

The Ascension

PENTECOST 2024

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On Mission with the Holy Spirit

A Brief Reflection on My Time as Ascension's Rector



By Jonathan Millard, Rector

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“O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever!”

Psalm 107:1

A great privilege

I interviewed at Ascension almost 21 years ago in July 2003. I was 41 and my three children were nine, seven, and five. It seems like a lifetime ago. As I look back over these past more than 20 years, the uppermost emotion that I have is gratitude. I am deeply grateful to God, my family, and the many hundreds of people (probably some 2,000) who have made Ascension their church home for varying seasons over these past two decades.

I was privileged to follow the long-tenured (13-year) rectorship of the Rev. Dr. Douglas McGlynn. I knew and respected Doug and he had been a good friend and mentor to me when I first came to the Diocese of Pittsburgh in 1994 to serve as rector of Trinity Church, Washington, PA. Having spent almost four years back in England, after my time in Washington, I was excited, nervous, and a little apprehensive to be coming back to the diocese, to Pittsburgh, and to Church of the Ascension. While I had been ordained for more than 11 years, nine of which I had been a rector in parishes here and in England, and before that having had some five years as a barrister (trial lawyer) in the UK – coming to Ascension, following a beloved previous rector, felt like a big deal - and it was.



My family and I were warmly welcomed, and we soon settled in. My children quickly adjusted to life in the Fox Chapel Area School District. However, within a few short months, their adorable English accents were gone. The first three years at Ascension were hard. I was not Doug McGlynn, I was not (yet) an American citizen, and I had much to learn about Ascension, its traditions, and its people. For several years I wondered if I would ever become “*the* rector” or whether I would simply go from being “the *new* rector” to “the *former* rector.” A wise colleague in the diocese suggested I should consider myself “the *interim* rector” and try to succeed myself! Happily, I did. Serving as the rector of Ascension has been one of the greatest privileges, honors, and delights of my life, second only to being the father of my children, Jack, Juliet, and Jane; and husband of Andrea.

Early changes and challenges

Shortly after my arrival, one of the first changes I instituted was the introduction of the weekly Children’s Talk in our Sunday Worship. At first, there was resistance and pushback – “Wouldn’t the children learn more in Sunday School?”; “It interrupts the flow of our worship”; “Why do we need it?” Today, I think I would be driven out if I suggested that we do away with the Children’s Talk. What a joy it is each week to welcome to the front some 100 or so children between our 9:00 am and 11:00 am services. How important it is that we see them, hear from them, love and embrace them – the very embodiment of answered prayers from 40 years ago when there were so very few children at Ascension.

In my first year, I faced some very difficult challenges regarding the operating budget. Ascension had weathered several years of deficit budgets, which would not have been sustainable going forward. Among other things, staff changes had to be made to achieve the significant savings that were needed. This was painful. And yet, in the face of these hard decisions, those whose positions came to an end were remarkably gracious and understanding. Today, while the finances are healthy, there is no room for complacency. God calls us to be cheerful and generous givers. I encourage all who call Ascension their home to give faithfully and, if not already tithing, to move towards giving back to God the first 10% of all your income.

One of my early joys was working with the leadership and indeed the entire congregation in discerning our new Vision Statement, which was adopted in 2005: “A Worshipping Community; Equipping God’s People; Sharing Christ’s Healing with a Broken World.” This has been a living statement that has informed who we are and what we do at Ascension.

Dark clouds

In the early years of my tenure, two very large storm clouds were brewing – the impending breaking of ties with the Episcopal Church – which ultimately led to the formation of the Anglican Church in North America in 2009, and the disintegration of my first marriage which ended in divorce in 2015. Much has been written about the realignment of the Diocese and the formation of the ACNA which I won't rehearse here. Suffice it to say, that the roles I had at a parish, diocesan, and later provincial level were made possible in part by the faithful prayers and support of the clergy, vestry, and people of Church of the Ascension. I am so grateful for the wise counsel and support of so many. Likewise, through 10 very painful years leading up to my divorce, my children and I were the recipients of extraordinary kindness, grace, and love from our church family. Words cannot express the depth of my appreciation.

