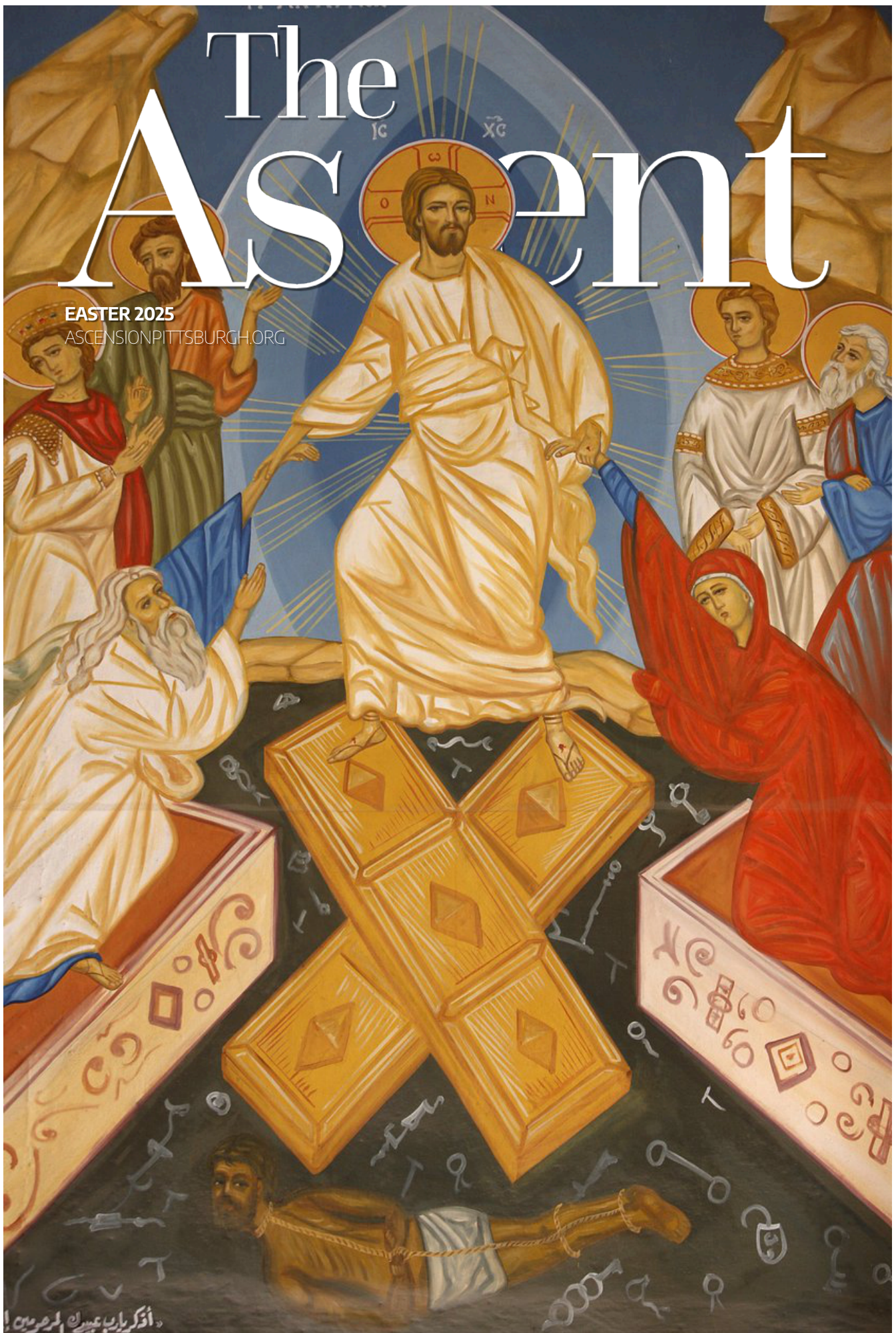


# The Ascent

EASTER 2025

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أذكر ربنا عيسى !



