

The Ascent

FALL 2023



Stewarding God's Abundant Grace

Introducing Ascension's Fall Preaching Series



By Kevin Antlitz, Assistant Rector
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Starting in September, the preaching team at Ascension will begin a new sermon series on the theme of *stewardship*.

Now, stick with me here! I know “stewardship” can be a loaded word. So, I want to be clear up front that this preaching series is manifestly NOT a series that is just focused on money or giving. I promise this is NOT the start of another capital campaign (Lord have mercy!).

Of course, our treasure is an essential gift that God calls us to steward, but the theme of stewardship is so much bigger than just money. For the Christian and for the Church, stewardship is about faithfully stewarding all the gifts God lavishly bestows on us.

The name of the series is “Stewarding God’s Abundant Grace.” The inspiration for this comes from 1 Peter 4:10:

Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.

In this passage, the Apostle Peter calls us to be good stewards. This word “steward” is such a rich concept. In Greek, it literally means “house manager.” To be a steward means to oversee or manage something that is not yours but has been entrusted to you. Stewards are not owners. Stewards are managers of the things entrusted to them. This is what we are as Christians. We are managers of the things God entrusts to us.

In the context of this passage, Peter has God’s gracious gifts in mind. He goes on to write this in 1 Peter 4:11,

“Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belongs the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.”

Starting in September and continuing all the way through to Advent, we will be exploring what it means to steward the manifold grace of God. God’s abundant grace comes to us in so many ways and in many forms. Various topics we will explore together include stewarding our God-given time, spiritual gifts, and work. We will consider how we might become better stewards of our minds, our bodies, our relationships, creation, and – yes – even our money!

In addition to preaching on passages of Scripture that focus on these gifts, the preaching team will provide discussion questions each week for you to dig deeper. The central purpose of these questions is to resource Community Groups to facilitate conversations on the weekly theme and passage. Not every group will track with the series, but our hope is that some will. The questions will be made available to anyone who wants them.

We are really excited about this series. Our hope is that it will expand our vision of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Our prayer is that, as we learn to be good stewards of God’s abundant grace, as we serve one another with whatever gift we have received, that God would be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ!

Parish Retreat:



By Marilyn Chislaghi, Director of Ministry
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Ascension's 40th Parish Retreat is upcoming September 29 – October 1. Since 1982, except for 2020 (and we won't mention what happened then), Ascension has been gathering annually at Laurelville Church Center, about 50 minutes east of Pittsburgh, to enjoy a weekend of teaching and fellowship. The weekend is a great way for newcomers to connect. It's an all-ages event with special programming for children and youth, as well as plenty of outdoor activities, prayer ministry, campfires, walks in the woods, and an annual ducky race. Registration opened in August and closes on Sunday, September 17. In 2022 approximately 350 people attended at some point over the weekend.

We are once more offering significantly subsidized rates on food and accommodation. In addition to general subsidies, we offer scholarships so that financing the weekend is not a barrier to anyone. Participants are welcome to come for the entire weekend and stay overnight. There are about seventy rooms with ensuite bathrooms and many other types of accommodation with shared bathrooms. If you don't want to stay overnight, coming for a day trip is possible too – either Saturday or Sunday. We hope to use as much of the great Western Pennsylvania outdoor space as we can. If it's a cooler weekend, please bring your woolies because we hope to have the garage-style doors of

our main meeting space as open as possible for maximum air flow.

We have an incredibly winsome speaker this year – the Rt. Rev. Drew Williams (that means he's a Bishop). Bishop Drew comes from New England but is also a Brit – they're everywhere! He is passionate for Christians to understand the Fatherhood of God in the very depths of their being. What did Jesus mean when he repeatedly referred to God as his Father? What does that mean for us? Many of us have a vague uneasiness with God – why is that and can we begin to think differently, and perhaps feel differently, as well? We look forward to Bishop Drew unpacking this more for us in ways that are highly personal.

We hope you will consider coming. A preview video of the retreat with footage taken last year is on our website (News & Events). As mentioned, registration began in August. We encourage online registration whenever possible, and online payment via Easy Tithe. An information table will also be available on Sundays. If you need to know more about the program or weekend in general, don't hesitate to reach out to me. If you have questions specific to registration, please email parishretreat@gmail.com.



Learning God's Story in Kids' Church All Year Long!



By Catherine Slocum, Director of Children's Ministry
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At Church of the Ascension children are welcomed and loved! We feel blessed and privileged to have an abundance of children participating in the life of our church. Our Kids' Church lessons are guided by the yearly church calendar and lectionary readings, both of which provide a beautiful structure for our children to learn God's story each Sunday. Summer saw a dynamic Pentecost season of learning. A couple of highlights were the "God and Me" series and the "Summer Celebration" series.

