

The Ascent

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Easter People

...in a Good Friday world

Letter from the Rector

An Easter People in a Good Friday World

By Jonathan Millard, Rector

jonathan.millard@ascensionpittsburgh.org

“An Easter People in a Good Friday World,” a phrase attributed to author, Barbara Johnson, has particular poignancy in a pandemic. For many people, the past twelve months may have felt like living in the cold of perpetual winter, the fasting of Lent, or the suffering of Good Friday. And yet, whatever your experience, as Christians we are an Easter People – a people who have hope, no matter what our circumstances. This edition of the Ascent gives us some vignettes of what being “Easter People” looks like, through the testimonies of folks in our congregation who are living hope-filled lives even in the face of adversity.

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As I think about a “Good Friday world” I am reminded of that first Good Friday - the day when the only good man who has ever lived was killed. Jesus, the Son of God, who laid aside all his kingly glory to be born and live and die for us, was crucified. He who was without sin became sin. The eternal Word who became flesh, who came to the world, was rejected by those to whom he came to save.

Jesus knew immense suffering. He experienced betrayal, false accusation, humiliation, rejection, torture and death. And he took on all of this willingly out of love for you and for me. It was because he did this, loving us to the end, that he fulfilled his divine mission. A rescue mission for the world. He died so that we might have eternal life. That is why the darkest, bleakest, most God-forsaken day in history is called “Good Friday.” It is good for you and for me that Jesus gave his life for us. This is the Good News of the Gospel: Light in the darkness, rest for the weary, and the hope of Glory for all who put their trust in the risen Lord Jesus.

As we lift our heads from all that weighs us down, our Easter hope reminds us that we know how the story ends. We know that Jesus triumphed over death. We know that God is making all things new. We know that he is coming again to judge the world with truth and mercy. We know that one day “he will wipe away every tear... Death will be no more; mourning and crying will be no more” (Revelation 21:4).

Every Sunday is a reminder of Easter – even in Lent, and so we say each week:

Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again

Throughout the Easter season we will also proclaim boldly,

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!



PHOTO CAPTION:

Cover photo & above photo used with permission by J. Borst

Hello, Ascension!

Greetings and Introductions from our incoming Assistant Rector and his family.

“To make a long story short, I encountered the transforming love of Christ in a radical way at a Young Life camp in high school and became a Christian. It surprised everyone – myself perhaps most of all.”

By Kevin Antliz, Incoming Assistant Rector

In his first letter to the church in Thessalonica, Paul reminds the Thessalonian Christians – many of whom he would have personally led to the Lord – just how much they mean to him. He writes: “so, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us” (1 Thessalonians 2:8). I have always been struck by this – it’s the Apostle Paul at perhaps his most tender and affectionate.

In just a couple short months, we look forward to moving to Pittsburgh and sharing not only the gospel but our lives with you. Until we really get the chance to know one another and partner together on mission, I want to share a little about our family.

I’ll begin by introducing you to Susan and share briefly about our relationship. Susan is truly my better half. Just give it a year or two and I bet you’ll agree that arguably the best part of the church hiring me is that Susan is part of the church. Susan went to The King’s College in NYC and earned her Master’s from Boston University. She is passionate about education and, most recently, has carved out a career as a college guidance counselor for private Christian schools in Princeton and DC. She comes from solid Christian stock, born from a long lineage of believers. She spent the first 9 years of her life



PHOTO CAPTION:

From L to R: Marilynne Rose, Susan, Jack, Kevin and Billy Antliz

as a missionary kid in communist Poland and then as a pastor's kid in Annapolis, MD after her folks returned to the States.

Unlike Susan who has never known a day apart from Christ, I was not raised to love the Lord. I grew up in a loving, nominally Roman Catholic home but gradually left the church because it seemed completely irrelevant. To make a long story short, I encountered the transforming love of Christ in a radical way at a Young Life camp in high school and became a Christian. It surprised everyone – myself perhaps most of all. I joined the church where Susan's father was the pastor, which is where we eventually met. We dated long-distance for three years through college and were married in May 2008. We have three wonderful children (and a loveable but emotionally needy English Springer Spaniel named Lewis). I'll share a little about each of our kids.

