

# The Ascent

JANUARY 2021

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## Epiphany Invitations

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## Highlights from Live Nativity



## Letter from the Rector

# God willing...

By Jonathan Millard, Rector

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**A**t the start of a new calendar year, I am eager to look forward. I want 2020 to recede in the rear-view mirror as fast as possible! So much disappointment and loss. So many unfulfilled longings and plans. And yet, I'm convicted and convinced that I ought not to be in such a hurry. What have we learned from the disruptions of a pandemic? Much, I hope. Certainly, I have been reminded, with deep gratitude, of the extraordinary creativity, talent, and sheer hard work of so many people at Ascension. The staff and congregation have given above and beyond in so many ways.

I have also been reminded of the sin of presumption. St. James writes,

*Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."*

My grandparents would always say, "DV" at the end of any statement about the future or their plans. DV stands for Deo volente, Latin for "God willing." They said this so often that, as a child, I used to think it was a bit silly. But, having experienced a global pandemic, clearly they had a point!

I think in our excitement and anticipation for

something better, newer, different from the year past, we would be wise to enter the year ahead with an appropriate humility and a willingness to hold lightly to our plans, even as we seek to be a beacon of light and hope to a world in need.

In Epiphany, we remember the wise men. They were learned. They were faithful. They followed the star. They used their wisdom. They sought direction. They listened to God. Today, as we ponder our many hopes and dreams, ideas and plans, individually, and as a church, I hope we will remember the wise men. For we too are called to be wise. We are to study. We are to ask for direction. And we need to be attentive to the Holy Spirit.

Let 2021 not be a year of presumption, but of humility, of listening – a year of saying, "I wonder..." And, as we move forward, as we make our plans, let us, in humility, add that important caveat, DV – "God willing."

As I was remembering, with a smile, my grandparents constant refrain of "DV," another memory came to me, crystal clear in my mind. It was a memory of my paternal grandmother's funeral. At the graveside stood my grandfather, elderly and frail, supported physically and emotionally by his two sons (my father and my uncle), all with tear-stained cheeks. As I stood looking and wondering, I could hear in my mind, the refrain of that hymn, "It is well with my soul."

*When Peace like a river attendeth  
my way*

*When sorrows like sea billows roll  
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught  
me to say  
It is well, it is well with my soul*

In Epiphany, and in this new year of God's grace, we are invited to trust him with our whole selves, our relationships, our children, our parents, our work, our longings, fears, hopes and dreams.

At the start of this year of 2021, I invite you to ponder two questions:

**1. How is it with your soul?**

May this year be a year of attending to our souls. A year of listening, looking, and willing to say, "I wonder." Perhaps we may even ask one another, "How is it with your soul?"

**2. Will you guard against presumption?**

We do not know what tomorrow brings. But this we know – God is sovereign. We know that he has called us to humble service and to be a light to the nations. I am convinced that God wants Ascension to be a beacon of light and hope and that we are called to welcome our neighbors and reach the nations. I believe God has called us to prepare room for him to work more in our midst. Room in our hearts. Room in our homes. Room in our church. And, in all our planning, let us remember to say, DV.

*Jonathan +*

## Music & Worship Arts

# Visio Divina: Praying with Visual Art

By Elise Massa, Assistant Director of Music and Worship Arts

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**C**anon Greg Goebel from *Anglican-Compass.com* describes Epiphany as, “a time in which we *focus* (italics mine) on the Transfiguration and glory of Christ, the mission of the Church to reach all the peoples of the earth, and the great gift of God’s grace in revealing healing truth and light to the world.”

Focus. My son is four years old, and has an incredibly difficult time focusing. I find myself saying repeatedly, “Caleb, focus. Look at me.” Truth be told, I’m not faring much better these days. I find myself glossing over words when reading Scripture. My mind races when I try to pray. I can hear my Heavenly Father whispering, “Elise, focus. Look at me.”

So, this Epiphany, I’d like to invite you to join with me in the prayer practice of visio divina (“divine seeing” or praying with the eyes). Similar to its cousin lectio divina in which you pray with Scripture, visio divina is a way to pray with images and artwork. Here are seven steps to aid you in your process (source: <https://biloxidio-cese.org/visio-divina>):



Adoration of the Christ Child, Mughal India, ca. 1630. Opaque watercolor and gold on paper, 15.6 × 11 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

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**1. Ask God to speak clearly in a way that you can hear.** Prepare to bring the whole of yourself – analytical, emotional, and intuitive – to the process. (Heb 4:1)

**2. Gaze at the image.** Let your eyes rest on the characters and objects. Note your feelings as you examine the whole and parts of the work. If the image is specifically related to a scripture, scene, or story from the Bible, go and read it.

**3. Read or listen to accounts of the events.** They might be scripture, insights into the work, or guided meditation. Remain receptive and open to surprises the Lord may be personally revealing to you. Keep an attitude of wonder in our Lord.

**4. Gaze at the work again.** Imagine that you are in this scene, using all your senses. What is God asking you to personally experience with Him?