During the "God and Me" Bible readings we took an exploration tour through the book of Romans. The kids enjoyed receiving their very own "Kids' Church credit card" for one of the lessons where we learned that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness.

Also, the kids were quick to understand the lesson on idols (things we love more than God) and were eager to write on their "idol balloon" something they could possibly love more than God. They then had the chance to pop their balloon and replace it with the big "GOD" mylar balloons in a huge heart shaped box.

The "Summer Celebration" series created opportunities for us to take time to welcome special guests and highlight their God-given talents, beginning with children's book author Rhonda Smith. The kids had a blast digging up fossils in the sand and drawing dinosaurs during this lesson.

We are excited for our fall program that will include hearing Old Testament stories from our Godly Play curriculum along with a Kids' Church series on the Prophets.

We are grateful for God's provision for our children's ministry. Thank you to all who serve directly with the children in the nursery and Kids' Church and all who pray and love them from afar. If you are interested in joining our team, please reach out to me.





Church of the Ascension Youth Group (aka CAYG!)



By Josh Bennett, Director of Youth Ministry

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Let me begin by saying what a joy and a privilege it is to continue serving here at Ascension, AND to have the opportunity to love and serve our youth as the new youth director!

I have served off-and-on with teens for over 10 years. I always hoped I would have an opportunity to do so again and so I'm delighted! I am delighted for the laughter and fun, and I am delighted because I believe that King David spoke truth when he said, "Power belongs to you, God, and with you, Lord, is unfailing love" (Psalm 62). If the Lord of all power and all love is with us, working in us and around us, we ought to be expectant, we ought to be excited, to see all that he has in store for us and our youth!

Here are a few things I want to bring to your attention as we look ahead to kicking off in the Fall:

First, I am not doing this alone! Deacon Wes Williams will be joining our youth ministry team and will be leading our Middle School ministry as part of his role as Curate this year. Wes also has years of youth ministry experience (in

other words, he is REALLY good at dodgeball) and is eager to join me in shepherding our youth. Kelsey Regan Nienna will continue on, supporting Wes and I with much that takes place behind the scenes. I am honored to lead this team and serve alongside Kelsey and Wes.

Second, both Middle School and High School will be meeting on Sunday evenings starting September 10th! We will not run as one blended program, but rather two parallel groups on the same night. The Middle Schoolers will enjoy a night of games, Bible study and small groups, all led by Deacon Wes and his team of volunteers. The High Schoolers will enjoy much the same in a different part of the building and led by me and my team!

Third, we are always in need of volunteers who will faithfully love and support our teens. If you are at all interested, please reach out to me.

Fourth, for more details on all this, and regular youth ministry updates & announcements, be sure to subscribe to CAYG's weekly email. You can do so by contacting me (email above).

Ascension Music Ministry: Sing a New Song to the Lord!



By Gary Harger, Traditional Worship Music Coordinator
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This coming year promises to be an exciting one. We have new shared music leadership, a search process beginning for a director of Music and Worship Arts, and a mid-year move to our new addition. Amidst the construction dust and the staff changes, the music team is developing new pathways for you to discover your gifts, develop your talents and find community. We want to mobilize artists, singers, song writers, instrumentalists, composers, sound technicians and dancers to serve in ways that are familiar and perhaps even new. Ascension is and will continue to be a community where various worship styles and traditions intersect and unite. We often experience God's presence in the soulful offering of a string player, a new composition by one of our songwriters/composers, an all-church mosaic project, the music and dance of children and the swelling of the organ backing up the music team, to mention just a few examples. These are gifts for all of us. Perhaps God is stirring your heart to be a part of the Music and Worship Arts Ministry at Ascension. Whatever your level of participation, please join us in prayer for a year of vibrant music ministry that would equip the church for worship.

Choir

The choir is a group of experienced and novice singers led by Jennifer Miller and accompanied by Heidi Mayhew. Rehearsals are held on Thursday evenings from 7:00 – 9:00 pm and again on Sundays at 10:15 am. The choir normally sings for the 11:00 am service as well as special services. You may consider joining the choir for special services in December, particularly Lessons and Carols on December 17 and our 10:00 pm Christmas Eve Service.

The Music Team

The music team, led by Josh Bennett with the assistance of Scott Bowles and Deacon Wes Williams, consists of singers, musicians, and songwriters. This team plays an important role in our weekly worship at both the 9 am and 11 am services, leading us in contemporary songs and hymns. This fall the teams will typically rehearse on Wednesday evenings, with some of the teams rehearsing early on Sunday mornings instead. If you play an instrument

or sing and are interested in serving our church in this way, please reach out to Josh:

josh.bennett@ascensionpittsburgh.org.

