

The Ascension

EASTER 2024

ASCENSIONPITTSBURGH.ORG



Easter-tide at
The Ascension



Wear Red for
Pentecost
Sunday!

Sunday May 19th



ASCENSION INTERNATIONAL MINISTRY

THANK YOU BRUNCH

April 27 @ 9am-12pm

A time to thank our teachers and share about what's happened in the ministry over the past year.

Special guests
Jonathan & Andrea Millard

Gluten free options available

RSVP: stswauger05@gmail.com



Coming Up This Spring!

We have a busy spring that culminates with a big event on the weekend of June 15/16, the Millard Farewell Weekend. Jonathan and Andrea are doing a 'Farewell Tour' of sorts, visiting many church ministries to visit in smaller groups. Here is what's coming up!

APRIL

Saturday, April 13: International Ministry field trip to the Aviary (meet at 10am)

Sunday, April 14: College Ministry Farewell Lunch with Millards

Thursday, April 18: Millard Farewell lunch with Legacy (12:30pm)

Saturday, April 20: Soul Care (9:30am)

Saturday, April 27: International Ministry Volunteer Thank You Brunch with special guests, Jonathan and Andrea Millard (9am – Noon)

Saturday, April 27: WINGS Spring Fling (Noon)

MAY

Saturday, May 4: Marathon Weekend Worship (5pm); CAYG Movie Night (6:30pm)

Sunday, May 5: Pittsburgh Marathon; No Sunday Services

Tuesday, May 7: Rector Search Prayer Zoom (6pm)

Saturday, May 11: Soul Care (9:30am); International Ministry Laurel Caverns Field Trip (Noon)

Sunday, May 12: Ascension Sunday; Services of Confirmation at both services

Thursday, May 16: Legacy with Joel Scandrett "Dealing with Grief" (12:30pm)

Sunday, May 19: Pentecost Sunday (please remember to wear red!)

Wednesday, May 22: Book discussion with Kevin Antlitz (7pm); Digital Liturgies by Samuel D. James; Register on the app.

Sunday, May 26: WINGS gathering with Millards (10:30am)



Monday, May 27: Memorial Day (offices closed)

Wednesday, May 29, Friday, May 31: Community Group Leader gatherings with Millards

JUNE

Saturday, June 1: Soul Care (9:30am); Explore Ascension (1pm)

Sunday, June 2: Ribbon Cutting Ceremony for Parish Hall wing (pending)

Tuesday, June 4: Rector Search Prayer Zoom (6pm)

Wednesday, June 5: Contemporary Music Team dinner with Millards (6:30pm)

Thursday, June 6: Sacristy Team dinner with Millards (6:30pm)

Saturday, June 8: Ordination of Wes Williams to the Priesthood (St Stephens, Sewickley @ 10am); Choir lunch with Millards (Noon)

Sunday, June 9: Children's Ministry Ice Cream Social Farewell with Millards (after services); CAYG Farewell Party with Millards (6pm)

Saturday, June 15: Parish Farewell Program & Dinner for Jonathan and Andrea Millard (6pm)

Sunday, June 16: Millards final Sunday at Ascension

Tuesday, June 18: Vestry Dinner with the Millards (6:30pm)

Wednesday, June 19: Staff Brunch with the Millards (9:30am)

Thursday, June 20: Legacy Seniors Luncheon (12:30pm)

Sunday, June 30: Book discussion with Jess Bennett (12:45pm): *The Spirit of our Politics* by Michael Wear. Register on the app.

Loving God and Neighbor



By Kevin Antlitz, Assistant Rector
kevin.antlitz@ascensionpittsburgh.org

I believe that Jesus is Lord. But I am still dreading the next 6+ months as we wait for November 5, 2024 to arrive.

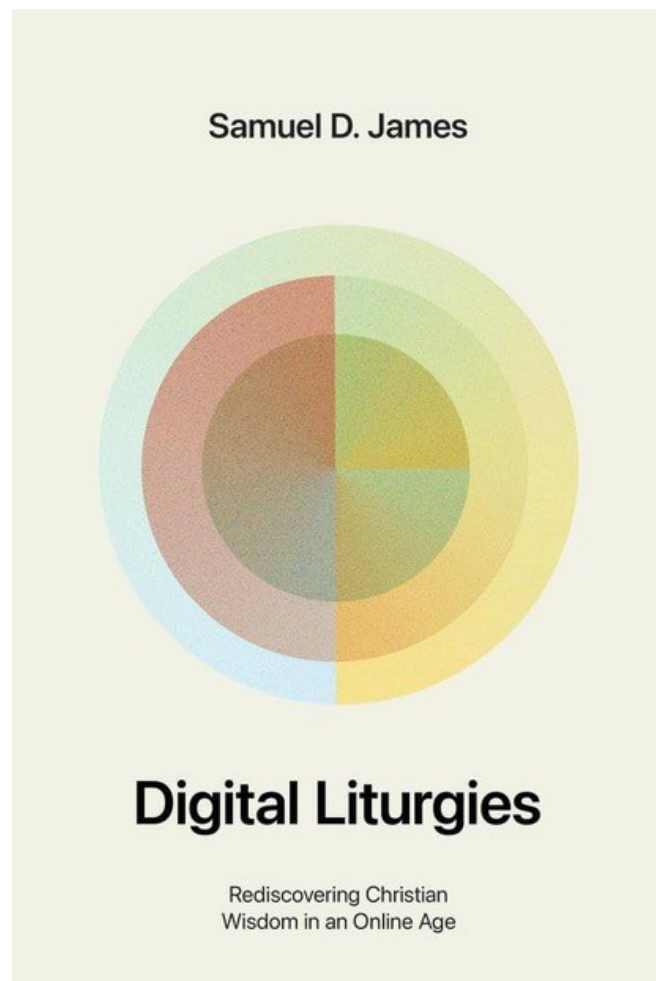
On this day, millions of Americans will head to the polls (fun fact: our church is a Polling Place) to cast their vote for the next President of the United States of America as well as other important political offices.

In between now and November 5, billions of dollars will be spent on political advertisements. Our news, media, and social media feeds will be flooded with “news” about the election. At times, I suspect it might feel like we’re drowning in political discourse.