New life and health and growth

Notwithstanding the challenges and heartaches of those years from 2005 to 2015, for me personally and the church at large, we saw God move among us in powerful ways. In 2007 a team from Ascension planted a new church, Jonah's Call. By 2013 our one principal service on Sunday mornings at 10:30 am was reaching capacity. After wide consultation, we launched two services which we now enjoy at 9:00 am and 11:00 am. More recently we have seen massive growth in our international ministry, including the provision of legal services and helping to resettle several refugee families in Pittsburgh.

By God's grace, we have navigated sweeping upheavals over the past five years, including a global pandemic, political and social turmoil, a large capital campaign, and the major disruption of a building project. I am so grateful for the many ways that Ascension's community has rallied to keep the light of the Gospel shining brightly (weekly livestreaming, tent worship, scores of baptisms, and the addition of more than 100 new members).

Today Ascension is blessed with a very large Children's Ministry, a strong Youth Ministry, and an ever-growing Prayer Ministry. Hundreds of people at Ascension are involved in serving in these ministries as well as in our Music and Worship Arts ministry, on Sacristy Teams, and in so many other ways. Once again, I am deeply grateful. So often I find myself wondering how this has come about and how it is that we have been so blessed. I have played my part, and yet I know that all the glory must go to God with thanksgiving for the gifts he has given to us and to all the people who have faithfully worked and prayed and served to make Ascension the place and the people we are – all through God's grace.

A constant joy and lasting fruit

A constant joy for me has been seeing the people of Ascension living out their Christian lives at home and in the neighborhoods of Pittsburgh, in the schools, universities, hospitals, and myriad other workplaces in and beyond our city. The gifts and talents that God has given the people at Ascension are truly extraordinary. I pray that you will continue to be salt and light, as you do your work as unto the Lord.

As I recall some of the big projects, significant milestones, and successful programs I am reminded that at the center of it all is the God who loves us,



knows us, cares about us, and, in Jesus, gave his life for us. As I think about the work of the Holy Spirit in our midst and recall the lives of individuals who have been touched by God, I know that much of the lasting fruit of God at work among us is not always visible straight away.

I realize I have barely touched the surface of all that God has done among us these past many years. I am also mindful that for every up-front leader or ministry, many more people are praying, working, serving, and giving of their time and expertise. Once again, thank you to all who serve at Ascension.

Preparing to leave

I arrived at Ascension at times fearful, at times overconfident, and often wondering if I'd make it. Now, as I prepare to leave after more than 20 years, I stand amazed at our great God and his work among us. With the completion of our *More Than Stones* capital campaign, and the soon to be opened New Narthex, expanded Parish Hall, new restrooms, refurbished offices, and outdoor Carlucci Commons space, I am excited as I think and pray about what the next 20 years will look like for Ascension.

In closing, I am reminded of the words of former Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, who famously said, "The Church is the only institution that exists primarily for the benefit of those who are not its members."

This challenging truth undergirds so much of that which we have been working towards. I pray that all those who have made and will come to make Ascension their church home will more fully embrace the slogan of our now-completed capital campaign, *More than Stones: Welcoming our neighbors; Reaching the Nations*.

A final prayer and thanksgiving

As St. Paul prayed for the church at Philippi, so I pray "that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that on the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God." *Philippians 9-11*

Thank you so much for your love and support to me and my family these past many years and for your wonderful welcome to Andrea in 2017. Thank you for our partnership in Gospel ministry. Thank you for letting me serve, albeit imperfectly, as your rector. I love you and you will always have a special place in my heart.

"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace." *Numbers 6:24-26*

Yours in Christ,

Jonathan +
→

Jonathan N. Millard
(Rector)



More Than Stones: *Welcoming our Neighbors, Reaching the Nations*



By Marilyn Chislaghi, Director of Ministry
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As we enter a period of transition in the life of our parish, it's good to remember the plans we have put before the LORD, where we have come and where we have said we want to go. In that spirit, here are some highlights from the past 5 years as we have undertaken the *More than Stones* initiative. We have many new people among us and, as we seek to move forward as a body, we hope this reflection on our recent past will be of much help.