Sound Team

The sound team helps with mixing and controlling the audio for worship services on Sunday mornings. This includes audio for microphones, instruments, and the livestream feed. If you are interested in learning more about this ministry and being trained in how to run the sound for our services, please reach out to Wes:

wes.williams@ascensionpittsburgh.org.

Visual Arts

The cover pages of our Sunday worship bulletins include visual art representing the themes of the given Church season or sermon series. When possible, we love inviting visual artists from our congregation to include their work in this way. If you are a visual artist and would like to be included in the bulletin cover art project, please reach out to Stacey Regan:

stacey.regan@ascensionpittsburgh.org.

Two Special Events

You are invited to stop by after the 11:00 am service on August 20 for a **Choir Coffee Hour**. This will be a time of fellowship for current and past choir members and those who want to learn more. For more information, please contact me (email above).

On Thursday, September 14 we will host a **Combined Worship Arts, Choir and Worship Team Evening Prayer Service** from 6:00 – 8:00 pm. This will be a time of fellowship, worship, dedication, and prayer for all who are involved in the Music and Worship Arts Ministry at Ascension. We will gather at 6:00 pm in the New Catacombs for a meal and begin Evening Prayer at 7:00 pm in the Nave. Please RSVP to me to let us know you plan to attend (email above).

Prayer for Church Musicians and Artists (ACNA Book of Common Prayer)

O God, whom saints and angels delight to worship in heaven: Be ever present with your servants on earth who seek through art and music to perfect the praises of your people. Grant them even now true glimpses of your beauty and make them worthy at length to behold it unveiled for evermore, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



Music & Worship Arts
Dinner & Evening Prayer

College-Age Ministry



By Jess Bennett, Curate

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As usual during the college years, our students have spread out far and wide this summer! Many of our young adults have spent these months back home and even abroad. For those of us still in Pittsburgh, we've kept things simple, meeting as a small group for weekly Bible study and relational time. As our out-of-town students return to campus for the fall and we begin to welcome new students and young adults who visit Ascension, I am looking forward to seeing what this new season of our life together will bring!

Over this coming year, my focus for this community of college-age folks will be discipleship through engaging with the Scriptures and cultivating relationships that

feel like family — firmly rooted in the belief that the Lord loves these young adults, and that the Gospel is deeply relevant to this season in which they are exploring identity, navigating life-changing decisions, and shaping beliefs.

I'm excited to explore new avenues for our college-age folks to integrate into the wider parish, such as joining volunteer teams around Ascension and connecting with mentors and families here in the church.

This fall semester, we will continue to meet weekly for pizza, prayer, and Bible study. I'm looking forward to continuing the conversations we've begun about faith, doubt, culture, and what it means to follow Jesus in the midst of it all. If you are between the ages of 18-23, whether or not you are a student, you are invited to join us! Reach out to me for more details.

Ascension Special Needs Ministry



By Wes Williams, Curate

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Ascension's ministry to those with special needs, called **WINGS**, reflects the great diversity of those who worship with us every Sunday. We are neurologically, racially, and generationally diverse and it is in our differences that we make up the Body of Christ — it is in our differences that we experience the love of Christ.

When we meet

We meet the 1st and 3rd Sunday of the month at 10:30 am for a time of worship, creativity, learning, meditation, and discussion. Our teacher, Beth Christensen, leads us in those

times together. On either the 2nd or 4th Sunday of the month, we will meet at 10:30am to do a service project — to bless those in our church and community.

Want to join us?

If you would like more information on what your participation in our Special Needs Ministry might look like, please send me an email. We always welcome fellow parishioners who want to build relationships with those who have special needs, participate alongside them in our classes and projects, and join this community in its journey deeper into the love of God. I am new to the group myself having joined Ascension staff in July. I really look forward to this journey together!



Get the App!

Ascension is launching an App this fall. We'll be adding features in the months ahead. Through the app you will be able to register for groups (like Community Groups) and classes (like Foundations or the Ignatian Exercises or Soul Care). You will also be updated on Latest News, get texts alerts if news needs to travel fast, and do online giving — all from your phone and/or laptop if you prefer that format.

Refugee Ministry



By Daniel Behrens, Ascension Missionary in Residence

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I am blown away by the warm reception that Church of the Ascension has shown to our first two official Co-Sponsorship families! Hello Neighbor, our partner resettlement agency, also calls this program “Welcome Circles” so you may hear me use both terms.