If the past few election cycles are any indication – and I think they are – the 2024 election will likely be a divisive time for our nation. In all likelihood, the election will strain our friendships, our families, our relationships with our neighbors, co-workers, and even the relationships within our church family. Given what’s ahead, I think we need all the help we can get to walk through this season of life together.

To help us navigate the turbulent waters faithfully and with Christ-like love, we are inviting parishioners to read and discuss two books together. Obviously, these books are not a cure-all, but I think reading and talking together will be a big help!

I will lead the discussion of the first book called *Digital Liturgies* by Samuel D. James. We begin with this book because I think it gets upstream of problems like political divisiveness.



in an Election Season

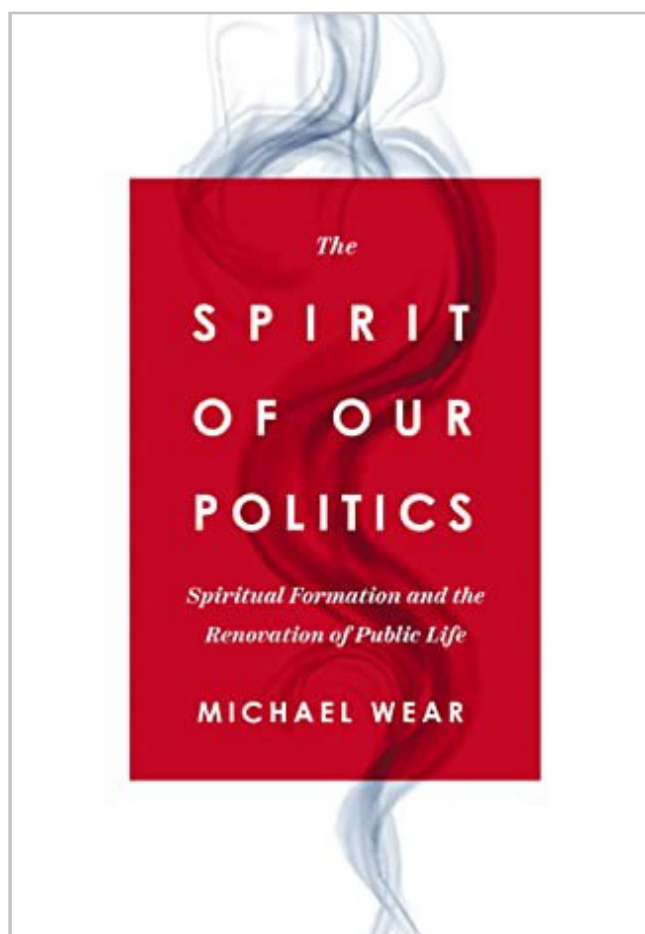
Digital Liturgies helps us to look at the impact of the Internet Age on every aspect of our lives. Becoming aware of how the internet and our technology are forming us more broadly is a helpful first step as we resist what I call “digital deformation.”

Discussion: *Digital Liturgies* by Samuel D. James
Date: Wednesday, May 22 at 7pm the Hunt Rooms
Register on the app.

Mother Jess Bennett will lead the discussion of the second book called *The Spirit of Our Politics* by Michael Wear. In this brand new and very hope-filled book, Wear offers a fresh way to think about political involvement as Christians. He does this by applying the riches of Dallas Willard’s approach to spiritual formation to equip us to engage politics in a faithful and wise way.

Discussion: *The Spirit of our Politics* by Michael Wear
Date: Sunday, June 30 at 12:45pm in the Hunt Rooms
Register and pay \$5 for pizza on the app.

You will be able to register for the book discussions on the Church Center app and website. You can join us for one or both. Even if you can’t make it to the discussions, the books are still well worth your time.



Introducing our Newest Staff Priest: The Rev. Lauren Scharf



By Jonathan Millard, Rector

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I am delighted that The Rev. Lauren Scharf joined our staff this past month as an interim staff priest. Mother Lauren has served in the Diocese of Pittsburgh for the past 10 years – indeed, Lauren was ordained a priest at Ascension!

Lauren has been engaged in ministry in Western PA for the last twenty years. She served St. Stephen's Church, Sewickley for many years as Director of Community Life, Women's Director, and, later, as a Deacon. After being ordained to the priesthood, Lauren was the Assistant Rector of All Saints, Cranberry.

She and her family live in Ambridge near Trinity School for Ministry where she is currently pursuing her Doctor of Ministry degree with a focus on the intersection of Christian discipleship with the spiritual practices of the Twelve Step community. Lauren also serves as a Spiritual Formation Coach with the Isaiah Forty Foundation.

Here at Ascension Lauren will regularly take part in our Sunday rotation of preacher, celebrant, and assistant priest. After Andrea and I retire from Ascension in June, Mother Lauren will assume many of the responsibilities in the arena of prayer ministry and pastoral care that Andrea used to hold.

Lauren is married to Chris, and together they have two children: Caleb (10) and Maddie (7). Together they love hiking, spending time at the creek by their house, doing puzzles, and playing with their dog, Snowflake. Lauren is an avid reader with a particular love of fiction and mysteries, so if you have any recommendations, please let her know.



The Power of God



By LuAnn Pengidore, Director of International Ministry

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"But to those called by God to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God." -1 Corinthians 1:14

During this time of Eastertide, I want to celebrate what Christ's power and wisdom have done in the international ministry. I have seen Jesus at work with the over 50 Ascension parishioners who teach or assist in classes each week, substitute for absent teachers, serve as conversation partners, or provide childcare during classes for students.

I am especially thankful to Wenting Zhang who serves in childcare during the Wednesday evening classes for 6 children of all ages after a long day at work at CMU and caring for her own 2 boys. There are other parishioners like Ochuko Oputo and William Decasere who make sure technology is running smoothly and have helped students with pursuing job ideas. I am also thankful for the 10 or more assistants in the Conversation Café who come each Wednesday morning to chat with students on various topics (such as cultural differences in smiling, bullying, or Leap Year). These volunteers often stay after to talk to students individually and pray for special needs that arise in their lives.

Because Jesus is good news to people

from all nations, the power and wisdom of God have brought students from around the globe (36 countries) to Pittsburgh to attend our programs. Just to name a few, we have gotten to know students from Ukraine, Russia, Venezuela, Mexico, China, Japan, Korea, Saudi Arabia, France, Guatemala, Turkey, Afghanistan, Brazil, Belarus, and Iran this year. These students range in age from kids to grandparents with most in their late 20s to 40s.