Our first born goes by Billy. His full name is William Wilberforce Antliz. He is 6 years old and is in kindergarten. Billy is our little philosopher-theologian and

asks really great questions (a lot of them). Much to my chagrin, "Who Let the Dogs Out" became his favorite song in 2020. He loves bagels (he averages 10 or so a week), telling knock-knock jokes (even though he doesn't quite get the genre), being the ringleader at home and on the playground. Billy has never met a stranger and will probably be a mayor somewhere someday.

Our middle child is called Jack. His full name is Jonathan Gregory Manley Antliz. Given his older brother's robust name, I figured the only way to keep up was with two middle names. Jack is 4 years old and technically in pre-school but he's never actually stepped foot in a classroom because of COVID so not sure it counts. Jack has a more refined taste in music than his older brother. He especially loves Johnny Cash, Bob Dylan, and the Beatles. Jack is a total mama's boy. He really enjoys tinkering with things and taking stuff apart. He's not so great at putting it back together.

Marilynne Rose, our baby, is 2 years old. She learned to walk one month into the

pandemic and hasn't looked back. She is the mirror of her older brothers, especially Jack. Compared to her predecessors at this age, she has a sprawling vocabulary. Mary is funny, strong, affectionate, remarkably good at hiding, and not unfrequently mischievous. Her lovely long blonde locks notwithstanding, she looks just like her father – bless her little heart. She is currently potty training and really working the "reward" system. Her favorite song is "Dance Monkey." She is very much the darling of the family.

Most recently, we moved to Washington, DC in 2018 so I could begin a curacy at a great parish called Church of the Advent. Prior to that, I served as a campus minister at Princeton University for 5+ years. As a family, we spent the better part of a year discerning where the Lord was calling us next and are so delighted that He led us to Ascension. We look forward to relocating to Pittsburgh and establishing roots there. Please pray for us as we say bittersweet good-byes to friends and family in DC, search for a new home, and enjoy a few weeks of rest before relocating.

Glory be to Jesus

By Marilyn Clifton Chislaghi, Director of Ministry
marilyn.chislaghi@ascensionpittsburgh.org

Several people have commented to me that Ascension's Lent 2021 services are the happiest Lenten services they have ever observed. Even while numbers of people are limited and we are still experiencing the restrictions of masks and no singing inside, it has been SO GOOD to be together again. It was hard to stop the chatter on Ash Wednesday so that the services could begin, and it's been harder to stop the chatter on Sundays after the service is over so that walk-through Communion can begin. It's a great problem to have!

One extraordinary highlight so many have mentioned is the singing of Glory be to Jesus, a recorded congregational song that has played regularly throughout Lent. The first Sunday we heard the song and saw the congregational faces singing, my husband Charlie and I were at home, sitting like a couple of oldies on our respective chairs drinking our tea. We were both brought to tears - seeing old and young, parents and children, the healthy and those battling serious illness, sound techs and doctors, students and professors, some with eyes closed and some with hands upraised, those who have had a season of rejoicing and those who have had a season of weeping. Even with the limits of live stream, our spirits were lifted high in worship with others in our congregation.

Charlie and I are back to church in person, greeting and ushering. This song remains my favorite part of the service, but for another reason too. While the live stream likely does not capture this moment because the song video is playing, our special needs friends are back with us, carrying up the offering during the Offertory. Our community of friends and their teachers has remained steady and faithful throughout the pandemic, meeting weekly at 9:30am for a Zoom call to touch base personally and chat about the (incredible) video lessons posted each week especially for them on our YouTube channel, thanks to Keira Fuener. Knowing how this group has remained together through this most difficult year, sustaining each other, and seeing these friends of ours again in person at Ascension, my heart swells with the crescendo of the song, "Lift ye then your voices; swell the mighty flood; louder still and louder praise the precious blood." Glory be to Jesus.



PHOTO CAPTION:

Top: Screen capture of "Glory be to Jesus" video
 Bottom: Stephen, Hannah & Holden, members of special needs ministry

Take my hand, Precious Lord

By Andrea Millard, Director of Prayer Ministry & Leadership Development

andrea.millard@ascensionpittsburgh.org

Millicent Smith recently shared a creative way of bringing the church to someone who can't go:

The church where my cousin has been attending has not had in-person services since COVID shut it down last year in March. My cousin is 99 years old and being in church had been the highlight of her week. Ruth doesn't have a computer so she can't watch an online church service. And, because I want to protect her from the virus, it's not wise for me to bring my iPad over to bring our worship service to her.

However, I had the idea of sending her Ascension's weekly bulletin. It has all the scripture readings and words of the hymns and songs. It's a way to be connected spiritually when she can't be in church physically.