Family #1 (mom, dad and 4 children) arrived on May 12th and continues to adjust to life in Beechview in the apartment which we outfitted. At the time of this writing, the mom and oldest son have started working at a restaurant in Mt. Lebanon, and most of the adults have passed their learners’ permit test. The children are nervously excited about starting school this fall, and the boys are hoping to join the soccer team. Our Welcome Circle volunteers have provided indispensable support in many tangible and intangible ways. To give just a few of many examples I could list, one couple from the team visited to set up a wi-fi router and ended up staying to play a soccer video game. Another volunteer visited regularly to teach basic yard and garden maintenance and play board games. We provided in-home English tutoring twice a week through June and July. The family has met some other Syrians and are growing more independent with grocery shopping and transportation, and we will continue to be consistent, encouraging American friends.

Family #2 (mom, dad and 7 children) arrived on June 20th to their home in Perry North which was furnished by our team. Their transition is progressing slowly. There have been several hurdles in obtaining their basic identification documents, and there are many surprises and disappointments in the process of enrolling for school and finding work. The younger children love shopping for snacks at Aldi and the older children are happy for any opportunity to meet new friends and explore Pittsburgh. They regularly express gratitude for our team and have said “Without you, we would be strangers in Pittsburgh.”

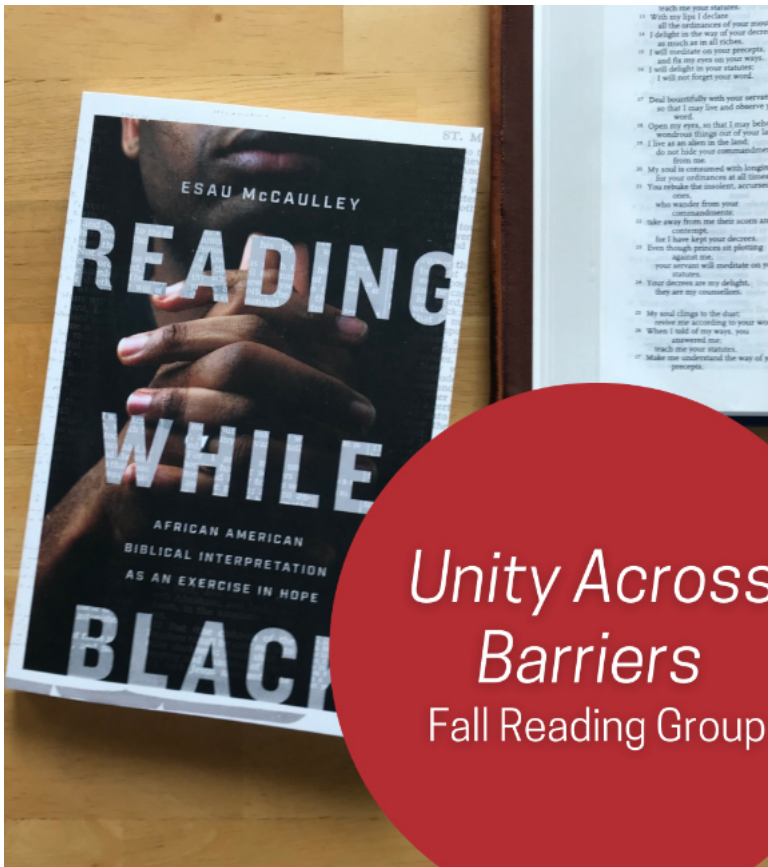
Hello Neighbor limits the size of each Welcome Circle to 15 people to protect the families from being overwhelmed, but there are plenty of ways for all of us at Ascension to care for these families and others like them as we seek to build a sustainable refugee ministry! Let me mention a few:

- **Contribute to the Food Barrel!** Your food donations will be shared with our two refugee co-sponsorship families over the next few months. Non-perishable “gleanings” from your food pantry or grocery shopping (pasta, flour, sugar, salt, cooking oil) and Mediterranean specialties will help in their transition toward financial stability. A few favorites are dried fruit, pistachios, almonds, canned corn, tomatoes, mushrooms, dark olive oil, and red and brown lentils.

- **Other Donations!** Our team will share other needs for donations as they arise. Our hope is to work with the families to address ongoing needs, leveraging connections with their Syrian friends in Pittsburgh and our church community.
- **Help with Graphic Design!** We are developing a brochure to help promote the Refugee Ministry within Ascension and even to other local churches. We could use a volunteer with graphic design skills. Please send me an email if you have time to help!
- **Come to the Legacy Luncheon on Nov. 16!** People of all ages are welcome to attend. Members of our team will be sharing stories from our Welcome Circles journey and what we are learning about the lives of refugees in Pittsburgh. More details to come!
- **Prepare to join a Welcome Circle!** We hope to gather another Welcome Circle of 15 people to receive another family before the end of 2023. If you are interested in training to become part of a team, let me know (email above).