I also see the power and wisdom of God bringing people to greater knowledge of Himself! With various Bible study and prayer leaders such as Timmy Podnar, Logan Stahl, Josh Oliver, Lola Alcorn and Philipp Burckhardt, Nancy Foster, Petra Obley, Gary Harger, Daniel Behrens, and myself, we get to plant seeds and witness how people with very little past exposure to Christianity start sensing Jesus' presence and answered prayers. The 10for@4 ministry with Sophie Bernardi and four to six prayers warriors also see many answered prayers as students or teachers share their concerns each week.

Finally, I am grateful for Savannah Swauger and Caleb Shook who assist in this ministry. They have planned and encouraged other young people to help with international events. For example, with their help we took 25-35



ASCENSION INTERNATIONAL MINISTRY

PITTSBURGH AVIARY FIELD TRIP

Saturday April 13 | 10:30am-12:00p
Need a ride? Come to the church at 10:00am
RSVP on the app or google form

students to Phipps and the Titanic exhibit. Upcoming field trips to the Aviary, Laurel Caverns, Raccoon State Park, the French and Indian Museum at the Point, and a working farm are planned.

Thank you for your generosity to this program and your love, hard work, and prayers for internationals. If you are interested in this program, please contact me as we always lose a few volunteers and need more in the summer months and fall.

Meet the Vestry

Ascension's Vestry will play an important role in the interim period between rectors. We'd like you to meet them again so you can both pray for them and reach out to them as needed. Here they are!

Mandy Jabbour (Senior Warden)

Mandy feels privileged to serve as senior warden during this transitional chapter in the life of Ascension. In fact, her first visit to Ascension as a newlywed in 2003 marked our last Rector transition: The Rev. Doug McGlynn's final service. He preached about Peter's confession of Christ in Matthew's gospel where Jesus declares, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it."

Father Doug emphasized each word, I...will...build...my...church, declaring Ascension to be Christ's Church, extolling us to trust Christ's promise to build the Church and to rest in His love for the Church. Twenty years later, we testify to God's fruitful work at Ascension under Father Jonathan and accept Christ's invitation to rest again in His love and provision for the Church as we prepare to say good-bye to the Millards and welcome the next Rector in due time.



Mandy and her parents were introduced to Christ while living in the Netherlands & Germany for her father's work. She spent her formative childhood years attending a Baptist church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. After high school, she studied psychology & communications at Wheaton College, and married her college sweetheart, Noel, shortly after graduation. Noel and Mandy attended Ascension from 2003-2007 during which time Noel was in medical school and Mandy completed a Masters degree in social work at the University of Pittsburgh. Noel's training sent them elsewhere from 2007-2013. In a surprising twist, Noel and Mandy returned to Pittsburgh and Ascension in fall 2013.

Mandy has been married to Noel for 21 years and they are parents to two teens, Micah (17) and Nathan (14), who keep them playful and humble. Vocationally, Mandy works as a co-owner and a licensed therapist at Living Stones Counseling Services, providing counseling to individuals and groups.

Mandy has served in many capacities at Ascension over the years, including teaching Godly play, leading the North Hills community group, serving on the missions committee, leading prayers of the people, chaperoning a CAYG trip, serving on altar prayer, serving on More Than Stones committees, and serving on vestry from 2019-2022.

On any given day, Mandy can be found enjoying time outside, laughing with family and friends, chauffeuring her kids in her minivan, and/or eating dark chocolate.



Tyler Marwood (Junior Warden)

Tyler Marwood grew up in Linesville, PA, "where the ducks walk

on the fish," attended a Baptist church growing up, and went to Geneva College for undergrad. After graduation, Tyler participated in the Pittsburgh Fellows Program, which is when he experienced his first Anglican worship service at St. Stephen's Church in Sewickley. A year later, in 2010, he moved to Pittsburgh and started attending Church of the Ascension and hasn't left! He currently leads the North of the Ohio community group.

Tyler has worked at the CCO (Coalition for Christian Outreach) in the Marketing and Communications Department since 2013. He loves working for an organization that is passionate about reaching college students with the Gospel, connecting them to a local church, and giving them a vision to serve Jesus in their lives.

Tyler and his wife, Kate, live in Brighton Heights with their daughter Mercy (5). They love taking walks around the neighborhood and seeing the growing Ascension community! Tyler also loves his cat, Booboo, eating ice cream, and reading British novels.

Sarah Gilmer

Sarah is a strategist and programmer of arts experiences based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Sarah was confirmed at the Church of the Ascension in 2006 and rejoined the congregation upon moving back to Pittsburgh in 2016. She lives in Penn Hills, typically attends the 11am service, and is part of the Martsof Community Group. You can often find her sitting at the drum kit on Sunday mornings.

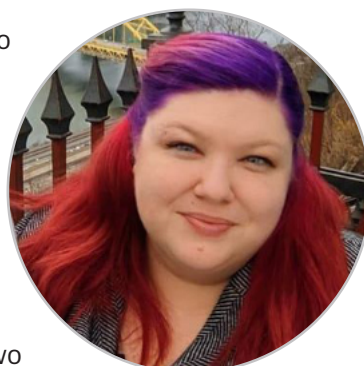
Sarah obtained a Bachelor of Arts in economics from American University and a certificate in worship music from the Hillsong International Leadership College in Sydney, Australia. She worked as a program manager in strategic partnerships and community engagement at the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust for over 4 years. She currently works as the programming manager of the Kelly Strayhorn Theater in East Liberty and volunteers for Acoustic Soul, a quarterly, multi-church worship experience founded by Macedonia Church of Pittsburgh.



Britt Gowen

While originally from the Mon Valley, Britt came to the big city to attend the University of Pittsburgh. There she obtained her bachelor's degree in English Literature, striving to take as many unique classes as she could that would still fulfill her educational requirements. She was very involved in the campus ministry RUF (Reformed University Fellowship). Britt is currently in her second year of graduate school, pursuing a low-residency counseling degree from the Seattle School of Theology & Psychology.