**5. Pray.** Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you into all truth. Bring all of what you've experienced before God. How do you feel God is calling you to respond?

**6. Application.** How does this Visio Divina relate to your life now? How is Jesus trying to personally encounter you through your prayer today?

**7. Gratitude.** Record your insights you want to remember and the actions God has invited you to take. Spend some time thanking God for speaking to you.

Where can you find art? Review our church bulletin covers. Visit the websites of visual artists from our own congregation (Carol Amidi, Zoë Welsh, Suzanne Werder to name a few). Read the blog *Art & Theology* that highlights various pieces of art related to the liturgical seasons.

Our family recently finished reading together *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis. To celebrate, we watched the 2005 live action movie. At the very end of the movie, if you stay through the credits, we see Lucy attempting to enter Narnia again through the wardrobe, yet is unsuccessful and understandably disheartened. The Professor offers these words of hope to end the film: "All the same... best to keep your eyes open." May the practice of visio divina help train us to "keep our eyes open" during this Epiphany season. In doing so, may we be transformed by his glory, and shine his healing truth and light to the world.

## Music & Worship Arts

# Will the Congregation Please Join in Singing...

By Chris Massa, Director of Music and Worship Arts

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**F**or several months, all of our worship services at Church of the Ascension—live streamed, in-person, or a combination of both—have ended with a singing of the Doxology:

*Praise God, from whom all blessing flow;*

*Praise him, all creatures here below;*

*Praise him above, ye heavenly host;*

*Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.*

The voices are those of over seventy parishioners, ranging in age from three to over ninety, who recorded their voices on their own, many simply singing into their cell phones. It's the type of project that would have been very difficult (if not impossible) to pull off years ago; but now, thanks to the wonders of modern technology, it's very feasible.

The process of assembling the Doxology was time consuming without being terribly difficult. I received invaluable aid from the choir's section leaders—Lara McGill, Bethany Adamiak, Francis Burk, and Ian Young—and from Dave Morris, who helped with the final mix. In this season where we can neither sing together nor hear others sing around us, the melding of voices had a beauty and power that I couldn't anticipate. The project was a joy in more ways than one, and you are invited to participate in the next one. Last time there were roughly seventy participants; I'd love to see more than twice that number this time.

One of the time-honored traditions at Ascension is that, during the season of Lent, we sing "Glory Be to Jesus" (#479 in *The Hymnal* 1982) as the doxology. It is, in my opinion, the best kind of hymn: musically excellent, aesthetically pleasing, eminently singable, theologically rich, and profoundly worshipful. Many parishioners, new and old, would find it very odd to not sing this hymn during Lent, so it is my goal to assemble a "virtual congregation" to do just that: sing "Glory Be to Jesus" so we can hear it, and worship with it, every Sunday during Lent.

Near the start of Epiphany, you will be able to view a YouTube video with the title "Glory Be to Jesus – Instructional Video." In addition to a few brief words of instruction from yours truly, you will get to sing your preferred vocal part—soprano (with or without the descant), alto, tenor or bass—along with one of the choir's section leaders. (While the Doxology was a cappella—i.e., without instruments—"Glory Be to Jesus" will include the organ.) There will be no audition process, and nobody will judge or critique your singing. You will simply be invited to lift your voice and sing along.

Even more than that, you will be invited to worship. These are unusual times, no doubt, but the invitation to sing with your church, whether it is live and in-person or remotely and virtually, is still a call to worship. I look forward to hearing from you, and worshipping with you.

### *Glory Be to Jesus*

*Glory be to Jesus  
Who in bitter pains  
Poured for me the life-blood  
From His sacred veins!*

*Grace and life eternal  
In that blood I find;  
Blest be His compassion,  
Infinitely kind!*

*Blest through endless ages  
Be the precious stream,  
Which from endless torments  
Did the world redeem!*

*Oft as earth exulting  
Wafts its praise on high,  
Angel-hosts rejoicing  
Make their glad reply.*

*Lift ye then your voices;  
Swell the mighty flood;  
Louder still and louder  
Praise the precious blood.*



# An Invitation to Membership



Over the course of the pandemic, from March 2020 through January 2021, we have welcomed into membership 45 adults who bring with them 20 children. It has been a joy and source of encouragement to see this unfold in the difficult circumstances of this past year.

At Ascension all are welcome! Membership, however, is required of those seeking to serve in worship ministries – leading prayer, reading, serving communion. It is also required of all seeking to serve in our discipleship ministries – teaching children or youth, leading a community group. It is also required of all in leadership roles on vestry and subcommittees of vestry (finance, missions, discernment). Leaders lead from a commitment to a shared vision of the gospel, and membership is an express commitment to that shared vision. There are other good reasons to become a member – join the class and find out more!

If you would like to investigate membership, or just want a better understanding of Anglicanism or Ascension, you are invited to the next **Explore Ascension** class which will be held by Zoom on **Saturday, January 30<sup>th</sup> at 2pm**. Please email Marilyn for the Zoom link at [marilyn.chislaghi@ascensionpittsburgh.org](mailto:marilyn.chislaghi@ascensionpittsburgh.org).