In the spring of 2019 Church of the Ascension embarked on an ambitious campaign to raise a large sum of money to fund three very specific goals: Essential Repairs of our historic structure, Refurbishment and Renewal of the parish hall, and Mission and Ministry.

The Essential Repairs included the repointing and cleaning of exterior stone masonry which now sparkles in the sunshine. This exterior work began during the 2020 pandemic, years of Pittsburgh soot being washed away to reveal golden stone beneath. Interior Nave work began shortly thereafter and included new pews and refinished floors to enhance our beautiful worship space (and to make sure people didn't crash to the floor, or worse, through the floor!) Ascension's beautiful stained-glass windows

were last on the essential repair list. As many of you recall, the windows were taken to the workshop of an offsite contractor. As this work continued into 2021 while pandemic protocols were still in place, we had services under our tent while dodging bright orange cherry picker lifts, ladders, and accumulating construction supplies.

The Refurbishment and Renewal portion of this initiative focused on the expansion of our Parish Hall, new restrooms, improvement of the connection and flow of our buildings through the creation of a 'New Narthex', and the development of a welcoming outdoor patio area with a new and obvious church entrance. We're all too familiar with this phase of the project right now and are hopeful the construction will soon be complete.

The Ministry and Mission component was a piece that was added to the More than Stones initiative in response to the 20+ Listening Groups held in the fall of 2019. This portion of the monies was intended for additional staffing, outreach, ministry, and mission. To date funds have been used to make our Director of International Ministry fulltime, to fund a new 10-year Curacy program in partnership with the *Made to Flourish* network, as well as the funding of other part-time positions.

Five years have passed since the project began. Looking back there is much to be thankful for. Visitation teams worked tirelessly to visit every Ascension household with an invitation to partner with others in this initiative. The initial campaign was brought to an abrupt halt in March 2020 when the pandemic was upon us. A mini campaign was launched in the fall of 2021 with another mini campaign after post-pandemic inflationary costs became known. All these twists in the road notwithstanding, \$9.4M was raised, significantly above our initial target of \$8.2M. Our teams managed to have personal visits with approximately 90% of Ascension households. 293 'units' (families or individuals) from the Ascension family made pledges to the campaign (\$5.8M). Helped by our general endowment, interest and other restricted funds (\$2.4M) as well as several foundations (\$1.2M), we will complete the goals of project as well as some items on our wish list, all without debt. Thanks be to God! Additionally, we will carry savings forward to repair 6 of Ascension's aging roofs in the years ahead.

We now stand on the brink of reopening. God-willing, the dedication of the new construction will take place on Sunday, June 9th.

One of the highlights of the campaign was the announcement of spaces named to honor beloved members and friends of Ascension – some of the *living stones* who have gone before us and made a significant impact on the

life of Ascension. All the named spaces were *honorary* and not related to financial contributions. As we anticipate the re-opening of the parish hall, it is good to be reminded of who those people were and why they made an impact on our common life.

Ann Paton Contemplation Garden



The Rev. Dr. Ann Paton, who turns 96 this year, is one of our beloved living stones at Ascension. Ordained for some 30 years, Mother Ann has been such an important part of our church family. Ann's gift to the parish has been her excellent

preaching together with her constant challenge to us to take time intentionally to come into God's presence in silence. While her health prohibits Sunday attendance, Mother Ann continually challenged us to keep worship at the forefront of our life together and to remember the priesthood of all believers and to live out that calling.

Minnie Smith Education Wing



Minnie Smith (1927 to 2011) was one of a small group of people who met together for more than 10 years to pray for our church. When this group met in the 1970's there were almost no children or young families at Ascension.