Unity Across Barriers



A reading group is forming this fall in hopes of diving into three great books over the course of the year – one in the fall, one in winter 2024, and then one in late spring 2024. The books will be themed around unity in God's kingdom across racial, economic, and cultural barriers. The group hopes to talk about what that looks like in Pittsburgh. The books on tap will be *Reading While Black* (Esau McCaulley), *This Here Flesh* (Cole Riley), *The Color of Compromise* (Jemar Tisby). Join Sarah Gilmer, Senior Warden Ginger Weeber, Jen Hemphill, and Liz Ealey for engaging conversation around each of the books.

This fall the group will read *Reading While Black* (Esau McCaulley), meeting a couple of times:

Sunday, October 15 from 1:00 – 2:30 pm
(Chapters 1 - 4)

Sunday, November 5 from 1:00 – 2:30 pm
(Chapters 5 - Conclusion)

Order your book, then on the dates announced please bring a bag lunch and enjoy the fellowship of a few others around a great read! For more information, please text Sarah at 412-529-1470.

International Ministry Highlights



By LuAnn Pengidore, Director of International Ministry

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The International Ministry was active this past summer. We take a break from regular classes and add special seminars, Bible studies and lots of field trips. This provides needed rest for our volunteers and different opportunities for internationals, and a way for new students in the summer to join in. Highlights of the summer include: A Tour of Amish Country, a Pronunciation class, an Advanced Writing Class, a month-long Conversation Café, several Bible Studies, a six-week Career Class, Lawn Bowling, stargazing at the Pittsburgh Observatory, a visit to the Carrie Furnace, attending Elizabeth Ames' wedding, and July 4th Festivities including a Picnic in the courtyard and Fireworks. We have several internationals who have joined us regularly for Sunday worship throughout the summer, and we hope they continue into the fall.

Will you pray for us? Prayer is the backbone and life blood of all that we do. We need the Holy Spirit's guidance and help. On our broadest roster our ministry encompasses about 300 internationals, including those in classes, those with conversation partners, those who join us for field trips, those who attend festivities, and those who we stay in touch with but who have moved from Pittsburgh. Teachers have visited former students on both the East and West Coasts of the U.S.

Will you pray for us as we prepare for the fall? Testing for fall classes has been ongoing every Monday night. August and September are incredibly busy months as new teachers are recruited and students are tested and placed into classes. It is easy for the leadership of this ministry to feel overwhelmed. We know that we need to seek God's face. We do recognize that without Him we can do nothing. May all find the grace of the Lord and may we launch with peace and good cheer!



Will you pray for our teachers? Lead Teachers, Assistant Teachers, and other Volunteers will have EFL teacher training on Wednesday evenings, September 6 and 13.

Will you pray for our fall semester of classes? They begin on Monday and Wednesday, September 18 and 20. We have morning and evening classes with different levels offered at different times.

Will you pray for childcare workers? We offer childcare for our classes, and this requires a small team of workers. Please pray for good workers and for safety for the children.

Will you pray for assistants for the Bible studies that are beginning? Students will have the option of participating in one of several Bible studies on Wednesday morning or Thursday evening. We may also host a Sunday study at 12:30 pm that meets in a home.

Will you pray for field trips and specifically that friendships form between Ascensionites and Internationals? We hope to attend a CMU Virtual Reality Cultural Center. We also hope to travel to the Oglebay Resort in West Virginia to

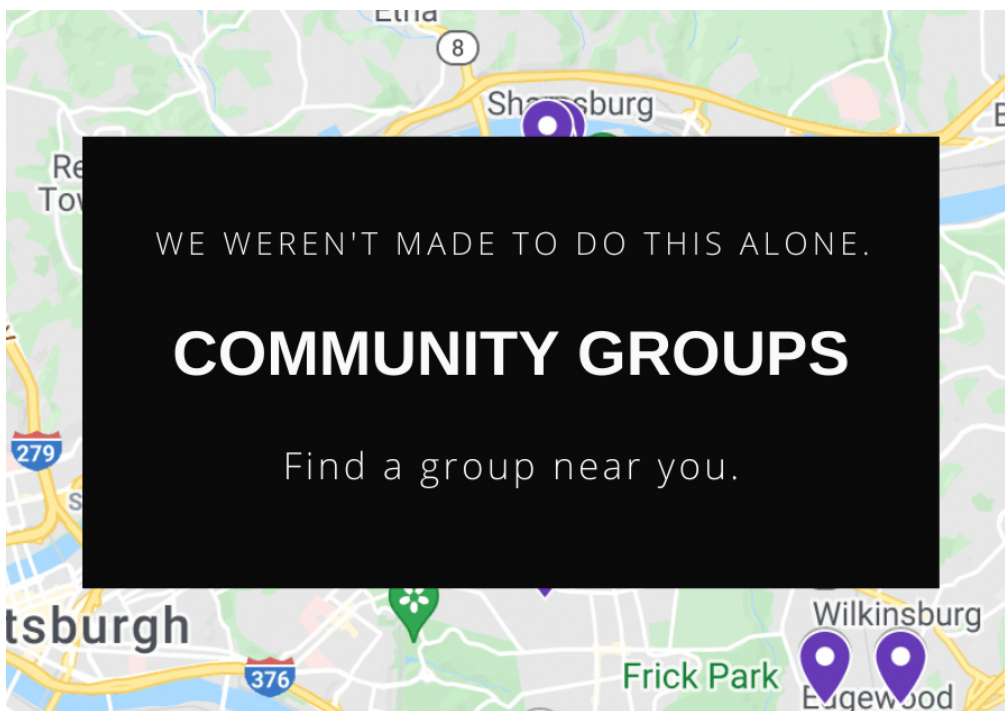
hike, wall climb, ride a tram, enjoy a pool, and visit the zoo. This fall we also want to visit Pittsburgh's Botanical Garden and the Luray Caverns.