# Jesus Invites the Poor - Help Serve up a Feast!



Ascension partners with two local ministries to provide meals for the poor throughout the year. Twelve Sundays each year, Jonathan Sewall gathers volunteers to cook up a meal for residents and guests of East End Cooperative Ministry in East Liberty. The meal is served the last Tuesday of the month. He also gathers volunteers to cook and serve a Sunday evening meal about six times each year for the homeless community served through Shepherd's Heart, an Anglican Church just a block from Mercy hospital. If you want to be part of "Team Ascension" to serve the poor in this way, please reach out to Jonathan Sewall at [jonathan.sewall@gmail.com](mailto:jonathan.sewall@gmail.com) or text him at 412-452-1935.

# You're Invited...to the Annual Meeting!

By Marilyn Clifton Chislaghi, Director of Ministry

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**T**his year's Annual Meeting is scheduled for Sunday, February 14<sup>th</sup>. The exact time and format of the meeting will be announced closer to the time. Please stay tuned.

This meeting is an annual 'check in' – Ascension's 'State of the Union' - with helpful reports from the Treasurer (Susan Crary), Chair of Finance (Jim Foster), Senior Warden (Ginger Weeber), and from our Rector, Jonathan Millard. Each year we elect three new members of the congregation to serve on the vestry. Brief biographies of the three vestry candidates proposed by the nominating committee are to follow. They are Bill Campbell, Jen Newhouse and Christina Silva. The annual meeting is open to all, although only adult members are eligible to vote.

## 2021 Vestry Candidates



### Bill Campbell

Bill grew up as a choirboy at the cathedral in Bethlehem, PA, an experience that set the trajectory of his life. He joined Ascension as a college student in 1996 and met his future wife Lucia at a Campus Ministry meeting in the Old Catacombs in 1998. They were married at Ascension in 2001 and moved to St. Andrews, Scotland, where Bill was pursuing a doctorate in medieval church history. Seven years and two children later, they returned to Ascension as Bill began teaching history and religious studies at Pitt-Greensburg. The author of three books on English church history, Bill finds the lives and insights of Christians from centuries past to be profoundly relevant to the Church today.

Bill is a member of the choir, where he moves among the Alto, Tenor, and Bass sections. He has also served on the Library and Property Committees. When not teaching class, grading papers, or reading obscure books, he enjoys doing woodwork.



## Jen Newhouse

Jen grew up in the Mon Valley and Indiana, PA. She has a B.S. in Chemistry from Pitt. Jen first visited Ascension for the Perspectives in World Mission Class in 1998.

Jen met her husband, Eric, when they were both members of the Rippey Street Christian Community in East Liberty. Married at Ascension, they attended Eastminster Presbyterian Church where Jen was working with kids, returning to Ascension in 2004. Jen and Eric have two children, Ella Jane and Austin. They live in the South Hills.

Jen has worked as a chemist, chemistry and algebra teacher, after-school program director, camp counselor, Children's Director for Community Bible Study, as a stay-at-home Mom and recently as a clerk at the local library. Jen also earned a Diploma in Christian Ministry from Trinity School for Ministry. She has been homeroom parent and has served as a scoreboard operator/announcer and a board member/registrar for Ella's swim club. Jen reads voraciously and loves solving puzzles.

At Ascension, Jen co-leads the Wednesday women's group and the 10For@4 Children and Youth prayer time. Jen has taught children's classes, served as an acolyte, prayer minister, reader and chalice bearer.



## Christina Silva

Christina is originally from Indianapolis, IN. During college, she began volunteering with Young Life, an outreach ministry to Middle and High School kids. After earning her Bachelor's degree in Psychology, she went on Young Life staff in Indiana and eventually, in Burlington, VT. Here, as she worked with many immigrant and refugee kids, the Lord grew a passion in her heart for those who are hurting and marginalized. Christina went back to school, earned her Masters in Teaching ESOL, and taught English in public K-12 schools. Now, she still teaches English online with kids in China, and she hopes to begin volunteering with Ascension's ESL program soon. For now, Christina is helping with the Children's Ministry, both in the classroom and online.

Christina and Rodrigo met while she was in Vermont and he was in Montreal. After a long and interesting immigration process (the second for him!), they lived in Vermont for two years. Attending a small Anglican Church in Burlington, Christina often preached and worked in the nursery. Sarah was born in Vermont, and then the Silva family moved to Pittsburgh with their two ancient cats. Rodrigo had to go a month early for work, and through friends, he ended up staying with Volus and Caryn McKenna while he looked for housing. At Ascension that Sunday, Rodrigo heard Portuguese (his native tongue) being spoken, he made some instant connections... and the rest is history. When Daniel was born, we were so thankful for the Ascension community! Rodrigo, Christina, Sarah, and Daniel have found Ascension to be a place of wonderful fellowship, sweet connection, solid teaching, beautiful worship, and thoughtful outreach.