Britt's husband, Ian, works as a software engineer. They have two fluffy Siberian cats: Hobbes & Rosie. Britt & Ian first began attending



Ascension in the summer of 2018. Britt attends the Women's Bible study group on Wednesday mornings and loves working through the difficult parts of the Prophets with such gifted, smart ladies. In her years volunteering with CAYG (aka youth group), Britt has found it to be a joy and privilege to walk alongside such great teens! She is also a camp counselor at her childhood summer camp, Camp Christian in the Laurel Highlands. She has served there for the past 17ish years. Britt loves reading, musicals, and feelings!

Britt has found Ascension to be a place of spiritual growth, deep solace, and kind community. In serving on Vestry, Britt looks forward to joining in the ongoing work of making Ascension a place to deeply experience the love of God in tangible ways.

Andy Halfhill

Andy, along with Hannah and their three children, Micah, Selah, and Zechariah, have been at Ascension since 2018. Andy was baptized and raised in the Presbyterian church. In 2005, Andy and Hannah moved to Little Rock, Arkansas where they were members of Mosaic Church of Central Arkansas, a non-denominational, multi-ethnic church. Andy chaired Mosaic's elder board from 2011-2015, before moving back to Pittsburgh where he and Hannah had grown up. The Halfhills are members of Ascension's Omnia Nova community group. While Hannah works as a spiritual director, Andy works for Allegheny County's Department of Human Services, where he serves as the administrator of homeless services.



Jane Banfield Hicks

Jane Banfield Hicks was raised in both Minnesota and Kansas City. She has been at Ascension since 2015, arriving from St. Louis where her husband Alex (a Brit) was attending Covenant Theological Seminary. Since coming to Ascension, she has been involved in music ministry, singing in the adult choir, and leading the Children's Choir for 5 years. She also volunteered in Kids' Church and led the CAYG parents' discussion group last year. Jane and Alex are currently leading a Community Group in Morningside for parents of youth.



Jane was raised in the Evangelical Covenant Church, and her first exposure to Anglicanism was after marrying Alex and moving to the UK, where they were Community Group leaders at St. Leonard's (Church of England) in Exeter. Although they were not involved in an Anglican church at the time, their friend Alex Shuttleworth (rector of Christ Church Fox Chapel) invited them to come 'explore' Pittsburgh and Jane is so glad they did! She loves the orthodoxy and liturgy found in the Anglican church, and the breadth and width of expressions of worship as well.

Their first Sunday at Ascension was for her husband Alex's interview as Director of Youth Ministry, Jane found the welcome warm - they were especially well looked after by Dave and Ginger Weeber, who are now godparents to their son John Victor. Jane and Alex have three children: Lydia (12), John Victor (9) and Beatrix (8). She is the Office Manager for Haiti H2O, a Pittsburgh-based charity which partners with 4 communities in rural Haiti. Jane is excited to serve on vestry in this transitional period! She hopes her presence and prayer input will be a blessing for our community, and those around us who don't yet know Jesus.

Jordan Markley

Jordan and his wife Brenna live in Greenfield with their daughters, Sylvia and Vivian. Raised in a diverse assortment of churches, they first encountered Anglicanism through the Rev. Ethan Magness and the ministry of Grace Anglican Church while studying at Grove City College. They came to Church of the Ascension about 10 years ago. Today they lead the Greenfield Community Group and take very deep breaths every time their daughters are called on during the children's sermon.



Jordan previously played with the Ascension Music Ministry, assisted the bishop's office in planning Diocesan Convention, and crafted foundation proposals for the More than Stones Campaign. When he is not chasing his daughters around area playgrounds, he works in fundraising at Carnegie Mellon University, goes mountain biking in Frick Park, reads fiction, history and cookbooks, and hosts guests for cocktails on the front porch.

Jon Parise

Jon Parise and his wife Kristen have been regularly attending Ascension since the summer of 2019. They previously attended South Side Anglican, but their first encounter with Ascension was on Christmas Eve 2018. Invited by Karen and Mark Stevenson, Jon and Kristen were captivated by the service's beauty and joy. This experience led them to choose Ascension as their new spiritual home when their previous church closed soon thereafter.



The couple, native Pittsburghers, have been married for 15 years and share their home with a dog and two kittens. They met in college through InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, which played a significant role in their spiritual development. At Ascension, Jon and Kristen co-lead the South Hills community group alongside the Don and Barb Wardius. Additionally, Jon contributes to altar prayer and assists in the refugee ministry.

Beyond church activities, for the past 15 years Jon has been volunteering weekly with Youth for Christ Metro Pittsburgh's Campus Life program, a high school

ministry. His dedication to this role has even led him to take part in a December “lake jump” on multiple occasions.

Professionally, Jon is a Software Engineer at Klaviyo, a Boston-based marketing automation company. He is enthusiastic about serving on the vestry, aiming to support Ascension's growth in its love for God and fulfillment of God's purposes in Pittsburgh.

Hannah Quinn

Hannah (Foster) Quinn started attending Ascension in middle school with her family while growing up in Pittsburgh. Over fifteen years after leaving Pittsburgh for college, she is thrilled to be back and settled here in Pittsburgh with her husband Ian and their children Liesl, Sean, and Samuel. Hannah studied English literature and taught high school students in Miami, FL for two years with Teach for America before feeling called into the field of nursing. After several additional years of schooling, working as a nurse, and having kids, she is a pediatric nurse practitioner by trade who is currently grateful to be at home with her kids.



Although Hannah and Ian lived all over the country while Ian served as an officer in the Army, Ascension has always been their church home away from home; she and Ian were married here in 2015 and Liesl was baptized here in 2018 when their local church at the time didn't perform infant baptism. They are deeply thankful and excited to now call Ascension their official home. The incredible fellowship, teaching, and abundant presence and grace of God she and her family continue to experience at Ascension gives rise to daily thanks and joy. Hannah and Ian are especially grateful to be a part of their community group and to see their kids growing in relationship with friends at church just as they do. Hannah loves serving in the nursery and is humbled and excited by the opportunity to serve on the vestry.

Aaron Sams

Aaron and his family moved to Pittsburgh from Colorado in 2012 and have been members at Ascension since 2017. He is husband to Kelsey, and dad to Zeke, Dorothy, and Lucy. The Sams family live in Swissvale with a dog, cat, python, and a small flock of chickens. Aaron and Kelsey are part of the Forest Hills Community Group. You may spot him at the sound desk during the 9am service, behind a bass guitar on the music team, in the hallway as leader of the security team, or hovering around the cookies during the fellowship hour.