Will you pray for internationals attending the Parish Retreat at the end of September? We are offering internationals free accommodation in a cottage with a full weekend meal plan for just \$40. May the Lord draw those whom he pleases and may those attending the retreat have a firsthand experience of the church at its finest.

Do you want to pray with others for students by name? Weekly guided prayers that focus on our international friends and ministry will begin again on Thursday, August 17 through Ascension's 10for@4 program. If you would like to join those praying for ten minutes per week, please reach out to Sophie Bernardi (sophiedbernardi@gmail.com). We meet at 3:50 pm and begin prayer promptly at 4:00 pm for just 10 – 15 minutes.



Join a Community Group



Kevin Antlitz, our Assistant Rector, is working hard to expand the number of groups we have to ensure that there is room for everyone who would like to be a part of a Community Group. These small groups of parishioners meet in people's homes across the city and are the very best way to belong, find real community, and do life together on our Christian journeys. How to join? Five easy steps: (1) Download the Church Center app on your phone, (2) Find Ascension (several churches will pop up), (3) Create an account, (4) Search the Groups tab, and (2) Sign up for a Community Group.

Prayer Ministry



By Andrea Millard, Director of Prayer Ministry & Leadership Development
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End of Summer Soul Care

9:30 – 11:00 am, Gordon Chapel
 Saturday, August 26

Join us for a morning of quiet reflection and contemplation. Together we engage in a slower rhythm designed to help us listen and respond to the Lord. We prayerfully read scripture (Lectio Divina), meditate on God's holy Word, and make time for individual reflection. 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. To register, check out the News & Events page on our website or Latest News on our Church Center app. For those who like to plan ahead for future Soul Care mornings, mark your calendars for September 23, October 21, November 18 and December 2.



10For@4: 10-minute Prayer Gatherings at 4:00 pm (on Zoom)

After taking a summer break, our weekly zoom prayer gatherings are relaunching the first week of September. 10For@4 is the name for our online interactive groups that

pray for the needs of particular populations within our church family and wider community. 10 stands for ten-minutes of focused prayer; For indicates the particular concern or population; and @4 signifies the start time, which is 4:00 pm.

The Zoom calls open at 3:45 pm for fellowship, orientation, and preparation. Team leaders then lead the groups into the prayer time promptly at 4 pm for 10-minutes. To join one or more of these prayer gatherings, send an email to the group contact person, who will welcome you and send you a link for the call.

Tuesdays: Praying for Children & Youth; Lisa Suit, lisa.suit@yahoo.com

Wednesdays: Praying for Ascension Parishioners; Melita Carter, cartermpo@gmail.com

Thursdays: Praying for Internationals; Sophie Bernardi, sophiedbernardi@gmail.com

Praise & Prayer: A Weekly Email Ministry of Intercession

Throughout the course of a week, we receive prayer requests and thanksgivings from a variety of sources – Sunday's written prayer requests, through the website, via phone calls, etc. Our team of intercessors, the people who pray for those requests, pray for those joys and needs as they are compiled into a confidential email. (We include in this email requests from those who have indicated they want prayer support.)

This weekly email includes the first name and last initial of the person making the request (or the one in need of prayer) along with a brief recap of the praise report or the challenge being faced. Sometimes folks prefer to be included in this ministry anonymously, so we are happy to use generic language (like a man, a woman, a child) to honor their wishes.

These emails provide a way of "rejoicing with those who rejoice" as individuals thank God for his many blessings – health, family, friends, employment, etc. It is also a way of "bearing one another's burdens" as individuals invite additional prayer support during difficult times like grief, sickness, family crisis, unemployment, addiction, discernment, etc. If you would like to know more about our Praise & Prayer ministry, please contact me (email above).