Just the other night, when we were on the phone, she started singing "Take My Hand, Precious Lord" to me. She told me she didn't know the last verse of the song, but she was going to keep the bulletin because it had all the verses!

Who knew that something as simple as sharing a church bulletin could bring such joy and connection?



New Members Welcome



Over the course of the pandemic, from March 2020 through March 2021, we have welcomed into membership 52 adults who bring with them 26 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, April 17 at 2pm. Please email Marilyn for the Zoom link at marilyn.chislaghi@ascensionpittsburgh.org.

A Turning of Seasons in Children's Ministry

By Catherine Slocum, Director of Children's Ministry

catherine.slocum@ascensionpittsburgh.org

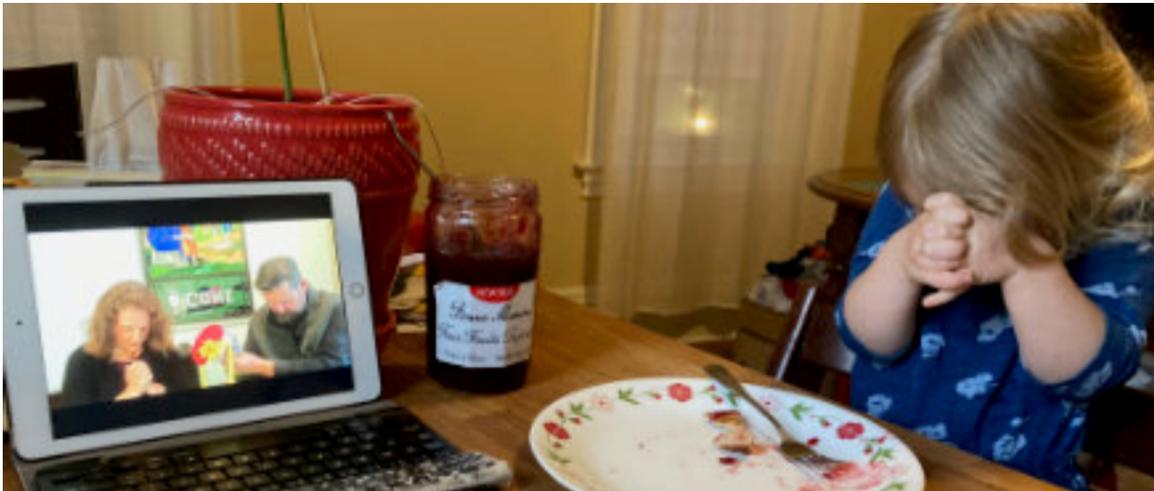


PHOTO CAPTION:

Phoebe Mayhew praying with Kids' Church

To be on the brink of spring is an exciting thing to consider after a winter of frequent snow, cold and gray days. But, as the days near, spring will not just burst forth. Instead, it will come as it always does, despite what the groundhog's shadow reveals. Spring emerges from winter, with days slowly becoming longer, and temperatures slowly rising, and sun becoming more and more of a friend to us all as we anticipate the blooms and full green that will eventually mark spring turning to summer.

Like winter emerging into spring, our life at Church of the Ascension is slowly changing from total lockdown to more and more opportunities to gather. Eventually, as more of our brothers and sisters are vaccinated and as less cases of COVID are reported, we will be as we were, together in person from week to week.

We have been thinking a lot about how we can resume a weekly in person Children's Ministry and believe that just as God tenderly turns winter into spring, so too will we turn from being remote and virtual to being in person and together. This transition will be gradual with sensitivity to all that you have been through as families and all that we have been through as a church and nation. Kids' Church on YouTube will become less frequent, but we have all come to love Sally Lolli and her friends so we will still see and hear from these bright additions to our difficult time.

We will gather on Sunday with two options; one outside (9am) and one in the Nave and Parish Hall (11am) but moms and dads will need to remain with their kids for the safety of families and the community for the first few months (April, May, June). During these months we will provide activity kits that include the bible lesson for that particular Sunday. We will then add an in-person

Kids' Church live option in the middle of the summer during our 9am service. This will be one large group program held during the sermon and prayers and will be hosted in the courtyard. Our hope is that our gradual transition will lead into a fully operating children's ministry (including nursery care) on Sunday mornings beginning in mid-September.