# “...It is the Business of Christians to Pray!”

By Andrea Millard, Director of Prayer Ministry & Leadership Development

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“As it is the business of tailors to make clothes, and the business of cobblers to mend shoes, so it is the business of Christians to pray!”

*-Martin Luther*

Pre-pandemic, you couldn't miss it – children were everywhere! When we gathered in the Parish Hall between the two services for coffee hour, you had to watch your step. Toddlers and youngsters made beelines to the food tables, then happily traipsed about with their friends.

Have you heard the story behind this remarkable growth in our children and youth ministries? It started decades ago when a group of men and woman began praying for the Lord to bring children and families to Ascension. It was an act of faith – there were no children at the time. Yet following years of persistent prayer, the Lord fulfilled the desire of their hearts: Ascension now brims with newborns, children and youth. (We have “met” many of them as we listen to their voices during the children's sermons.) We are the beneficiaries of this prayerful legacy!

This group lived into Jesus' words to his followers “always pray and never give up” (Luke 18:1). What about us? What are the needs of our day? What's on God's heart? How is he calling us to pray? How might we join with others in prayer?

As Martin Luther wrote, “it is the business of Christians to pray” and we have teams ready to welcome you into this “business.”

After taking a brief Christmas break, we will restart in Epiphany by offer weekly prayer meetings, each focusing on particular prayer concerns. Co-leaders open these interactive prayer meetings at 3:45 pm (on zoom) to meet, greet and orient the group. Prayer begins promptly at 4:00 pm for ten minutes of focused prayer. Groups will meet for five weeks leading up to Lent. To join the zoom prayer meeting(s), send an email requesting the link:



## Epiphany Season Weekly Prayer Meetings

### **Mondays – 10For@4: Internationals** (Jan 11- Feb 8)

Co-leaders: Jess Bennett, Josh Bennett

At this prayer gathering we pray for those engaged in our English language programs. The nations have come to Pittsburgh and we have the privilege of welcoming them at Ascension and praying for them.

Email for Zoom link: [jess.bennett@ascensionpittsburgh.org](mailto:jess.bennett@ascensionpittsburgh.org)

### **Tuesdays – 10For@4: Children, Youth and Students** (Jan 12- Feb 9)

Co-leaders: Jen Newhouse, Tiziana Rankin

At this prayer gathering we pray for the nurture and growth of our children. The pressures and concerns that face this generation are many, so we pray for our children, youth and students and program leaders.

Email for Zoom link: [niferm@hotmail.com](mailto:niferm@hotmail.com)

### **Wednesdays – 10For@4: Healthcare Workers** (January 13- Feb 10)

Co-leaders: Wendy LeMarquand, Andrea Millard

At this prayer gathering we pray for medical and mental health care workers. As the pandemic continues so does the need for prayer support. We pray for our parishioners who serve in hospitals, care homes, and other front-line or clinical settings.

Email for Zoom link: [drwendy77@gmail.com](mailto:drwendy77@gmail.com)

### **Thursdays – 10For@4: Peace, Justice and Racial Reconciliation** (January 14-Feb 11)

Co-leaders: Sarah Gilmer, Hannah Halfhill

At this prayer gathering we pray for the brokenness in our society. Political polarization, racial tension and injustice cause deep pain in our nation and neighborhoods. We pray for God's kingdom to come as we seek his peace, justice and reconciliation.

Email for Zoom link: [sarahgilmer@gmail.com](mailto:sarahgilmer@gmail.com)

For questions or more information, email [andrea.millard@ascensionpittsburgh.org](mailto:andrea.millard@ascensionpittsburgh.org)



# More than Stones: Update on Phase 1

By Karen Gowdy, Director of Administration

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**A**s you have probably noticed, work has begun on the major repairs needed to our building. The largest of these projects in Phase One, the repointing of the stonework, was actually begun in 2018 when we contracted with an architectural firm to examine the stonework and provide plans for needed repointing and repairs. We were advised that one wall of the church needed to be repointed within two years and the rest in no more than five years. After our capital campaign was underway in 2019, the architectural firm developed more detailed drawings. We hired Jendoco to manage the project and, after receiving bids from three companies, Marsa Inc was hired to do the masonry work. We also hired Prism Stained Glass and Norco Painting to repair the badly damaged and eroding windows in the tower.

Work was supposed to begin in late March, but due to the pandemic, we were not able to begin until May. Cleaning, pointing and repairs to the windows continued all summer with the buildings slowly turning from sooty black to bright, golden yellow. Rotted wood and blown out glass was replaced in the tower windows, and they turned out quite beautifully. Due to the delay at the start of the season, and additional work found to be needed on the tower once it was cleaned, the masons were not able to finish the last side of the tower and will therefore be returning in the spring. Landscaping repairs will also recommence in the spring.

We also completed a few not so visible projects this past year. We replaced a leaky roof on the west side of the parish hall. While we had a major organ restoration several years ago, this past year we finally had the leathers in the organ replaced as well. We made repairs to the gates in the courtyard and are awaiting installation of a new gate for the back alley to replace the



broken one there now. This new gate will allow people to exit, but will be able to be locked to the outside to control access to the back of the church. Within the church, we replaced our old sound board with a new digital one that can interface with our live stream and other sound equipment better.

