy dinner solution (pizza, salad, and dessert for \$5 a head) and are entertained by youth group stories and major news over the last year. It will be a case of first come first served, and places are limited to around 150.

What if you are running the marathon this year, or in a relay team? Contact me, as we would love to have you visit us at a youth group event in the last two weekends in April. We get to hear your story, pray for you, and be primed to cheer loudest for you when you come past our fluid station. ■

**MARATHON WEEKEND**  
 (no Sunday service on May 7)

**Join us SATURDAY**  
**May 6th @ 5pm**



# BARAK Not ARAR! God is Blessing Ascension Kids' Church



By Catherine Slocum, Director of Children's Ministry

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**I**n a recent lesson from our Epiphany Kids' Church Series, "Shine on Me!" we learned the difference between the word blessing and the word curse. In Hebrew blessing is the word "Barak" and curse is the word "Arar". In this lesson we learned how God made a world that he blessed and how God gave special blessing to mankind when he breathed his breath into us. We also learned that God asks US to care for the good things that he set before us. Of course, we also learned that things are not as they ought to be because of the fall of mankind in the garden. The ground and our efforts to flourish are now cursed, ARAR! The joy of the Gospel is that God has not left us alone in a cursed world but has promised to bless us through his Son, Jesus.

As we reflect on the Church year, we are seeing that God is blessing Ascension's ministry to children! By His strength we are building a godly and integrated culture for our children based on our vision statement and guided by our five core values of listening, grace, truth, beauty, and kindness. Our Ascension Sunday morning Kid's Church programming emphasizes children as whole people and nurtures their hearts, minds, and imaginations. From the time they enter the big red doors of the church to the time they spend in the sanctuary using "white bin" resources, to their time engaged in learning God's word as they learn through play and form deep relationships during the Sunday School hour each week.

The discipling of children at Ascension occurs through a serious investment in our teachers using the both Godly Play curriculum and curriculum we develop "in house." Our "in house" curriculum is developed using the same lectionary readings as the "Big People." So far, during our current church year, the children have enjoyed three themed based lesson matching our church season: "He Is Coming" (Advent), "Shine On Us" (Epiphany), "The Good News of Lent" (Lent). We are grateful to have over twelve dedicated teachers who serve. Thank you, Josh Misner,



Bethany Ward, Emma Juday, Mike Juday, Meg Scanlon, Tyler Foxwell, Mari Stout, Adrienne Von Bloch, Natalie Bezeck, Susan Antlitz, Sonia Rowley, Christina Silva, Tyler Marwood, Jen Newhouse, and Meg Sateia who serve in this role. Additionally, we have a faithful team of Kids' Church assistants and nursery caregivers.

Throughout the year we also have special events and projects to help draw children deeper into the life of the church. Coming up we have the longstanding tradition for Children's Ministry to sponsor the "Women's Choice Network." This local organization helps vulnerable pregnant moms have the resources and support to choose life. Consider supporting this fundraiser by collecting a baby bottle coin bank sometime between Mother's Day to Father's Day and filling it with cash (and checks). Baby bottle coin banks will be available on Mother's Day Sunday.

Please keep our ministry to children in your prayers. Our desire is to steward God's blessing on our church and grow by continuing to see children as whole people within our congregation who bless us with their presence and potential as vital members of the Body of Christ. ■

# Looking Back



By Leah and Chris Kirkland, Ascension Campus Ministry

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**A**midst this season of Easter celebration, we are celebrating God's work in the lives of the students we've served the past several years. Although this season is coming to an end for us, we are grateful to have had these opportunities. What started as a handful of students in 2018 has grown into a flourishing community of students committed to Christ who are steadily growing in spiritual maturity. We have journeyed alongside students and encouraged them to lean into Christ's love, delve into the richness of Scripture, and delight in the goodness of Christian community.

One of these students, Caleb, first came to Ascension in the Spring of 2021 as a freshman at Pitt. He says, "I grew up in the church but as I got older and got closer to college, I found myself drifting away from my faith. I came into college with many questions, doubts, and frustrations with God and the church." Tempted to walk away from his faith, he desperately prayed "God, if you're really there, send me answers and show me what the church and faith are supposed to look like." When his sister, Grace, invited him to join her at Ascension, he decided to give it a chance. This is when we met Caleb, and he agreed to meet with Chris. "When I first met with Chris, I found that there were answers, both to my questions and to my prayers." Following this, he was reinvigorated to step back into his faith.



Caleb gradually began to get more involved at Ascension and in Venite. "Through Venite and learning from Chris and Leah, I was able to grow in my faith and make it my own. Venite and Ascension have given me a rich, genuine, and thoughtful community of Christian peers that shows the love of Christ to each other every week." As he was being poured into, he realized that he had quite a bit to offer as well. During one of our 'Dinner and A Story' events, Caleb courageously shared his testimony, which resonated with many of our other students, providing them a sense of solidarity, hope, and peace.

As a student leader, Caleb welcomed students into the Venite community, shepherded them through leading Bible studies and discipleship groups, and served them at our 'QualiTEA Time' outreach on campus. His experience as a Boy Scout was invaluable to us on our canoe trip with CCO XD. When it looked like we weren't going to achieve our goal of reaching Lake Michigan, Caleb stepped up to encourage and motivate us. His positive attitude was contagious, and


this, along with our canoes and paddles, propelled us the rest of the way! Caleb concluded, "I have grown more assured and passionate in my faith. Venite has been such a blessing to me and my fellow students and provided us with the opportunity to be discipled and grow in our faith together."

Caleb is one of the many students whose life has been changed by the gospel through the ministry of Venite and Ascension. As we go, we will be praying for these students and Ascension leaders as they continue discerning the future of campus ministry. We know that Ascension has a lot to offer college students, and we are excited to see how God will continue the work that we've been doing. And that includes you! We hope that you will welcome students who you encounter, and as Venite was to Caleb, maybe you'll be an answer to their prayers. ■




## 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



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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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