Aaron grew up in Wyoming, the son of a coal miner and an elementary school teacher. He is a life-long Christian and has served in various leadership and governance roles in previous churches. He attended Biola University in southern California where he met his wife, Kelsey, and where he received a B.S. in Biochemistry and M.A. in Education. Aaron also holds a Ph.D. in STEM Education from Texas Tech University. He is a former high school chemistry teacher and now works at Saint Vincent College as an Associate Professor of Education where he teaches and trains new educators. Aaron also operates an education consulting business and has worked with K-12 schools, colleges, seminaries, universities, and ministries of education around the world. He has co-authored numerous books for teachers and regularly speaks at education conferences. Aaron enjoys being outside biking, camping, rock climbing, hunting, or just lounging in a hammock. He is an avid homebrewer and likes to sip on his creations while barbecuing, grilling, or smoking meat.

James Wilson

Jim is new to Vestry, filling the unexpired term of Millicent Smith.

Jim grew up in Western Pennsylvania (Franklin PA up north) and attended college at Indiana University of PA (graduating in December 1974). From there it was on to the (too) big city of Philadelphia where Jim graduated from Temple Law School in 1978. He has, for nearly 40 years, been a federal prosecutor, starting with a 5-year stint in the Criminal Division of the United States Department of Justice in Washington, DC. He has handled prosecution of international drug trafficking organizations that were responsible for the kidnap murder of a federal agent, and for most of the last 35 years has been responsible for prosecuting a wide variety of financial crimes (tax and insurance fraud, investment fraud schemes, and many other fraud offenses) here in the Western District of Pennsylvania. He also served as a liaison from the US Embassy in Baghdad to the Iraqi High Tribunal (the Court that tried Saddam Hussein and his henchmen), for most of two years in 2007 and 2010. He looks forward to retirement later this year.



It was while living in Washington DC that he met and married the lovely Christina Carlucci. Christina and Jim moved to Pittsburgh in 1990 and almost immediately began attending Ascension. Over the years three children arrived (Benjamin, Emily, and Sam) and for most of the last 20 years Jim has been known either as Christina Carlucci's husband or Benjamin Carlucci's dad (both designations he wears proudly). Sadly, Christina suffered a catastrophic health emergency in 2019 and did not survive.

Jim became a member at Ascension in approximately 1982 and over the many years has served as a member of something called the Parish Council, the Vestry, the Board of Trustees for the Diocese and as Chair of the Search Committee that brought Father Jonathan to Ascension (at the recommendation of Mother Ann Paton). From time to time, he also taught Sunday School for a variety of age groups from primary schoolers to adults. As a result of a renewal of his faith during his senior year in high school he began taking the development of a comprehensive Christian perspective seriously and set out to cultivate a viable intellectual approach to matters of the historical Christian faith. Over several years he took courses at Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge and Reformed Theological Seminary in East Liberty, accumulating approximately 39 credits in New and Old Testament studies, church history, missions, and systematic theology. Collateral to volunteer ministry through Ascension Jim also functioned for many years as a volunteer assistant to the ministry of the Coalition for Christian Outreach to law, medical and dental students. He was also a founding board member of the mission organization Anglican Frontier Missions and served on that board for more than 20 years - it is the only mission entity in the worldwide Anglican Communion that has as its sole focus the unreached world, that is, the largest and least evangelized people groups on the planet.

Jim is happy to step out of moth balls and once again assume a position on the vestry. He is excited by what has been going on at Ascension in recent years, particularly the steady growth that sees the regular arrival of new young families (it is great to have so many people that he has no idea who they are) and the development of the ministries to internationals and refugees. He is also especially gratified when the new Ascent arrives each month and he can read the latest column by James Scannell. All in all, these are days when it seems that Ascension is an exciting place to be.

Prayer Pointers for Eastertide

Ascension Search Committee – For wisdom and unity as the committee interviews candidates.

Ascension Wardens and Vestry – For unity and wisdom for our Senior and Junior Warden and the Vestry as they prepare to appoint a new rector and lead the parish in the absence of a rector from July 1st.

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

Jonathan and Andrea Millard – For grace and peace as they prepare to retire from Ascension.

Lauren Scharf – For wisdom, grace, and confidence as Lauren joins Ascension staff as a part-time interim priest.

Parish Hall construction – For continued safety of workers and completion of construction.

Millard Farewell committees – For the two committees planning a farewell event for Jonathan and Andrea Millard on the weekend of June 15.

Erika and Nate Twichell – For wisdom, trust, and provision as they prepare to move to the UK in May to take up a new calling.

Interim Music Leadership – For Gary Harger, Josh Bennett, Jenn Miller, Heidi Mayhew, and Scott Bowles as they continue to lead Ascension music ministry.

Refugee Ministry – For participants of this ministry as they prepare to welcome a fourth refugee family. Pray especially for the recruitment of a team of 10 – 15 people to join our

‘Welcome Circle’, including team leads for housing, education, medical, benefits, and community orientation.

International Ministry – For good relational connections to develop between Ascension volunteers and program participants; for the 50+ volunteers within this ministry

Community Group Leaders

– For those 50+ individuals who lead Ascension’s 25+ Community Groups throughout the city; for Kevin Antlitz as he leads this ministry.

Shelter Meal Ministry

– For continuation of the preparation of meals offsite for the next couple of months, and then readjustment to onsite preparation once Ascension kitchens are available; for the leaders of this ministry: Jonathan Sewall and Brian Janaszek.

Special Needs Ministry

– For the flourishing of all in our congregation with cognitive, developmental, and sensory disabilities; for the leaders of this ministry: Beth Christensen, Judy Schaad, Hannah Rudzki, Wes Williams.

Legacy

– For our seniors’ group as they grow in their faith and enjoy monthly lunches and talks together; for the leaders of this ministry: Ann Tefft, Kate Fisher, Nancy Drew, Tom Hillman, Alan Komm.

Children’s Ministry – For our children, teachers and childcare workers; for the leaders of this ministry: Catherine Slocum, Katie Wentz (assistant), Jay Slocum (curriculum).
(Continued on p. 15)



Prayers of the People



By Andrea Millard, Director of Prayer Ministry & Leadership Development
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Nearly every week, following the Nicene Creed, we kneel for the Prayers of the People. Did you know that at Church of the Ascension it is one of our trained volunteers who prepares and leads the Prayers each week? These Ascension members prayerfully seek to respond to the proclamation of the Word and the needs of the community by crafting prayers for all to pray together.