In response to the faithful prayers of Minnie and others, and by God's grace, the tide turned at Ascension. Today, we can look back at more than 40 years of life, health, and growth. By 1998, there were so many children the church decided to build an education wing. Similarly, in recent years, we have felt called to respond to growth in order to better provide a hospitable welcome to all.

Ken and Ethel Bailey Hall



Ken and Ethel Bailey have been a huge inspiration to us. Prior

to his death eight years ago, Dr. Bailey had been a regular guest preacher at Ascension. He was a scholar of biblical languages, traditions, cultures, and a masterful teacher. Ethel Bailey was a research assistant to Dr. Jonas Salk during the time that he discovered the Polio vaccine, right here in Pittsburgh! They are both such wonderful examples of what it means to live out the Christian life through their vocations. Still today, most of the vital ministry and mission of Ascension takes place Mondays through Saturdays as parishioners serve God in their workplaces. Our extended hall will continue to be a multi-purpose space – including as a venue for the kind of teaching and equipping that marked Ken Bailey's ministry as well as for weekly hospitality, and so much more.

Carlucci Commons



Christina Carlucci, who died in January 2019 after an aneurism and stroke, continues to be missed. Christina embodied what it means to love our neighbor. She exuded generous hospitality, love, and kindness.

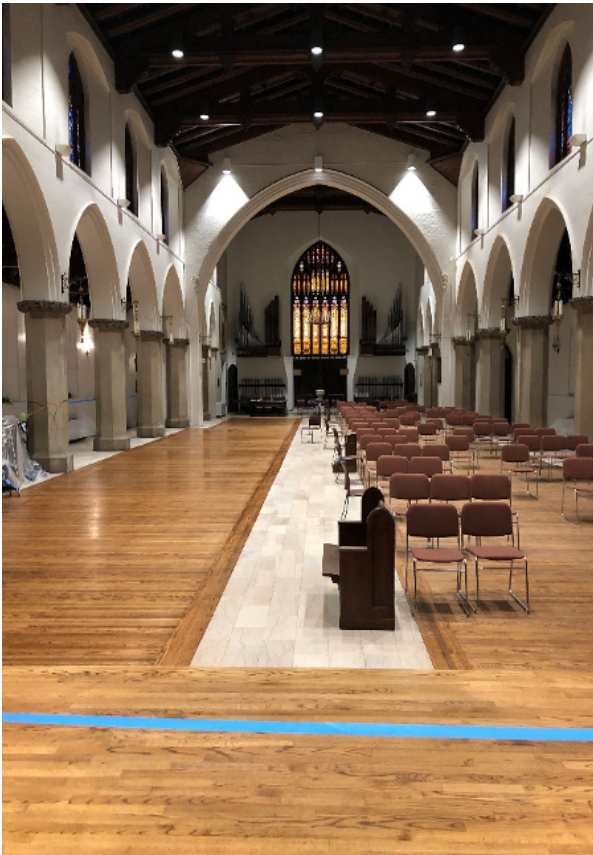
Christina loved Jesus and she loved people. This was seen especially in the care and concern she expressed for our special needs community. Christina helped us better to see and love those on the margins. Her life was an example and inspiration to us of welcoming hospitality. We hope that the outdoor patio space, the Carlucci Commons, will be a place of hospitality and welcome for generations to come.