# Alive to Possibility



By Peter Coelho, Rector

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*“Now all things have been filled with light, both heaven and earth and those beneath the earth; so let all creation sing Christ’s rising, by which it is established.”*

-St. John of Damascus

**A**lleluia! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed!  
The full extent of what Jesus accomplished in his death and resurrection is something that we will never fully comprehend. The full force of His victory is something that we will not exhaust in reflecting upon it and rejoicing over it.

One element that I love about the church calendar is that it specifies a full fifty days for the season of Easter, or Eastertide. Just as the season of Lent guides us in depth through repentance and self-denial, over the span of seven weeks, the Easter season does the same for rejoicing and celebration.

In a luxury society where we struggle with limitations and delayed gratification, a prolonged season of fasting is both a challenge and a gift. Counterintuitively, however, just as our culture can shape us to struggle with self-denial, it can also anesthetize against joy and celebration. We’re good at contentment but struggle with joy.

We can receive these next fifty days as both a challenge and a gift. A challenge to

sustain our rejoicing over Jesus' victory beyond one day or week; to see the reality of His triumph seep into our lives, changing the rhythm and pattern of our days, cultivating a new "resurrection imagination."

A gift in that there are sustained weeks of opportunity to taste and see again of God's goodness. There is the opportunity to return again and again to the delight of the resurrection and to live in its radiant light.

The reality of Jesus' victory over death, hell, sin, and evil is something that we will return to time and again in our worship on Sundays. We will repeat and revel in the refrain that "Christ is risen!" Beyond Sundays in our corporate life, we will have other opportunities for feasting and celebration. Check them out in upcoming e-news and announcements.

Of course, celebration lives beyond Sundays and outside the bounds of our formal corporate life. Over the coming weeks be encouraged to find ways to weave resurrection celebration into the pattern of your life. Have friends over for dinner, throw a party, make an intentional and daily practice of thanksgiving and singing, delight in creation at a city park, enjoy something in the city or region as an expression of common grace manifest in beauty and goodness around us, extend forgiveness, and pray with expectation in the name of the "risen Lord" for resurrection power to be on display in our lives (Romans 8:11). These are but a few ways that we might grow in our capacity to rejoice and celebrate the goodness of God revealed in Jesus' resurrection.

The quote above, by the monk and apologist St. John of Damascus, speaks for the resurrection as something to be built upon; by it, all creation is made new and established. The Easter season is an opportunity for us to build in joy, to more deeply establish our lives upon resurrection hope. Jesus' resurrection demonstrates that no circumstance or situation is beyond God's capacity to move and bring life. In Christ, all things are possible. In our busy and limited lives, that truth is difficult to find credible and live in line with. It takes practice. We must practice celebration over Jesus' victory. We must practice expectancy and openness to resurrection power.

This Eastertide, let us undertake the joyful work of Easter possibility, hope, and happiness.

# Introducing the Common Cup



By Peter Coelho, Rector

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**B**eginning on Sunday, April 27th, and in keeping with our Bishop's desires, we will be returning to receiving the bread and wine separately.

Communion servers will no longer “*intinct*” (or dip) on the communicant’s behalf, but each person receiving the Eucharist will receive the bread and wine directly. The current mode of receiving the elements together from the hand of a communion server was a necessary adaptation in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. If you joined in worship at Ascension over the last few years, this mode of reception has been normative. However, this change in receiving the wafer and wine individually is consistent with the church’s historical practice of receiving communion and will align us with standard practice throughout the diocese.

**This means that you have a few different options as you receive the Eucharist:**

1. After receiving the wafer from the bread-bearer, you can choose to dip your wafer into the chalice. This is known as intinction.
2. After receiving the wafer from the bread-bearer, you can consume the wafer and drink from the chalice itself. Between communicants the chalice-bearers will turn the cup and wipe the lip of it with a purificator (clean, small linen cloth).
3. After receiving the wafer from the bread-bearer, you can consume the wafer and forgo receiving the wine. The theology of the church regarding communion does not require that both elements are consumed. We do not believe Jesus is “50% present” in each element. By receiving the wafer alone in faith, you are receiving Jesus in fullness as he offers himself to us.