In the context of our liturgical worship, the Prayers of the People provide

space for intercession and public prayer. The one leading gives voice, on our behalf, to our community's collective needs and longings. The Prayers are shaped by the awareness of human need and the circumstances in the world, as well as the assurance that Jesus can touch, heal, and reconcile all things through the transforming power of God's Holy Spirit. The Prayers of the People are saturated in faith, hope, and love, and with an expectation that God's inbreaking Kingdom is at hand.

Our leaders use a standard framework designed to cover a wide range of topics that are then customized each

week (prayers for the world, the universal Church, governmental leaders, missionaries, the local church, and community, including individual and personal needs, and more). This framework comes from our 2019 Book of Common Prayer. The leader uses the Prayer Book as a guide to craft petitions while keeping in mind the Sunday readings, current events, and needs arising in the church and in the world.

Now when you kneel to pray the Prayers of the People, perhaps you will hear them differently and, in your heart, give thanks for the one leading.

Prayer Pointers Continued

Youth Ministry – For our youth as they navigate very difficult cultural challenges; for the leaders of this ministry: Josh Bennett, Wes Williams, Kelsey Regan.

Ascension College Students and Young Adults – For those in this stage of life as they navigate education, jobs, and decisions about their futures; for the leader of this ministry: Jess Bennett.

New Members – for those who have become members of Ascension this past year and those contemplating membership, that they grow in the grace and wisdom of the Lord.

New Believers – For encouragement and joy for those who were baptized at Ascension over the course of the past year.

Baptisms– For those internationals who will take a baptism class in preparation for baptism on Pentecost Sunday; for those adults and families of children as they prepare for baptism.

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

Those in distress – For those who are in situations of personal distress.

Job Partners



By Daniel Behrens, Ascension Missionary in Residence

behrensdg1@gmail.com

The English classes at Ascension bring hundreds of internationals into the building and into the lives of teachers and assistants. As these connections grow, a common request is help finding work, either a first job in Pittsburgh, a different job that provides for a family's needs, or a job that connects with someone's work history. It is very common to see someone who was a highly trained professional in their home country now working for minimal pay in a restaurant, hotel, or factory.

Last summer I started holding "Office Hours" to meet these job seekers and try to provide assistance. This humble beginning is taking shape as a new group of volunteers we are calling "Job Partners." Job Partners are paired with a job seeker for one to three months to help them overcome their specific obstacles to employment. Sometimes this looks like preparing a résumé, wading through an online application, or going door-to-door to look for work. So far, we have assisted people from Venezuela, Afghanistan, the D.R.C., Russia, Nicaragua, and Turkey, and have worked with volunteers from Iran, Guatemala, Russia, Kenya...and the United States!

"David" is a single dad from South America with decades of experience as a craftsman. He studies English at Ascension and approached me for help finding a construction job to provide for his 4 children. Communication was slow with my growing Spanish and his thick accent, but we were able to discuss a few job connections. He also shared about a traveling companion who got stranded in Ecuador but hopes to join him in the U.S. I was able to direct him to CIAC, the legal aid clinic which Ascension hosts every Thursday



A great movie about refugees adjusting to life in North America and finding work is "Peace by Chocolate", based on a true story (and you can purchase the chocolate on Amazon!)

night. I also invited him to an upcoming informal gathering at the church for Spanish-speakers where he and his children can meet others who have recently arrived and are adjusting to life in the U.S. He spoke freely about his faith and at the end of our conversation I got to pray in Spanish for his job search, his children, and his dear friend in Ecuador. This rich conversation helped me see the beautiful potential for this holistic, church-based ministry.

Please pray for those in our programs who are seeking employment and pray for the Job Partners. I believe that this ministry can be truly life-changing!

If you want to learn more about Job Partners, Latino Ministry, or Refugee Welcome Circles please reach out to me! I would love to chat!

Setting the Table for Communion



By Linda Von Bloch, Sacristy Team

Behind the scenes at Church of the Ascension, there is a group of men and women who, on a weekly basis, prepare the altar and its furnishings for worship. Known in bygone days as the Altar Guild, our Sacristy Team gets the church ready for Eucharistic services as well as special events such as weddings, baptisms, and funerals. They also beautify the church by decorating it at Christmas and Easter.

The Sacristy Team cares for the altar linens, vestments, candles, and communion vessels. While the various Sacristy teams make sure everything is in place and ready for the clergy to conduct the church service, it is more than just setting the table and cleaning up. It is quiet, prayerful work that serves the Lord and allows for the smooth flow of worship.

If you are interested in exploring Sacristy Team services, please contact Marilyn Chislaghi (marilyn.chislaghi@ascensionpittsburgh.org). No prior experience or special skills are required. Flexible time commitments available. The only qualifications are an open heart and a willingness to serve.

Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

By James Scannell

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From the editor: For this issue James, a young adult at Ascension who has non-speaking autism and communicates via a spelling board, interviews an Ascension teenager, Eva Ruth Scandrett. This is Part 2 of James' interview with Eva Ruth. Part 1 can be found in the Lenten (February) Ascent.

James: *I am pleased to be interviewing Eva Ruth for this issue. Disability can be present in many forms: I think of it as any physical or neurological challenge that makes it difficult for a person to navigate in our current societal structures. To my mind, mental health challenges, which have often been seen by Christians as spiritual or character issues, fit in this category. Recently, medical models have shown us the biochemical imbalances that can play a part in these difficulties. I hope that you enjoy and learn from Eva Ruth as I did. She kindly agreed to share with us her insights and struggles.*

James: My struggles are obvious to people. What is it like to have an invisible struggle?

Eva Ruth: I think it's hard to look "normal" and not be "normal," because people tend to think if you look fine, you are fine. And that's just not true. Most people have something going on that's not OK, that's a struggle for them, even if it's not a mental illness. I have friends with depression and anxiety, friends whose parents struggle or who had fraught childhoods, and you can't see that by looking at them. You only know it when you get to know them. So, it's hard that we grow up in a world where you should treat everyone at a base level of assuming they're ok. It's assumed that someone is ok unless they tell you or look like they're not. It makes it hard to "come out" as having those struggles because they've assumed that you're fine for so long. You can seem like a happy, kind person but you struggle with depression. Or you can seem to "go with the flow" and have fun times and still have a lot of anxiety. So, it's hard for other people to accept when they've been wrong about someone and it's hard when you tell someone that they're wrong about you. Then they may tell you you're wrong about you. That can be really damaging when you're already struggling with self-doubt and anxiety. You start to think maybe they're right, maybe I'm just overreacting, but it's definitely hard.