Here is a timeline of Ascension's Children's Ministry in the coming months:

- Season 3 of our Kids' Church video series will wrap up at the end of March with a final episode that focuses on Holy Week and Easter.
- Palm Sunday (March 28): NEW service schedule 9am (we will provide table-top activity bins for families under tents on main church lawn) and 11am (will continue to provide



PHOTO CAPTION:
Swab girls after puppet workshop



optional table-top activity bins for families in the Parish Hall). Also, fun to know that there will be a live donkey on the lawn from 8:30am – 11am on Palm Sunday!

- Easter Sunday (April 4): 9am (will provide table-top activity bins for families under tents on main church lawn) and 11am (will continue to provide table-top activity bins for families in the Parish Hall). We will be providing Resurrection Eggs activity kits (beginning March 21)

- April, May, June: 9am and 11am we will continue to provide optional family tables with table-top activity bins. We will also have a couple of visits from Sally Lolly and friends on the lawn in between the services on May 2 and June 6 around 10:20am.

- April – August: Once a month teaching videos with Sally Lolly and friends can be found Ascension's YouTube playlist

- July 4 – September 5: Additional summer programming of "Kids' Church Live" for children during the 9am service in the Courtyard (will go to Parish Hall if it rains). We will continue to offer optional family tables in the Parish Hall during the 11am service.
- September 12: Resume full in person programming for children at both 9am and 11am services that will include nursery care and a music program.



PHOTO CAPTION:
Finn Foxwell praying with Kids' Church

Bringing the Joy of Easter to Internationals!

By LuAnn Pengidore, Director of International Ministry

PittsburghEnglish4U@gmail.com

The pandemic has seemed like an extended Lenten season characterized by cold and isolation. Many people from Ascension are bringing joy and light into lonely places within the international ministry. I wanted to highlight just a few in their own words:

Ellen Meadows (An assistant literature teacher)

"Oh, I would love to do that", I said to my husband when learning that Ascension would host an ESL program. I didn't seek to get involved, though, because of my physical limitations in both speaking and hearing. But God was not deterred by my reluctance. LuAnn Pengidore called and asked me to help in a class temporarily. I did and I loved it. For the last four years I have been either an assistant or a teacher.

For Thanksgiving 2018, Mark and I hoped to host four or five internationals. We were a little disappointed when only two were due to come, B. and S., two Chinese students. We soon found that S. was an enthusiastic believer. Because only four of us sat at a candle-lit, intimate table, we were able to share what Jesus means in our lives with B. and to become friends. She and I have become close friends, sharing meals since then and getting to know extended family members.

Each semester I am skeptical about being physically able to continue, but God has provided wonderful assistants, and in the



fall of 2019, my Chinese friend B., bought me a voice amplifier when I shared with her my struggles. Not only do I have the pleasure of teaching, but as a friend I have enjoyed attending a concert of a student musician from Chad, welcoming a Korean mother's new baby, strolling through Phipps Conservatory with an Indonesian student/friend, and listening to a young Venezuelan woman, desperate to bring her mother to America.

The Lord is still concerned about these students, still interested in providing a warm, accepting place for us to gather in the cold isolation of the pandemic. This year I am helping in the Advanced Reading Class. The forum presents opportunities to get to know each other on Zoom. Most important to me is the ability to pray for each one. What a privilege! A couple of weeks ago one student wrote to the teacher and me, "Thank you so much. Our discussion cheers me up after exhaustion. I really appreciate your kindly help and patience." Ah, I am the one who is thankful.

**PHOTO CAPTION:**

Group of internationals at a BBQ at the Wilkes' home

Carolina Tufino (A Spanish Bible study leader)



My husband and I moved here from Ecuador for his post-doc at CMU. I believe I have grown spiritually during this time thanks to the contribution of all the teachers, conversation partners and those in the Bible Studies. I also enjoy teaching a Spanish Bible study on Tuesday evenings. One of the things that I am most grateful for are these Bible Studies, which have been

continued throughout the quarantine, and the various English courses. Those things are what keep me alive in hope. Additionally, reading the Bible on my own has been a good way to keep my faith. During these hard times, my husband and I have continued to enjoy field trips with the international program around Pittsburgh, I teach Spanish to students from Ascension, and I am a nanny to a family with connections to this church. All these activities have made it possible to continue interacting with many fun and interesting people from many countries.