Feel free to receive in any of the three ways above. For those especially concerned with potential transmission, the third option may make the most sense. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has found no



documented infectious disease transmission has ever been traced to using a common communion cup. A theoretical risk of transmitting infectious diseases by using a common cup exists, but the risk is so small that it is undetectable and is less than the other risks associated with gathering. Additionally, we use sterling silver chalices to further mitigate risk due to their antimicrobial properties.

We will also communicate about this in the weeks immediately preceding this change. We seek to carefully consider continued safety and the symbolic significance of receiving in this traditional mode, in line with the wishes of our Bishop and the practices of the diocese. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me.

In Christ,

Peter+



# Introducing J-Terms!



By Kevin Antlitz, Assistant Rector  
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**W**e are thrilled to offer a new formation opportunity called June

**Terms (J-Terms).** For three weeks in June (June 11, 18, and 25), we will gather on Wednesday evenings at the church for J-Terms. We will offer four courses that meet concurrently. Each course will meet from 7-8pm and then everyone will gather to pray Compline in the Nave.



## Anglican Sacramental Theology: Exploring What Anglicans Believe About the Sacraments

Taught by the Rev. Dr. Joel Scandrett, this course will help you understand what Anglicans believe about Baptism and the Eucharist. Participants will explore the meaning and significance of the sacraments in a way that enriches their appreciation of and participation in these formative and sacred rites.

## Faith & Finances: A Christian Approach to Money, Stewardship, and Generosity

Taught by Jim Foster and Jack Walsh, this course is designed to help Christians think biblically about money and possessions and equip them with practical tools to manage their finances in a way that honors God. Participants will explore key principles of financial stewardship, learn practical budgeting skills, and reflect on how generosity can shape their discipleship journey.

## Learning to Love and Live the Psalms: A Journey of Prayer, Praise, and Lament

Taught by the Rev. Josh Bennett, this course is geared towards our Youth (middle and high schoolers). The

psalms are an invitation to learn how to pray, how to feel, how to think about life with the Lord. Join us as we study, pray, and even write our own psalms of praise, anger, and lament.

## Pathways of Prayer: Practicing Prayer through Tradition, Contemplation, and Discernment

Taught by Brian Janaszek, Hannah Halfhill, and the Rev. Lauren Scharf, this course will equip you to grow in your practice of prayer. Sessions will focus on praying with the Book of Common Prayer, contemplative prayer, and prayer as discernment. We won't just talk about prayer... we'll practice together!



By Lauren Scharf, Staff Priest

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**P**art of the great beauty of the Anglican tradition is the rhythm that the church calendar and the Book of Common Prayer provide for our lives. Both individually, and as a community, we are invited to orient ourselves to the seasons of the church year which, in turn, unite us with Christians throughout time and space. These rhythms help us to rehearse, remember, and live into the great story of our faith.

On particularly special days, called “principal feasts” or “major feasts,” we direct our hearts, minds, and worship towards specific foundational stories and truths. Our principal feasts include Easter Day, Ascension Day, Pentecost, Trinity Sunday, All Saints' Day, Christmas Day, and the Epiphany. In the next few weeks, we will be celebrating three of these feasts: Ascension, Pentecost, and Trinity Sunday. If you are new to worshipping in a church that follows the church calendar, here is a bit of background and guidance that may be helpful as you engage with these feasts, possibly for the first time. If you are not new, we encourage you to consider how through prayer, meditation, or study you might more deeply engage with the spiritual nourishment gifted to us through observing these special days.

## Ascension Day (Thursday, May 29)

Background: This day commemorates the physical ascension of Jesus back into heaven following the period after his death and resurrection. During those forty days (which is why Ascension Day is forty days after Easter Sunday) Jesus appeared to both his disciples and to great crowds. He brought reassurance to his disciples and confirmation of the miracle of his resurrection. Indeed, he has now opened the way to eternal life!

The Ascension is, of course, a particularly important story for the life of our community as it is our namesake. We carry our name in honor and recognition of this great event and everything that it means for us and for the world. As we celebrate the Lord's Ascension, we do so bearing in mind Jesus' own posture toward his return to heaven: this is not the end of the story, but rather the beginning of a new chapter of the story - more on that under Pentecost. Jesus did not abandon us, but is even now sitting at the Father's right hand interceding for us as our great high priest and preparing a place for us (John 14:1-4). His physical ascension back into heaven signals to us several points to ponder. What does it mean that one with human flesh, just like us, is seated in heaven (Mark 16:19)? What are the possible implications for our everyday lives that our Savior is, right now, seated on the throne of heaven? I wonder what new hope

the Lord might offer us as we spend time meditating on this foundational story.