We are currently negotiating a contract to have our stained glass windows repaired in 2021. We had a condition report created several years ago and are now in a position to act. Many of our windows were installed in 1898 and are now coming apart. If you look closely, you can see holes in several of them. These older windows will need to be removed, taken off the property, rebuilt and reinstalled. They will be gone for several months. The three largest windows will have plexiglass temporarily installed, while the smaller ones will be covered with wood while the windows are out for repair. Some of our newer stained-glass windows (mainly the clearstory windows) will be repaired in place. We hope that all of our newly refurbished windows will be more visible to the neighborhood and ready to last another century.

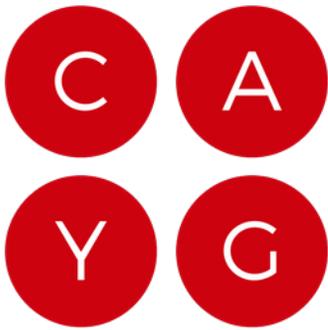
We will also be replacing our pews in the spring. Two furniture refinishing companies with extensive national expertise evaluated the pews, and both advised that repairing the pews would cost more than buying new ones. A committee was formed and selected a pew design that was compatible with the neo-gothic design of the sanctuary. Chairs were selected to replace the choir pews to allow more flexibility in the chancel seating. The wicker chairs in the chancel will also be replaced. While that won't mean much to most of you, I guarantee that all of our chalice bearers just cheered upon reading that! We will also be rewiring our sound system and refinishing the hardwood floor in the Nave under

the pews during this transition. The pews will be removed in the early months of the year, and the project will take approximately five months.

Work will begin this year with architects Rothchild Doyno on further development of the Phase Two Parish Hall Expansion. We will also begin the permitting process. The expansion will require us to bring the plumbing and fire control systems up to code as well as finishing wiring upgrades. Imagine, new bathrooms with new sufficiently large pipes! Changes to our nave doors are also planned that will allow them to be locked to the outside but still allow people to exit (the outer red doors will stay!) The nave steps will also be redesigned to include a landing and more secure banisters. We will also look at our exterior lighting and landscaping. Other projects such as replacing the roofs on the Nave and Education wing will need to be done as well.

The next couple of years will be challenging with much work going on. However, we will have a facility that is not only more attractive, but safer and more functional, allowing us to invite more people in to experience the love of Jesus.

*Editor's Note: Karen Gowdy is ideally suited to be Ascension's Director of Administration at this critical juncture. She has degrees from CMU and the University of Michigan in Engineering and has handled the details of the projects listed above with professionalism, care and extreme competence. Well done!*



# Church of the Ascension Youth Group: Winter Updates & Events

CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION

By Alex Banfield Hicks, Director of Youth and College Ministry

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## Mind the Gap.

Given COVID and current temperatures, we can't meet indoors nor outdoors, and given zoom-fatigue, we can't meet online. So how can we avoid gaps growing within the CAYG community through this snowy season? From MLK Monday (**Jan. 18**) through Ash Wednesday (**Feb. 17**), CAYG will consist of a network of online resources and individual phone conversations between CAYG-ers and CAYG leaders, based on the particular questions our CAYG-ers want to talk about.

I see this as a beautiful opportunity for those meaningful and undistracted conversations that do us such good in this time. You are invited to pray that relationships deepen, hope grows and, when we can see each other's faces again, praise and joy spring up all around!

# CAYG 2021 SKI TRIP

## @ HIDDEN VALLEY SKI RESORT

**Saturday January 9th 12pm-9:30pm**  
**Drive separately, ski passes work from 1pm**  
**Lift ticket \$32. Ski rental options**  
**Bring a packed dinner or \$\$\$**

C A  
Y G

### Come Skiing and save \$25!

The CAYG Ski Trip this year is happening on **Saturday, January 9th**. We will drive separately to the Hidden Valley Ski Resort, meeting in the parking lot at noon to get registered and prepared, before our ski passes give us access to the ski lifts from 1:00 - 9:30pm.

You are welcome to register with us and enjoy the benefits of a \$32 ski ticket (normally \$57). Go to -

<https://caygonline.com/ski/>

**HAITI H2O**  
HOPE TO OPPORTUNITY

# Biking FROM D.C.

## July 29 - Aug 7 2021

C A  
Y G

### Want to say you biked all the way from D.C to Pittsburgh?

Well, on **August 8** you can! If you join the CAYG team of youth and chaperones. This is a biking and camping adventure run by CAYG in partnership with Haiti H2O.