Regan Fetterolf (Teacher in beginner English classes)

It was summer 2020. I had been attending Ascension for about 6 months when Father Jonathan made an appeal for volunteers to help with the International program. I was already training to be a volunteer with Greater Pittsburgh Literacy as an ESL tutor, and I thought my schedule would allow me to also serve as a conversation partner with Ascension. LuAnn Pengidore encouraged me to think bigger, however, and become a Level 1 teacher – and I'm grateful she gave me that extra nudge. At a time when I, like many others, felt helpless in the face of so much need and pain caused by COVID, God opened a door into a ministry that gave my pandemic life an extra measure of purpose, laughter, and community. How hard it must be to feel a stranger in a strange land; made even stranger in recent years, and often hostile. What a blessing to be able to extend God's care and loving kindness by the simple act of helping someone learn a new language. It's been a reminder that God is always working, and that this life, right now, is the one he intends me to fully live.

United Through Prayer

By Andrea Millard, Director of Prayer Ministry & Leadership Development

andrea.millard@ascensionpittsburgh.org

While the pandemic has physically separated us, we have found creative ways to remain spiritually united. I caught up with Denise Bozich to talk about how praying The Litany of Penitence and The Great Litany changed Denise's prayer life and how we came to pray them together at Ascension.

Liturgical prayer has played a significant role in Denise's life and spiritual formation. Many years ago, during a dark season in her life, Denise walked into a church where she first heard The Collect for Purity:

"This prayer broke me," she said. "When I heard the words, 'from you no secrets are hid,' I felt such a sense of freedom and relief. God knows me and accepts me despite my imperfections. God knows everything about me and what has happened to me. I no longer need to carry secrets, pretend, or hide. The things I was ashamed of or tried to cover up ... God already knew. What relief – God knows me and accepts me."



God used this prayer to set Denise on a journey of faith. In that church she met people who invited her to join a bible study and eventually she came to know Jesus. "Through studying the Word of God, I went from knowing about God to being in relationship with the Lord."

Fast forward to Ash Wednesday 2018 when once again the liturgy spoke to Denise's heart. After she prayed The Litany of Penitence that evening (a prayer of confession and repentance), she made a decision to pray it daily

throughout Lent. "The words of this prayer encompass so much. They are clear in talking about God and about sin. They express my prayerful thoughts in a way that I couldn't convey on my own." And when Lent was over, Denise kept on praying it. This liturgical prayer took root in her prayer life.

Then the pandemic hit. Once again, the Lord used liturgical prayer to shape and grow her faith. Some might recall that at Ascension's first livestream service we prayed The Great Litany. This historic prayer is for occasions of solemn and comprehensive entreaty. The Church has long turned to it in times of national anxiety or disaster. It is a prayer perfectly suited for a global pandemic and for naming the prayer concerns of our divided nation.

"That Sunday was the first time I prayed that prayer. I felt it was a time to deeply examine our hearts before God. I began to pray it every week with a friend. And that friend introduced me to other friends who also began to pray it. ... In the summer I told Andrea about how this prayer was shaping my life. She asked me if I might consider inviting others also to pray The Great Litany leading up to the elections."

That's how praying The Great Litany via Zoom came about last fall. For ten weeks leading up to the elections, Denise, and co-host Bill Campbell, kept a weekly "prayer vigil" where participants would light a candle and pray The Litany together.

When Ash Wednesday came around this year, I asked Denise if she would consider co-hosting The Litany of Penitence. So, along with co-host Josh Miser, they led us in praying this prayer for six Wednesdays in Lent.

Through prayer we experience Christ's light, love and unity in these dark, challenging, and divided times. These prayer liturgies help us turn our hearts to the Lord as we become united through prayer.

Music & Worship Arts

Kintsugi People in a Fractured World

By Elise Massa, Assistant Director of Music and Worship Arts
elise.massa@ascensionpittsburgh.org

For the last several months, I have been listening to the Culture Care podcast, “Light Through the Cracks,” hosted by Brianna Kinsman and Makoto Fujimura. The pilot episode unpacks the concepts of Culture Care, art, faith, and the art of Kintsugi. Kintsugi is a traditional Japanese art form in which Kintsugi masters mend broken pottery using lacquer and gold. Kinsman describes the process of Kintsugi as follows: First, name the fracture; second, see the landscapes that arise from the fractures; third, sand down the edges; and fourth, mend the pieces together with gold and lacquer.