James: You help me see the importance of gentleness in our relationships with one another. Current social norms seem to value being right, competing, being cool, being snarky even. Jesus was gentle and took time to see people and to listen. I think you are an amazing spokesperson for mental health. I'm so glad you are so open. I think it will bless people. Is there anything else you want people to know?

Eva Ruth: I think just to remember God intentionally made everybody differently. It's not that He had a formula and then some of us fall outside of that. We all have different things that make us unique. And some of those good things open us up to different kinds of suffering, like mental illness. Some people are born with physical disabilities, or mental disabilities, and that's OK. They are still beautiful. God made them. I have very close friends on the autism spectrum. It's so hard for them to live in a world where autism is so stigmatized. There tends to be a view of things that if you are different that's not ok - unless it's useful to society in some type of way. There are many people with various struggles who can't use them to better the world around them, that's just who they are, and God made them that way. It breaks my heart that they can start to feel that it is bad that they were made the way they are.

In a perfect world, I wouldn't struggle with depression or anxiety. I won't struggle with these things in heaven because it's a form of suffering. But I will still be an extremely sensitive person, I will still be a person who thinks very deeply about things. And all these things like anxiety and depression and OCD, they won't be there because they are results of the fall. I don't think people will be suffering for who they are anymore. But that's doesn't mean they won't be who they are. I don't think God is going to have to remove the root just to get rid of the problem. I don't know if that makes sense.

James: Totally. My friend Claire, a theologian in England, is autistic. She thinks she will be autistic in heaven. The bad challenges will be gone. She says her autism is so much a part of who she is to remove it would destroy who she is.

Eva: Yeah, my older sister Lucie is on the autism spectrum. That's why I care so much about things like this. If Lucie weren't autistic, I don't think I would know her in the same way, I don't think she would be the same person. I don't think the focus should be on "curing" the person per se, at least not with the connotation the word "cure" has of changing a person. I think the goal should be to help to lessen the debilitating symptoms they may experience. I see too often that some have an attitude that, "autism stole my family member from me," or similar ideas. They seem to think that everything about a person is a result of their autism, and they would be a completely different person without their disability. But God made them, and they are still one of His children, even though they are dealing with autism. The goal shouldn't be to change them, but rather to help autistic people in the unique ways that they struggle, without resenting them for the struggles they have.

James: You'd love to read the stuff mom is reading about disability. Tell more about that, Mom.

At this point, everyone present—including Anna Ruhl (James' mother) and Shawn Scannell (his father), got involved in the conversation.

Anna: Many - but not all - people with autism believe that being autistic is just part of who they are, and they don't want it to be extracted from them and they don't want it to be "fixed". Of course, most do not want the things that make it socially difficult or some of the body issues, like having trouble controlling their bodies. But they believe their brains - their different "operating system" - is valuable and a part of who they are. It has been very interesting for me to hear that perspective. I've also appreciated the idea that neurodiversity is like biodiversity, that we need diversity in the community. It's not something to be pushed off into a corner or even necessarily fixed. We need to see the image of God in all people and value what they bring to the community whether it seems "productive" or not. A person is valuable simply because they are made by God, not because of what they can do.

James: I like how you summarized that, Mom. I like Eva. She is so thoughtful.

Shawn: Does Eva Ruth have any questions for James?

Eva Ruth: Was it difficult not being able to communicate for so long?

James: Oh my gosh, it was awful. I had Jesus as my friend, though. I talked to him, he talked to me. I was not alone. I fear for nonspeakers who don't know Jesus. I hope and pray He shows himself to them. It was my salvation during a lonely time. He is so good, so funny, so warm. He never leaves us. I picture Him walking beside you into school. He will deal with the jerks.

Eva: Thank you, James, that's wonderful. How does God talk to you?

James: He talks to me in images, in dreams, in quiet, in the nave after church. We hang out all afternoon in the nave. He talks to me every week. I'm a mystic, I think. My book is called *Autistic Mystic*. I don't have anything but a title so far!

James: I'm so happy about this talk. I learned tons about how to be more sensitive and how to encourage people. I'm here for you Eva.

Vulnerability and Security

By Aaron Sams and Jennie Mangiapane, Security team co-leaders

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Keeping a church building safe and secure is a strange process. A church must simultaneously be welcoming to all who enter while protecting those within its walls. A house of worship cannot

simultaneously be an impenetrable fortress while still offering access to the love and grace freely found in Christ to all who seek Him.

Shortly after the tragic killing of our neighbors at the Tree of Life Synagogue in 2018, security consultant Juliette Kayyem wrote in the *Atlantic*: "what if the essence of a place is that it is defenseless? What if its ability to welcome others, to be hospitable to strangers, is its identity? What if vulnerability is its unstated mission?" A few months prior to this tragedy, Church of the Ascension commissioned a safety and security audit from the Department of Homeland Security and has been slowly but steadily making infrastructure and policy improvements since that time.

Unfortunately, the COVID lockdowns put a pause on these improvements, but considering the Covenant School shooting in Nashville, and a general uptick in crime

nationwide, the Vestry has decided to continue to implement new safety and security measures by reconvening the security committee and establishing the security team. The underlying ethos of the newly reconstituted committee has been to maintain a level of vulnerability necessary to support the mission of the

Church, while taking appropriate measures to make Ascension a safe and secure place to worship. The hope is that the visible and felt intrusion of these changes will be minimal while the functional impact will be measurable. Essentially, you will not see an armed guard, but you probably will encounter a fellow parishioner wearing a name badge that says "security" keeping an eye on the education wing while your kids are there. You are unlikely to be asked to participate in active shooter training, but you will likely notice new fire evacuation procedures being posted throughout the facility.