Find out more via the website at - <https://caygonline.com/summer/>

# The Invitation of our Lives...

By Karen Stevenson, Interim Associate Rector

**I**f you grew up in a non-liturgical tradition as I did, Epiphany as its own unique and joyous celebration was not observed. Full disclosure: In my deeply religious family, the wisemen figurines appeared in the creche on Christmas Eve with the shepherds. It was only much later that I heard of the pattern of moving the magi figurines through the house only to appear in the nativity set on January 6 (Epiphany). And it was only in my adult life, as I came to celebrate Epiphany for what it is, that I also came to appreciate the amazing truths revealed in that visit of the magi to the holy family.

Epiphany is the season celebrating the revealing of Jesus to the Gentiles. It is a gift for us on Epiphany to stop and remember that the promise God made to Abraham in Genesis 12, to bless the nations through his descendants, the people of God, is being fulfilled as he draws these Gentile magi to the feet of the One who is to be the Savior of the Nations. And God, as he continues to unfold his plan, will indeed use his people to be the instrument of blessing to the world.

That blessing proclaimed by countless witnesses, through generations and across the nations, has been the reason that each of us has had the opportunity to know the Lord Jesus. God's plan is that through us, others can have the opportunity to experience the grace of God in the person of Jesus.

## The Aroma of Christ

Dr. Steven Garber, principal of the Washington Institute for Faith, Vocation & Culture, and author (*Fabric of Faithfulness, Visions of Vocation, A Seamless Life*) spoke to the Ascension Community Group Leaders recently and encouraged us to think about the wealth of opportunities we have to be the "aroma of Christ" to a broken world through our vocations. It is within the context of our vocations that we live out our lives – in our vocations as parents, friends, neighbors, employees, students, shoppers, citizens and so much more. Those are the places where we can be salt and light to a world desperate for a better way, a word of hope, and an invitation to a life of knowing Jesus. We live our lives carrying out the mission of God in the world, and as Steven often says, "Vocation is essential to that Missio Dei, not accidental." Our daily life and work are the primary avenues through which we work out our calling as God's image bearers, bringing order to chaos and pushing back against darkness.



"Sign of the Magi" by Lawrence OP is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/)



["Star of Bethlehem, Magi - wise men or wise kings travel on camels with entourage across the deserts to find the savior, moon, desert, Holy Bible, Etching, 1885"](#) by [Wonderlane](#) is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#)

In this Epiphany we stop and give thanks that God's pattern is to always reveal the hope of the gospel to a broken world. He has chosen to do this through his people. Our lives are lived as revelation and invitation. I have heard of so many stories of God's people bearing witness through welcoming their children's' friends into their homes to be touched by love; through being the person in a workplace who seeks to do what they do with excellence for the good of all; through showing up in season and out as a teacher or health care worker in a COVID-riddled world; through an invitation to come to worship; through notes written to a lonely neighbor; through pursuing justice or right business practices; through thoughtfulness about the use of resources; through the kind word to a checkout clerk clearly overwhelmed by current circumstances. You could testify to even more.

## **Act justly love mercy, walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)**

I spoke to a member of our parish who works as an Assistant US Attorney about how he has sought to be salt and light in his vocation. He shared that he has often had discussions about issues of faith with people. But vocationally as an attorney, he reflects often on what it is to pursue justice as the prophet Micah writes, "To act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God".

"I will be part of the prosecution team looking at a person or group, and the targets of the investigation will often want to cooperate to try and minimize the ultimate impact of a cataclysmic sentence and negotiate a plea. I get to know these people because I meet with them multiple times in this process. I become keenly aware of their vulnerabilities. I have seen how devastating the focus of a federal investigation can be for people, especially family members of the accused who were not involved in the criminal activity. What it has led me to do, is always immerse everything and everyone in prayer."

He prays for the prosecution team to act justly, asking not what they can do in a given case, but what they should do related to the charges they levy and how they use the power of their office. He prays for everyone associated with the process, the victims, the court personnel, the jury members, the person being prosecuted, especially their families, because of the devastation they can experience because of the prosecution.

He reflects that, before the Lord comes again and sets all things right in his perfect justice, we can only have 'proximate justice.' Yet we still seek a justice that embraces acting justly and loving mercy and walking humbly before God. This leads him to immerse everything in prayer, but always with the recognition that prayer, no matter how fervent, is not a substitute for professional excellence.

## **How do you 'follow the star'?**

Vocations are many and varied. We all have our particular callings. As you, like the magi, "follow the star", how are you uniquely positioned to bless those around you?



# Trouble Don't Last Always

By Leah Hornfeck, Associate for Youth and Campus Ministry

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**T**he light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

As Chris Kirkland (CCO Fellow) and I have been reflecting on the past semester of Venite (Ascension's Campus Ministry), this verse from John's gospel has continually stood out to us. 2020 was a dark year. With a pandemic, racial injustice, an election, and other political and social situations of unrest, it would be quite reasonable to succumb to the belief that the darkness has overcome us. Yet, the light is shining through, and this reality has been clear to us as we think of the work Christ has done in and through our students.