I believe that the Kintsugi art form has significant applications to those called to a vocation in music and worship arts, and to the church as a whole. We have the opportunity to live in a broken world as Kintsugi people. Artist Makoto Fujimura shares this reflection on his website:

You see, when you create and make into the fissures of life — when you rebuild from a devastating fire — when you create, despite scarcity — when you “consider the lilies” (Matthew 6), especially when you are afraid — then God chooses those moments to reveal God’s Presence in our lives. We are makers, as our God is our Maker. God did not promise us an easy life, but promised us an abundant one — an abundant life of creativity and imaginative freedom.

Fujimura goes on to speak these prophetic words to us: *Your generation will mend, and pour gold into the fissures of our broken times. And you can not only mend; you can create anew, create a world in which an invitation will be given to those who are broken. Those who mourn, those who are persecuted and those who are poor in spirit will be offered a great light. Your lives can be an offering of peace in a divided time — a gesture of hope for those in despair. Your sacrifice will be an aroma of the New.*

So go mend. Be the Kintsugi masters of your generation, of your



own disciplines, in the workplaces and in your homes. Pour gold into the fissures of the world.

This is my prayer for all artists and non-artists this Easter season. Become a Kintsugi master in the world around you. Name the fractures. Imagine the redemptive landscapes that can arise as you radiate Christ’s light and glory. Work out your faith and art with fear and trembling as the Spirit sands and sanctifies the rough edges. And then, go mend.

But do not go alone. Join with the creative community of artistic disciples - poets, visual artists, songwriters, novelists, dancers, designers - who poise their craft to point to the True Creator of us all. We would love to share this sacred space with you.

Elise Massa is also the Northeast Regional Director for United Adoration which seeks to revitalize the creative community in the church by empowering artists to make art in their local language, culture, and context.

You can read Makoto Fujimura’s entire article here: <https://makotofujimura.com/writings/kintsugi-generation/>

Listen to the Culture Care Podcast: <https://culture-care-podcast.simplecast.com/>

The Parable of the Leaven

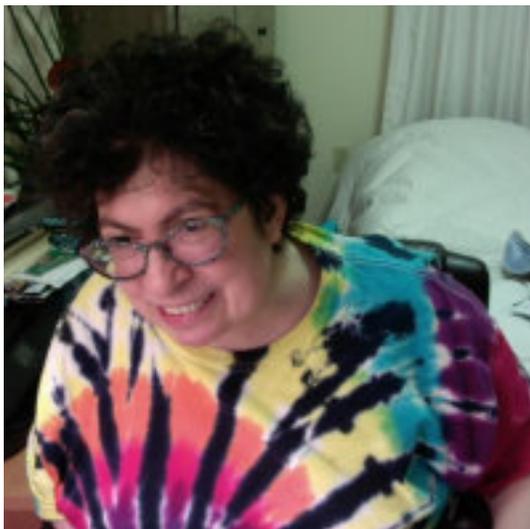
By Marilyn Clifton Chislaghi, Director of Ministry
marilyn.chislaghi@ascensionpittsburgh.org

My husband Charlie and I had fun recording Morning Prayer earlier this month for Ascension's YouTube channel. We reflected on Jesus' parable of the leaven where he used leaven in a very positive way to help us understand more about the Kingdom of God. Have you seen and smelled the wonderful aroma of rising dough? Leaven quietly works its way through all of the dough, producing enormous inward growth, causing the whole batch to rise. That's what Kingdom growth is like - quietly working away and then, voila, you see the beauty of it.

Our meditation started with Charlie's humorous reflections on his (naughty) childhood when he and a cousin decided to eat several yeast cakes under the shade of a tree on a hot summer day in hopes the yeast would build up their muscles (a rumor they heard at school). Those yeast cakes did build up something but not what they had hoped for. They both returned home, doubled over in pain with distended stomachs, to the shock of two distraught mothers.

More positively, as I looked back on the past year, a few faces came to mind of those who have weathered this year in ways I find deeply inspiring. These people have been as 'leaven' to those around them – they have quietly and faithfully lived and served and, in so doing, the Kingdom of God has grown in beautiful ways. Here's just one story.

Jude (pictured below) has spent almost every hour of the entire past year in a personal care home. She was (and is) unable to have visitors. And, to add sorrow to sorrow, her beloved mom who called her every day, her best friend, passed away early this year. Several of us have checked in on Jude over the phone – and she on us! When I asked Jude what her 'devotional routine' looked like, she said, "Oh, I don't use any resource. Me and Jesus just sort of hang out. Sometimes we do music. Sometimes we do poetry together or art. Sometimes we read scripture together." She read me some of her poetry – mostly laments for her mom. She shared her Spotify playlist, aptly titled for her situation in a care facility, "Walk the halls & Praise our God!". She talked of simple delights in her life. She always wanted to pray for me. I knew in talking with her I was talking to someone who 'hung out' with Jesus. Her presence was clarifying to me – she knows Jesus.