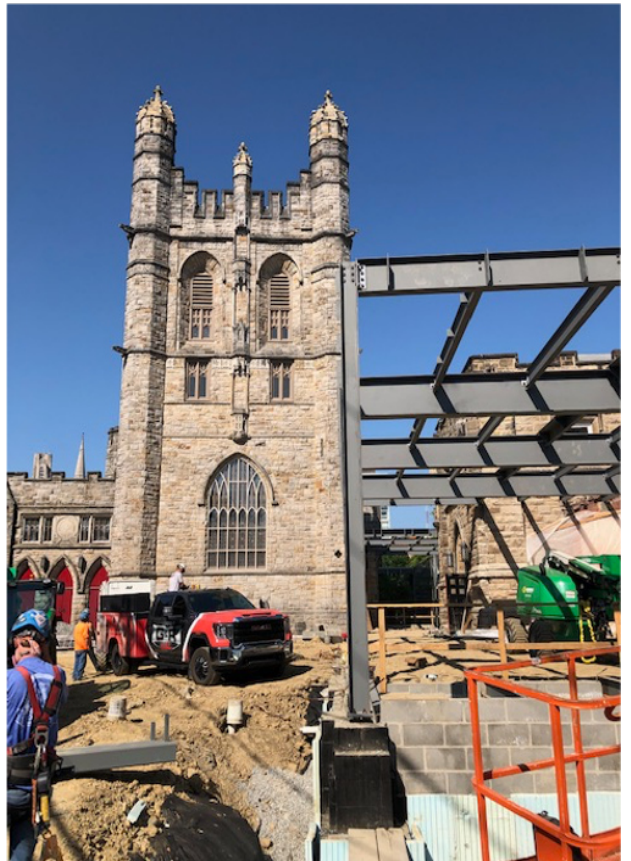
We are coming to the culmination of a long, God-blessed journey. We look forward to the dedication of our new

spaces to the LORD to be used for His purposes. Perhaps this is an opportunity to rededicate ourselves as well, to be on mission with the Holy Spirit – becoming a holy people and engaging with those for whom the entire project was designed in the first place: our neighbors and the nations.

I am reminded of times of dedication in the early history of Israel. Following instructions from Moses, after entering the promised land, Joshua brought the Israelites to Shechem (contemporary Nablus in the West Bank), a city in a valley surrounded by two large hills. On one side stood Mount Gerizim, known as the Mount of Blessing. On the other side of Shechem stood Mount Ebal, known as the Mount of Curses. The geography was significant and the choice for the people was stark – choose the good and not the evil. Choose holiness. Choose the LORD. Standing in the city with his voice projecting as in an amphitheater, with half of the Israelites on one mount and half on the other, Joshua asked the people whom they would serve: "Choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." (Joshua 24:15)

My prayer as we come to the close of this chapter in the life of our parish is that we, too, would dedicate ourselves in one accord, as a unified Ascension family, shouting together "As for our house, we will serve the LORD!!" Finally, please enjoy the pictures on the next two pages that show part of the journey of the past few years.





Reaping a Harvest

Frank and Anne continue to minister in North Africa. Having lived there for 20+ years tilling the soil and spreading seed, they are blessed in these years to reap a harvest. Here's a quote from Frank, albeit brief (and you'll understand why!): "The first part of this year has been a whirlwind. We don't have that much time to write long updates, but this is partly because we have been VERY BUSY preparing for so many baptisms. On Easter morning, we baptized seven North Africans. Enjoy the pictures!"





Kairos Prison Ministry

This article was written by Ron and Judy Yadrick after a mid-April weekend when the Kairos team ministered at SCI Greene, in Waynesburg, PA. Ron was on the 'inside team' while Judy was on the 'outside team.' She was able to attend the weekend's closing ceremony.



Dear Beloved Prayer Warriors,

From Ron:

This past weekend was exhausting, but the fruit - amazing! Out of the 24 residents (inmates) invited, 20 completed the Christianity 101 program. There were 24 men on the inside team including 3 Anglican clergy, and 9 women and men on the outside support team. The black, white, and Hispanic residents ranged from age 26 to 71, and religions included Catholic, Protestant, and "Other". Residents and volunteers sat around 4 tables: - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John - listening to 10 twenty-minute talks and 17 meditations given by the volunteers, discussing the topics, creating posters, singing, and just hanging out.

The artist at the Table of Matthew was Mike, a 35-year-old man, who gets out of prison next year. He wants to go to engineering school, and he loves Jesus.

Jonathan, at the Table of Mark, a large man some people would find intimidating, cried giving his testimony. He is tired of being avoided and wants to be loved, something he found this weekend. The motto of Kairos Prison Ministry is "Listen, Listen, Love, Love".