One student, a freshman at CMU, shared with us:

*"I knew that going to a non-Christian school meant that I would need to be intentional about finding a community that would support and foster me in my faith. This became especially true when the pandemic hit and everything that I expected of my freshman year completely changed; my classes, living situation, social life, the list goes on. Being involved in Venite has provided me with a place to go where I can study God's word with like-minded individuals who's love and support have helped me stay strong in my love for the Lord, and in turn, my love for all those that surround me."*

As it turned out, those who surrounded her took an interest in this group she kept disappearing to on Wednesday evenings. Slowly, but surely, her roommates began joining us at Venite as well. Now, these

Photos from the Semester



three students, though having some background and experience in the church, are not Christians. However, Venite has been a place where the light of Christ has brightened their lives. One of them prayed for the first time during one of our "share & prayer" groups for another student, beginning timidly with, "Dear God... uh, I'm not really sure how to do this..." before going on to pray a perfectly splendid prayer. Another, during a Bible study, recalled, "I realized that before tonight I hadn't picked up a Bible in 6 years." And the final roommate to join us became invested to the point of giving up other compelling social plans to join us for small groups on Friday evenings. These small moments have been like the gentle flickering of candle lights in the darkness, and we're hopeful that these sparks of the Holy Spirit in their lives will become flames of love for Christ.

Stepping into 2021, we're letting Venite be guided by the still, small light. It's in these simple, humble things - a student faithfully showing up week after week in a way that causes others to take notice; an invitation to share a testimony in a small group that allows a student to be truly known and loved; a leader eager to serve and return the love received from this community - that Christ shows up. And though the darkness may linger, and, as Rev. Timothy Wright sang, *"weeping may endure for the night, keep the faith it will be alright, trouble don't last always."*



# A New Epiphany in North Africa

By The Rev. Frank & Anne B.

**E**piphany, the season following Christmas that begins on the 6<sup>th</sup> of January, is most identified (when it isn't completely ignored) with the visit of the Magi. Other lesser-known stories identified with Epiphany are Jesus' presentation at the temple and Jesus' baptism. Commonly people assume Epiphany is that time when we remember the events that happened to Jesus when he was young. At Christmas he's an infant, during Epiphany he's a youth, and the rest of the year he's an adult.

The fact is, however, that what we really celebrate during this season is "the revelation of Christ to the nations." The reason we focus on the story of the Magi during Epiphany is because it is the very first instance of the Messiah being introduced to distant people groups. In the Gospels their visit happens immediately. This is evidence of the centrality of the missionary message in God's story. No sooner does the baby Jesus bless the shepherds, who represent the poor, than His glory is revealed to nations through the visit of the Magi. Two millennium after these foreign 'wise men' first realized that there was something special - something miraculous, something divine about this baby in Bethlehem - Jesus is still being introduced to the nations.

We should never let this season pass without acknowledging the work that is happening around the world today to complete this task. Neither should we celebrate Epiphany without recognizing the thousands of people groups throughout the globe that are still unreached, that have yet to be invited to this great banquet of ours.

We (Anne & Frank) live in a wonderful country full of wonderful people who are sophisticated and worldly, yet hardly a day goes by that we aren't face to face with somebody who has never heard of the miracle of Christmas and is unaware of God's great act of redemption and healing. Furthermore, we are infinitely aware that the vast majority of people in our small corner of



North Africa, even if they are moved by our stories of Jesus, are still out of reach of a church that is relevant and accessible. It is in this spirit that our ministry is currently undergoing a major transformation. Over the past 19 years we have focused on pioneering evangelism and outreach. The next season will focus more on developing the young church that is emerging in North Africa.

The Anglican Church in North Africa is re-aligning. What used to be the Diocese of Egypt is now becoming the Anglican Province of Alexandria, and as of 2021 this region which used to contain little more than a handful of British chaplaincies will consist of five new dioceses. Tunis will become the seat of the new diocese of North Africa, and Frank will lead the young, and singularly unique, congregation of Muslim background followers of Jesus that has recently emerged in Tunis. Archbishop Mouneer Anis has asked Frank to pastor this congregation and raise up new leaders, one of whom will inevitably become the first indigenous bishop of the diocese of North Africa. The Archbishop is also eager that Frank is available to ensure that, from the beginning, missions is rooted deeply in the DNA of this new diocese.

We are expecting a post-COVID return to Tunisia sometime this spring or summer. Upon our return, Frank will hand over all of his existing responsibilities to those he has been leading and training over the years and begin his new role. Anne will continue to operate her language center. We will both resume our work sharing the love and good news of Jesus with our Muslim friends and neighbors.

We are excited about this new phase in our ministry, but we need your prayers. It will be very new for us. Working within the confines of the Anglican church will be a huge adjustment. Frank is excited to be in a role where he is more able to exercise his holy orders, but he is concerned that this could create tension with his creative and innovative ministry style. We think it is appropriate that after nearly two decades our work undergoes a makeover, and we are excited to be a part of this historic beginning of the Anglican church in North Africa, but we will still need the prayers and support of friends and churches in our home community.