Interested in learning more about Ascension? Anglican history? Contemplating membership? Want to get to know clergy and staff? Please join us on Saturday, August 26 from 1:00 – 4:00 pm for a great afternoon designed for those who are brand new, those who have been around for a few months and still feel 'newish', those who want to know more about Ascension and Anglicanism, as well as for those who want to become members. Childcare is provided. Please RSVP by filling out the form on our website or email jess.bennett@ascensionpittsburgh.org and let Jess know you hope to join us.

Want to Help with Shelter Meals?

Ascension's shelter meals ministry has several opportunities over the fall to help cook and serve meals at two homeless shelters. If you are interested, please contact Jonathan Sewell (jonathan.sewell@gmail.com) or Brian Janaszek (bjanaszek@gmail.com). Preparing the meals usually takes 1.5 – 2 hours, but even an hour of assistance is a huge help.

We are cooking and preparing meals at East End Cooperative Ministry in East Liberty on the following Tuesdays: Aug 29, Sept 26, Oct 31, Nov 28, Dec 26.

Cooking begins around 4:00 pm in the EECM kitchen. Servers arrive around 5:30 pm and are usually finished by 6:30 pm.

A meal will be prepared and served at Shepherd's Heart Fellowship on the following Sundays: Sept 3, Oct 8, Nov 26. Cooking will begin mid-to-late afternoon, and the meal will be served after the liturgy at Shepherd's Heart.

Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

By James Scannell

jds2cc1@icloud.com

For this issue James, a young adult at Ascension who has non-speaking autism and communicates via a spelling board, interviews Ascension member Jude Blank who resides in a care home in Squirrel Hill.

Many of you might not recognize my next interviewee, Jude Blank. Jude has been in the church as long as I can remember. She was in the choir for years, always serving even when her physical challenges made it hard. More recently, covid and health issues have kept her away from public worship. I hope that if you don't know her, you enjoy meeting her in this article. If you do know her, look her up and send her a card! Everyone needs cards.

James Scannell (JS): How did you come to Ascension?

Jude Blank (JB): That's a fun story. I was going to Bellefield Presbyterian in 1994. I told the minister, "I am a charismatic Anglican, where should I go to church?" and he immediately recommended Ascension. I have been at Ascension ever since.

JS: How do you spend your days?

JB: My caregiver gets me up. I take meds and have therapy. Putting on compression stockings takes a while. Then I have lunch and we have group activities. I talk to my dad every day at 4:30 pm. In the evening I listen to Christian music or read scripture.

JS: I'm wondering how you experience God.

JB: I do "drop" prayers whenever I hear something is going on. I've had miracles happen - there was a time when I could not walk and the Lord said, "Get up and walk" and go to Bible study. And I got up and walked and went to Bible study! I pray for people all over the place - when I'm at my desk, when I'm in the shower, anywhere I am.

JS: What helps you belong in community?

JB: I'm in an Ascension community group.

JS: I want to know more about how you hear God.

JB: That's a good question James. I hear God in many ways but mostly I hear God through my heart, through my writing, and through my art.

JS: I'm curious about your art and how it helps you connect with God.

JB: Oh well I'm glad you asked! I thought you might ask so I brought my art. I write haikus. For instance, this is based off of Acts 1. (You are allowed to add an extra syllable in the haiku if it goes along with what the theme is).

*Party central Jesus
Upper room be there with me
Cry laugh pray kneel to me*

JS: I like it.

JB: Thank you.

JS: I'd like to know if you do visual art.

JB: Yes, I do visual art. I haven't done visual art in a long time. I have boards and markers and my easel right by my desk and I can do it there.

JS: I'm so interested in that. I love how we can connect with God in so many ways.

JB: Absolutely.

JS: I'm curious about whether you avoid the word "disabled".

JB: Yes, I avoid the word "disabled."

JS: Tell me more.

JB: Because I don't like it. I am an able-bodied person. I have to sit outside of God's world sometimes and I have to sit outside of my own plans - "Man makes plans and God laughs." But I can still do my art. I can still talk with friends



like you. I can still Facetime people and go to my Ascension community group. Although I can't go to church, I watch it online if I can.

JS: Do you have another term you like for those who need extra support?

JB: I'm glad you asked that. I don't like "disabled" because I am an able-bodied person. But I like "physically challenged".

JS: Interesting. What would you use then for someone like me?

JB: We both have neurological problems.

JS: Yes, there is no good vocabulary that isn't unwieldy. Examples: Autistic people don't like the labels "high functioning" or "severe" or "profound" autism. I like "motor challenges" or "sensory challenges" or "nonspeaking" but these descriptors get clunky. I love it that you see all your strengths and focus on what you can do.