Jason, at the Table of John, is "all in" for Christ and couldn't stop talking about Him.

The men were blown away by the 532 first names on a poster of those praying for them all hours of the day and night, including many of *you*. Thank you, Ascension family!

From Judy:

Sunday's closing ceremony was incredible and one of the best I've experienced. The residents were given an opportunity to share the weekend's impact on them. They did so with an amazing amount of enthusiasm, sincerity, and vulnerability. They were deeply touched by the message of love, acceptance, forgiveness, and inner healing. They discovered they were not alone but surrounded by brothers. They were strongly encouraged by a Kairos graduate resident to participate in what is known as the 'Continuing Accountability Ministry'. It meets weekly for prayer and sharing so the residents continue to experience the renewing love of Christ as well as a sense of purpose in the journey ahead.

"I was in prison, and you visited me" (Matthew 25:36). Thank you, Ascension, for so generously supporting this ministry through prayer. We were humbled to be a part of it.



The Twichell Family's New Calling

By Nate Twichell

natetwichell@hotmail.com

Twenty-three years ago, I walked through the red front doors of Ascension for the first time. I had recently graduated from college and was looking for a new church home. There are many things that I can still remember from that first Sunday, and chief among them is the Post Communion Prayer: “*And now, Father, send us out to do the work you have given us to do.*”



For multiple decades now, I have prayed this prayer. Some Sundays it spills from my lips in rote fashion. More Sundays than not, I am able to accept the challenge that lies within that prayer and pray these words with hope and expectation. Seven years ago, Erika and I started a missional gap year for recent high school graduates because we saw it as the work God had given us to do. After a lengthy period of discernment, and with more than a few doors opening or closing unexpectedly, God has given us new work to do in England.

Erika and I will both be working for a ministry called *Caring for Life*. Based outside of Leeds, at the foot of the Yorkshire Dales, *Caring for Life* provides for adults who have “fallen through the net”, often having no other supportive person or agency in their lives. A key part of the ministry is the therapeutic daytime activities that take place on their 125-acre working farm. Erika will be leading the Expressive Arts Therapeutic program, combining elements of art, drama, music, and poetry. I will be managing the Farm Store, selling produce and meat from the farm, while providing neurodivergent young adults with their first work experience. All these activities are ways of sharing the love of Christ in tangible ways.

Holy Mysteries

I remember hearing that phrase on my first Sunday at Ascension. There was something comforting about being in a place that acknowledged mystery. It is a mystery to me how I came to meet Erika, and how we came to be married here at Ascension. It is a mystery to me how our family has grown with Henry, Anne, George, and Jack, all baptized here at Ascension's font. And it is a mystery to me how God has and will continue to meet our needs as missionaries. It has been an amazing gift to be deeply rooted in this community, so it is a very hard thing for us to uproot our lives and follow God's lead. It is hard to walk away from our community. It is hard for our kids to leave their friends. It is hard to trust that God will provide for our material needs. But after standing in your midst for 23 years, praying to be sent out, how could we not respond?

Will you pray for us? We are scared; scared about not finding community, scared about not having enough financial support, scared about my health, scared for our kids. Thank you for holding us before the Father when we are weak. To keep in touch, learn more about our work, and be updated on prayer needs, check out theslowwork.com and sign up for our email newsletter.

We love you Ascension, we are incredibly grateful for your support, and we look forward to worshipping with you again soon.

The Holy Spirit is on the Move!



By Daniel Behrens, Ascension Missionary in Residence

behrensdg1@gmail.com

I want to share a few beautiful things I see happening in our church community as we celebrate how the Holy Spirit used Jonathan and Andrea to shape Ascension.

In the Job Partners initiative, two current students in the ESL program are wrapping their arms around a schoolteacher from Ukraine. She is looking for a new apartment and a new job as her husband prepares to return home to help with rebuilding. The two ladies helping her are from Russia.