I asked Jude once, "Do you have friends in your care home?" She answered. "Oh Yes! I know everyone here and they are wonderful." Jude has a demeanor of joy. There is no doubt in my mind that she has exhibited that same demeanor and has shone the light of Christ to her many friends within her facility – particularly as she's been moving through those hallways to the energetic tunes on her playlist!

One of the lessons the parable of the leaven taught me is that the gospel Kingdom does not grow on account of huge fanfare. Rather, it is most often spread through the faithful and quiet work of God's people. All of a sudden, we see it – "Here it is" or "Look at it there!" Although I have not seen Jude face to face, I have witnessed the Kingdom of God in our conversations and it puts a smile on my face to think that those in her care home – despite all the challenges of this year – have tasted of the Kingdom of God through her faithful presence.

Oh the Places You'll Go!

By Sam Ferguson, Ascension Ministry Apprentice

When I was a young boy, my mom liked to read me a Dr. Seuss book entitled *Oh, The Places You'll Go!* I liked to feel the warmth of her breath on the top of my head as she slowly spoke its words to me: “Congratulations! Today is your day. You’re off to Great Places! You’re off and away!”

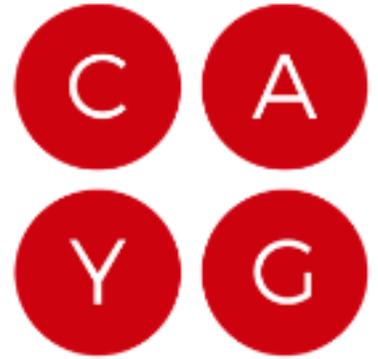


The rise and fall of her chest gave me silent yet insistent permission to dream of great places - our family road-trips did little to dispel my dreaming. Oh, the places we did go: Mesa Verde, Yellowstone, and the Grand Canyon, just to name a few. Yet the place I most relished to go was my mom’s living, breathing presence, her irrepressible in and out, sustaining my life in this world.

However, my mom’s cancer diagnosis forced us to go to more ignominious places: the hospital ward and, eventually, the hospice bed. Her constancy of breath, which had buoyed our family for so long, was reduced to a pale suggestion under a bed sheet, before finally ceasing altogether. I was in college when she passed and was wanting to go abroad for climate change research, but increasing struggles with grief-related anxiety made normal functioning difficult, sometimes to the point where I could barely leave my own bed. Her death had revoked the unspoken allowance her life had accorded me - the place from which I drew breath was gone, and I was collapsing into the vacuum. Fortunately, I came to know the Lord during this time and found I had a different place I could go: the breast of Christ, whose breath of new life revived my suffocating heart. As time went on, I found myself bolstered by this new living, breathing presence, an eternal in and out that anchored my life in this world and the next.

As I reflect on the theme of ‘Easter People in a Good Friday world,’ it strikes me that breath figures significantly in all the places we go in the Christian life. On Ash Wednesday, we remember the place we all must go, death, the place where all of us will breathe our last. On Good Friday, we remember the place Jesus did go, Golgotha, the place where even God breathed his last. On Easter, we remember the resurrection of our Lord and anticipate the place all of us will go, the new Jerusalem, where our own resurrection will restore us to breath. Today, as my fiancé and I prepare to go to Rwanda for mission work, I thank God for blessing me with my impending marriage and a chance to go abroad, but, above all, for giving me the ultimate Place I can go: to Him.

Church of the Ascension Youth Group: Reflections of a High Schooler: An Easter People & Church Family



By Alex Banfield Hicks, Director of Youth and College Ministry

alex.banfieldhicks@ascensionpittsburgh.org

For this Ascent article I would like to feature one of our CAYG (Church of the Ascension Youth Group) seniors, the wonderful Amelia Bailey!

Amelia joined us a few years ago when her family relocated from Texas, but she fit right in at CAYG and was even a small group leader for younger high school girls when we did porch pods last fall. I asked her a couple of questions about Easter and about her experience at youth group.

What are your early memories of Easter?