JS: I'd like to know who supports you.

JB: Well, my brother Michael supports me. My dad Steve supports me. The community here at Weinburg Terrace, my care home, supports me - especially the nurses.

JS: Does the church support you?

JB: I'm glad you asked. The church does support me. And I know that is something you wanted me to tell you about. I feel like they could do more for me. If they would bring me communion - one of the priests or a lay eucharistic minister. And if someone would bring me the bulletin. And visits because I am not allowed to go out because of health reasons.

JS: I think it is wonderful that you are open with people about what you need. We can't get what we need without asking.

Legacy Seniors Ministry



By Ann Tefft, Director of Legacy Seniors Ministry

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Thursday Legacy Meetings (3rd Thursdays from 12:30 – 2:30 pm)

Legacy is a fellowship of senior men and women growing in Christ and sharing the treasures of faith. Why did we choose this name? A legacy is something valuable that is passed on to future generations. It can take many forms. A Legacy might be one's faith, ethics, or core values – all of which have left an abiding impression on others. A Legacy comes from one's character, reputation, and the life you lead – setting an example for others and guidance for their futures. Author Maya Angelou writes: "If you're going to live, leave a legacy. Make a mark on the world that can't be erased."

Our plans for fall include monthly lunch meetings as well as a Bible study. Both activities will take place on Thursdays at the church. We are pleased that our fall series, beginning on Thursday, September 21, will feature Charlie Chislaghi who will speak about the legacy of faith he hopes to leave. Charlie will talk about the grace of God he has experienced in recent years, in particular the healing of deep emotional wounds from childhood and a new experience of the love of God. Having received such riches in Christ himself, he desires to leave a legacy for generations that follow him. Knowing Charlie, I am confident this will be a meaningful, inspiring, and vibrant talk.

At our meeting on October 19th, I will be talking about and leading a guided discussion that comes from a wonderful book that you might enjoy reading before the meeting called *Aging Faithfully: The Holy Invitation of Growing Older* by Alice Fryling. She challenges us: Would you like to grow in life-giving ways as you age? Do you have the courage to let go of former ways of thinking to receive God's love and life in new ways? As we age, we experience the loss of physical stamina, independence, and career fulfillment. Yet within each of these losses is a holy invitation to grow. God calls us to let go of our need for accomplishment and embrace the gift of fruitfulness so that we might be transformed in this final season of our lives. It will be encouraging to dive into this message together!

On November 16th we will investigate how our ministry to refugees is progressing, what we are learning and, if possible, I hope we can meet one of the refugee families we have been engaged with. December 21st will be a glorious Christmas party! We will enjoy the Nave which will be decorated for Christmas.

I hope to see you all at every meeting and bring your friends. What a blessing to have a senior community at Ascension - let's keep it strong and growing!

LEGACY SENIORS MINISTRY
*Charlie Chislaghi:
 My Living Legacy*

Thursday, Sept. 21
 12:30-2:30PM
 \$15/lunch (1st time free)

ascensionpittsburgh.org

Thursday Bible Studies

In addition to our monthly Legacy luncheon meetings, we will meet once a month to study the life and ministry of Paul in an in-depth study called *To Live is Christ* by Beth Moore. This study came to my attention from the wife of my former rector at Christ Church Fox Chapel, Carol Wilson. She said when the study ended “I wanted to cry I loved it so much” Also, I’m excited over the next year to focus on reading Scripture – the very best book we can study! We will meet monthly on selected Thursdays over the next year from 10am to Noon. The study requires a promise to do the homework ahead of time – each meeting requiring up to five hours of your preparation. Just a few of the benefits of exploring the life of the apostle Paul include:

- teaching us much of the history of the church in the New Testament;
- encouraging us to remain strong and steadfast during times of suffering;
- reminding us of the importance of God’s Word in the life of every servant;
- encouraging us to be bolder witnesses for Christ;
- helping us become less threatened by death.

We are ordering the books so we can begin preparation. During each session, we will discuss the findings of our study followed by a video illustrating how it pertains to our everyday lives. I’m excited about this fall! Here are the dates to block in your calendar:

September 28 Chapter 1: The First Footprints

October 26 Chapter 2: Finding the Way

November 30 Chapter 3: Miles and Missions

December 14 Chapter 4: Unexpected Sojourners and Wider Paths



Ascension has a password protected pictorial directory on our website. We’d love your picture. If you are willing, please send a high-resolution photo along with names of those on the picture to ascensionpictorialdirectory@gmail.com. A group prays through the directory on Wednesdays.



Newcomer LUNCH

NewCatacombs

SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 10TH @ 12:30PM

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

Website www.ascensionpittsburgh.org

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



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