# Epiphany: The Responsibilities of Citizenship

By Nate Twichell, Director of Agape Year, a missional gap year program

**Y**esterday our 7-year old Henry and our 4 year old Anne joined me in helping to prepare meals for shut-ins on the Northside. Along with other volunteers from *The Pittsburgh Project*, we prepared and delivered plates of ham, mashed potatoes, macaroni and cheese, broccoli, and pie to our neighbors who might otherwise go without. At the end of the day, I pulled Henry and Anne aside, told them how proud I was of them, and reminded them that this is what it looks like to be the people of God. The people of God bring light into a dark world.

One of the things that we are always stressing to our Agape Year Fellows is that they are citizens in the Kingdom of God, and that citizenship carries responsibilities. We remind them that they have a role in building up that Kingdom. A ministry mentor of ours once told us that until our Fellows could complete our sentences, they haven't heard us. This is true for our Fellows, but also true for ourselves. We are forgetful people. We forget that we have a job to do, that we are to look different than the world, and that we are called to bring the Light of Christ into the darkness.

This fall we went through the Bible with our Fellows, moving through creation, exile, the prophets, and into the Gospels. One of our Fellows commented that for the first time, the stories that he was so familiar with, truly felt like Good News. This Gospel that we have been given, the coming of Emmanuel, is light in a dark world. When our Fellows help a first grader navigate Zoom so they can stick with school, it is bringing light. When we keep a garden and grow food for our neighbors, it is bringing light. When we remodel a home for a first-time homeowner, it is bringing light.

In this season of Epiphany, we celebrate the Light of Christ coming into our dark world. But this light is not just for us...it is for the whole world. May we be bold in taking that light out into the world with us.

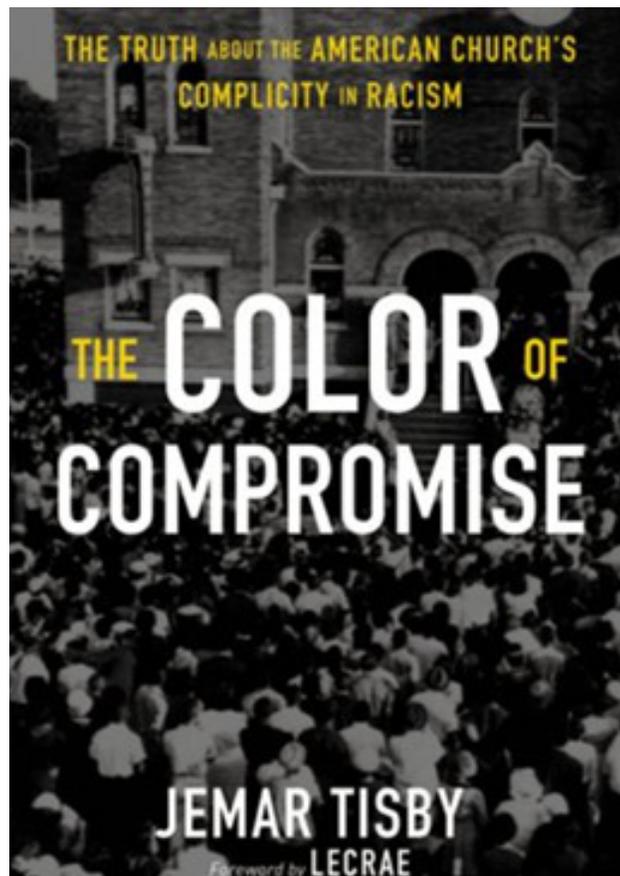


# Racism: A Continuing Conversation

This past summer, as part of his Rector's reading recommendations, Fr. Jonathan shared book titles that have been challenging him on themes of race and racial injustice. To continue in conversation, we invite you to join us for an evening book group based one of those books, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism*, by Jemar Tisby.

This book is challenging, yet in our desire to live into Jesus' command "to love one another" (John 13:34-35), we will come together, on Martin Luther King Day, January 18th, to listen, learn and share. Please read the book in advance of this gathering as discussion and conversation will emerge from the text.

Co-hosts Millicent Smith and Lynn Cox will facilitate. To receive the Zoom link, please email: [millicentarlensmith@gmail.com](mailto:millicentarlensmith@gmail.com)



# Grief Group in Lent



"Candle in the wind" by Ralf Appelt is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.0/)

Sam Ferguson and the Rev. Karen Stevenson, Ascension's Interim Assistant Rector, will be co-leading a Grief Group during Lent. Sam is a seminarian at Trinity School for Ministry, and very active in several Ascension ministries. Both leaders have a particular heart for those in grief and have suffered loss and grief themselves. The group will be meeting weekly via Zoom. More information with details about the group meetings will be coming in the month of January.

If you would like to find out more, please email Sam or Karen at:

Sam: [samuelcrozierferguson@gmail.com](mailto:samuelcrozierferguson@gmail.com)

Karen: [stevenson@pitanglican.org](mailto:stevenson@pitanglican.org)

# Season 3 Premiere



## Sunday, January 17<sup>th</sup>

**Worship Services** Sunday 10:00 am Live stream on [YouTube](#) with walk-through Eucharist from 11:15 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.

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