Easter was always a big holiday for my family. I remember it being one of the only times when all of my extended family would go to church with us and then we would go back to my house and hunt easter eggs and crack cascarones. I can perfectly picture waking up in the morning and greeting my family by saying, "He is risen!" My brother and I would find our easter baskets and then my whole family would make resurrection rolls for breakfast. I always loved easter Sunday at church because we always sang popular songs and everyone would dress up and have lots of fun.

What are your early memories of joining CAYG?

One of my earliest memories of CAYG was the Christmas overnight 2018. It was the first time I really felt like I had a church family.

Wow. That's wonderful to hear. I am very thankful that the CAYG kids and leaders could be so

welcoming. The Christmas overnight was always a highlight in the CAYG calendar and it was definitely sad and strange to be without it in 2020. What has been helpful about your continued involvement in CAYG?

I have always been drawn to leadership so getting to lead a small group was a lot of fun for me. I enjoyed getting to know my girls and hearing their stories as well as to guide them through

prayer. One of the best things is being able to learn from my peers and have thoughtful conversations about Christianity.

Thanks so much Amelia for listening, leading thoughtful conversations and guiding your girls in prayer. And I really appreciate your humility and desire to learn from others. And thank you, readers of Ascent, for praying for the youth of Ascension, for their conversations, prayers and for lives that shout forth that great Easter affirmation; "He is Risen!!!"





Glory to God

“There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!”

- ABRAHAM KUYPER

By Leah Hornfeck, Associate for Youth and Campus Ministry

leah.hornfeck@ascensionpittsburgh.org



“You came here to receive, and you came here to leave.” As we set the tone for our Jubilee Weekend Retreat, this was the message we were wrestling with. How is God going to show up here? How will our lives be different after this weekend? We were eager and expectant, and yet God had more in store for us than we could even imagine.

After almost a year of social separation and emotional exhaustion, this retreat was a much-needed space to commune with God and others. We’ve collectively experienced great hardships and strug-

gles, and many of our students were bringing their questions and burdens. How do I know what God wants me to do with my life? How can I live out and grow in my faith? Can I really trust God? Do I even believe any of this? I imagine there were some parallels between these questions and the ones the disciples were asking on a Saturday almost 2000 years ago, and (at least some) answers were just a dawn away. The dark and dreadful realities of the cross and the grave have been acutely present in our world, but as this year’s Jubilee theme reminded us, Christ is sovereign over all - over every inch of the cross and the grave, and every inch of our world today.

**PHOTO CAPTION:**

Group of Venite students gathered around CCO Jubilee conference video stream

We can stake our hope on the reassurance of Christ's sovereign lordship because of his resurrection. Though the world may feel much more Good Friday and Holy Saturday than Easter Sunday given our current circumstances, this retreat was teeming with evidence of the Kingdom of God that was ushered in with the resurrection. Students renewed their faith and trust in the Lord, confessing there have been parts of them that they have held back from him, but now they were ready to surrender fully to him. Students who grew up in the church but had been lingering on the fringes of faith since going off to college felt called to recommit to him and reinvest in his people.

There was even one student who came to a saving knowledge of Christ for the first time! She admitted that she didn't know why she had accepted our invitation to come to our Jubilee retreat since she wasn't particularly religious. However, after hearing a message from one of the speakers, she said that it all just clicked. She was here to start following Jesus and put her faith in him. She pulled me aside to pray with her and said, "The speaker told us to tell someone if we decided to commit our life to Jesus, so this is me doing that."

One of the graces used to close morning and evening prayers is from Ephesians 3:20-21 and reads, "Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: Glory to him from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen." As Easter people, holding to the hope of the resurrection, we must attune ourselves to the work of this inconceivable power. It may not be as obvious as the snide and savage headlines on our screens, but it is considerably more substantial. When we behold it, as we at Venite had the privilege of doing during Jubilee, may we proclaim, "Glory to God!"

Parish Day Away

Laurelville pool and grounds

Saturday, June 12

Noon – 5pm

Bring a picnic!



Worship Services **Sunday 9:00 am Outdoor Tent Service; 11:00 am Live stream** on [YouTube](#) with walk-through Eucharist from 12:15 - 1:15 p.m.

Website www.ascensionpittsburgh.org

Address 4729 Ellsworth Avenue Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Phone/Fax (412) 621-4361 / (412) 621-5746

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Marilyn Clifton Chislaghi, Editor
Kristen Parise, Publisher



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