In the Sudanese congregation, the lay leader Samuel has been approved by Bp. Alex to become a Postulant in the Diocese of Pittsburgh. The people of Ascension get to participate in his preparation for ordination! Samuel has been faithfully leading the Sudanese group which gathers at 4:00 pm on Saturdays at Ascension.

Three new Christians from China just finished studying To Be a Christian: An Anglican Catechism which introduces new believers to the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments. Their primary guides were mature Christians from China who were baptized at Ascension over the past few years.

A team of volunteers in various seasons of life said "Yes!" to partnering with Hello Neighbor to settle a fourth refugee family in Pittsburgh. The Welcome Circles ministry has had a deep impact on us and the families we are serving, one of whom shared this message of thanks: "You were like fathers, brothers, and sisters to us at the beginning of our path and our life in this country to which we were sheltered, and you still are. Thank you to every person who stood by our side. Thank you for supporting us psychologically, morally, and emotionally. You were like family to us."

These movements of the Spirit would not have happened without Jonathan's willingness to say, "Let's try it!" to some risky new things, like hosting ESL classes, sharing our crowded building with the Sudanese group, and partnering with a refugee resettlement agency. Thank you for your faith and trust in the Holy Spirit through many faithful years at Ascension! We will miss you! The Holy Spirit is at work, bringing the good news of Jesus to all nations.





Save the Date: Parish Retreat 2024

Ascension’s 41st Parish Retreat is upcoming October 4 – 6. Since 1982, Ascension has been gathering annually at Laurelville Church Center, about 50 minutes east of Pittsburgh, to enjoy a weekend of teaching and fellowship. The weekend is a great way for newcomers to connect. It’s an all-ages event with special programming for children and youth, as well as plenty of outdoor activities, prayer ministry, campfires, walks in the woods, and an annual ducky race. Registration will open in August. In 2023 over 350 people attended some or all of the retreat. We have incredibly winsome speakers this year –Bishop Alex and his wife, Tamara. We hope you will consider coming and encourage you to save the date!



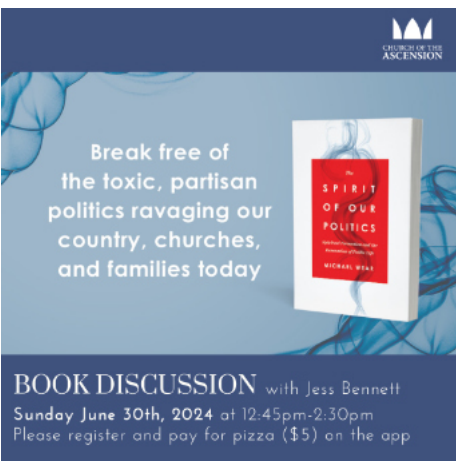
Baby Bottle Campaign: Mother’s Day through Father’s Day

Please pick up a baby bottle from the Education Wing hallway, fill it with change, and bring it back to church by Father’s Day. All proceeds are in support of the Women’s Choice Network. Their Oakland office offers free ultrasounds and counseling to women who are considering an abortion. For more info, reach out to Meg at meg.sateia@gmail.com.



Legacy June Meeting

Join Ascension Seniors for the final luncheon of our spring season on Thursday, June 20. We always enjoy our Ascension historian, Dr. Bill Campbell. This time he will tell us a bit about St. Francis of Assisi, and particularly of his love for animals. As a special surprise, we’ll also have a pet or two present! [Please sign up](#) on the app or website to let us know you plan to come. Lunch is \$15. First timers are free. We meet at 12:30pm in Ascension’s New Catacombs and wrap up around 2:30pm.



Join Jess Bennett for a Book Discussion

The Spirit of our Politics by Michael Wear is a great read to help navigate the upcoming election season. Ware talks about ‘stewarding our political selves’ and offers spiritual and liturgical practices as helpful ways forward to be the body of Christ against a background of toxicity and partisanship. Join a discussion group led by Jess Bennett after the 11am service on June 30. Purchase the book and register on the app (\$5 for pizza) to let us know you’re planning to join in.

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