Some improvements you may already have noticed are security cameras (soon to be operational throughout the church building), an AED for

cardiac emergencies, an emergency kit containing tourniquets and bandages (currently stashed under the video desk in the nave, physicians take note), interior locks on all classrooms and offices, 3M film on classroom doors to prevent shattering, and a security



volunteer working at each worship service. Other improvements are also in the works and will be rolled out over time.

One of the main driving factors in reestablishing the security team is ensuring the children in the education wing are looked after, while also freeing the ushers to focus on hospitality. The volunteers in the nursery and toddler room and those teaching Kid's Church do a wonderful job teaching and caring for our children. Additionally, the ushers continue to welcome and assist all who come to join in worship. Adding a security volunteer allows those serving as children's ministers and ushers to focus on those important duties while ensuring someone is always attentive to safety and security measures.

Some of these safety measures may impact and inconvenience you, and we wanted to make you aware of some of the changes. First, expect the doors to the nursery and toddler rooms and the Kid's Church classrooms to be locked. This is to protect people in those rooms from exposure to unauthorized persons. If you need to access these rooms to collect a child, just knock, identify yourself to the volunteer, and they will gladly let you in. The proximity of these rooms to the busy Neville entrance has led the security team to post a volunteer at that entrance at times when children are transitioning from the nave and between rooms. This volunteer is tasked with monitoring the entrance, assisting with room transitions, and assisting children during a fire evacuation or lockdown. On that note, in the event of an emergency, it is highly likely that the children will be evacuated out a different door than those in the nave. This volunteer would also assist in the supervision of the children and the unification of children with their parents.

As new safety and security protocols are developed, we will be sharing them with the Ascension parishioners. This may come in the form of published policies and procedures, informational videos, or other training opportunities. As our first foray into this realm, we offer a video from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security about Run, Fight, Hide. This video is not to generate panic, nor do we send it out of concern of any pending threat to Ascension. This video simply demonstrates how people in a publicly accessible facility may need to respond in the event of an active shooter or other intrusion. You can find the link to the video on the announcement page of the website and under News & Events on the app. All volunteers in children's ministry, ushers, clergy, and staff will be asked to watch the video. We invite you to watch it as well.

While it is sad that we live in a time and place where houses of worship are targeted by radical individuals who seek to cause people harm, it is equally sad that we live in a fallen world where accidental fire can destroy beautiful churches like Notre Dame in Paris. Ascension is neither uniquely immune to the possibility of gun fire, nor is it especially protected from actual fire. Considering this reality, we can be equally vigilant with our ever-developing security measures and with our prayers for peace and protection from evil.

Why do we bother with church membership?



By Jess Bennett, Curate

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I f you've been among us at Ascension for a little while, you've likely witnessed Sunday mornings where we welcome new members - equally likely that you yourself have been invited to consider becoming a member.

For many of us, we might wonder why we should bother. After all, you can worship here, tithe, participate in a community group and most other areas of life at Ascension without "signing the papers."

I understand that hesitancy.

It seems that the idea of "Membership" (to anything!) is becoming increasingly irrelevant in our culture. The term "Membership," at least for me, smacks of country clubs or labor unions, things that don't necessarily touch my life. Either that, or it's lost its weight of meaning altogether - we Bennetts are proud members of the Pittsburgh Zoo, which of course gets us in the gates for free but requires nothing of us personally. The truth is, we're more subscription-type folks: sign up - preferably for the first month free! - reap the benefits, "cancel anytime."

So why would a church bother with the idea of membership? Why should you bother with membership?

Christians might answer this question in different ways; but a few significant reasons come to my mind.

The first - and how very Anglican of me - is that there is something sacramental about it. To become a member is to "formalize" your commitment to a local body of Christians, but it's not just a formality. It matters, it serves as a visible sign of the inward reality of your commitment to the family of God, particularly through this local body of Anglican believers in Pittsburgh. It's your commitment to love them, to enter the presence of God regularly together in worship, to share your life with this community. Just as it means something deeply to sign marriage papers, adoption papers, the deed of your home - it means something to take this "official" step of commitment to the local church.

This kind of commitment - unlike my Zoo membership - requires something of you, and this is my second point. In a culture that trains us to *consume* to no end, to reap the benefits of a service until it no longer suits our desires, a commitment of this level is entirely upside-down. To pledge to walk with Jesus *in relationship with His body*, to give of my own resources and time for the sake of the church and her mission, to truly say *my life is not my own* - this is entirely counter-cultural. But the Apostle Paul would argue that this is where the good stuff is (see Colossians 3:12-17).

Membership puts you in a position not simply to consume, but to give and serve - because these are *your people* now, this is *your community*.

Lastly, and this may be a hard sell, but the sense of belonging that accompanies

membership also means opening oneself to accountability. To become a member of a church is to submit to that community - to its leaders, and to your fellow brothers and sisters (Hebrews 13:17). And I would argue this is a very good thing. As a member, you allow others to have a say in your life, in how you conduct yourself. You allow the clergy to know you, and to speak words of challenge when necessary. Our mutual commitment frees us to sharpen one another, to build one another up, as we run this race.



If you've worshiped among us and have yet to take the step toward membership, we invite you to. The process is quite simple!

- Attend Explore Ascension, a short Saturday class offered quarterly, led by one of our Rectors. Registration is open for our next one on **June 1st, 2024**.
- Sign and submit a very short application and schedule a personal meeting with Father Kevin Antlitz. In the application, you'll be asked if you agree to abide by the "*Canons and Constitutions of the Anglican Church of North America (ACNA)*" - which you can find and read online!
- Once completed, you will be formally welcomed on a Sunday morning along with other new members!

Ascension is not a perfect church. Far from it. What's more, it's possible - even likely - that our habits, programs, and worship practices don't always fit with your preferences. And that's okay! As Christians, our call is not to create an idyllic oasis, unspoiled by human imperfection or diversity of thought. Our call is to be the body of Christ, in unity and commitment to one another: precisely in our imperfections, differing views, and the messiness of our humanity.

You're invited to consider becoming a member among us. Let's make this official.

A background image showing the lower legs and feet of several runners in various colored shorts and shoes, participating in a marathon. The image is partially obscured by a large blue circular graphic on the right side.

**SATURDAY
WORSHIP
MAY 4 @ 5PM**
(no Sunday service)

MARATHON WEEKEND

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

Website www.ascensionpittsburgh.org

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CHURCH OF THE
ASCENSION

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