Ascension Day is Thursday, May 29, but we will celebrate as a community on the following Sunday, June 1, with a special visit from Bishop Alex and confirmations!

*Scripture to meditate on: Acts 1:1-11, Ephesians 1:20-23*

*Collect for Ascension Day:* Almighty God, whose only begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ ascended into heaven: May our hearts and minds also there ascend, and with him continually dwell; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## Pentecost (Sunday, June 8)

Background: Before his departure, Jesus began preparing his disciples for the Feast of Pentecost when they would receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-8). Pentecost, also called the Feast of Weeks, is a Jewish festival celebrated from the time of the Old Testament to mark the end of the grain harvest and to remember the giving of the Law at Mt Sinai (Numbers 28:26). As faithful Jews were gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate this festival, the Holy Spirit descended like a mighty rushing wind, and many began speaking in tongues. The crowds in Jerusalem were astonished to hear the disciples speaking in their own languages.

In the giving of the Holy Spirit, all who follow Jesus are united with Him in a profound way. We have the Holy Spirit as our guide, comforter, encourager, and admonisher. As we approach Pentecost we might consider, what does it mean to be a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19) even as I go about my everyday life?

*Scripture to meditate on: Joel 2:28-29; Acts 1:4-8, 2:1-21*

*Collect for the Day of Pentecost:* Almighty God, on this day, through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, you revealed the way of eternal life to every race and nation: Pour out this gift anew, that by the preaching of the Gospel your salvation may reach to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## Trinity Sunday (Sunday, June 15)

On the Sunday following Pentecost, we will celebrate Trinity Sunday when we remember the foundational truth about the God we worship: our God is Triune, three in one and one in three, the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. While the Trinity is in some ways a divine mystery, we see examples of God revealing His triune nature to us all throughout Scripture. In Genesis 1 we see the Spirit of God hovering over the waters and at Jesus' baptism we witness the Father speaking over his Son and the Holy Spirit appearing in the form of a dove. Through Jesus' own teaching we see the triune nature of God as he teaches about his relationship with the Father and the coming of the Holy Spirit. And these are just a few examples!

One of the most beautiful aspects of serving a Triune God is that within the Trinity, Father, Son, and Spirit, there is perfect love and perfect relationship. Our God did not create us out of lack or need, rather we were created out of abundance: an abundance of love, an abundance of creative energy, and an abundance of relationship. As we approach Trinity Sunday we may ponder, what does it mean to serve a God who does not need us to worship Him and love Him?

*Scripture to meditate on: John 16:12-15; Romans 5:1-5*

*Collect for Trinity Sunday:* Almighty and everlasting God, you have given to us your servants grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of your divine Majesty to worship the Unity: Keep us steadfast in this faith and worship, and bring us at last to see you in your one and eternal glory, O Father; who with the Son and the Holy Spirit live and reign, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.





# Ascension Curacy Program: Playing our Part in Forming Faithful Pastors



By Kevin Antlitz, Assistant Rector  
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**I**t is a great joy for me to serve as **Ascension Curacy Coordinator. I want to share about our Curacy Program and the experience of our first two Curates, Jess Bennett and Wes Williams.**

## What is Ascension's Curacy Program?

Just as teaching hospitals have medical residencies to prepare doctors for a lifetime of service, Church of the Ascension aims to be a kind of teaching hospital to prepare clergy for the service of the church. This is the mission of the Ascension Curacy program. It exists to train, form, and equip men and women for a lifetime of faithful and fruitful pastoral ministry.

So, why are Curacy programs necessary? In addition to biblical and theological instruction in seminary, pastors need hands-on, immersive training and formation in the context of a local church; pastoral wisdom and certain necessary skills that can only be developed through an immersive experience like this. This is what we aim to offer Curates as they seek to learn the art of pastoral ministry.

By design, the Curacy is not formulaic or overly programmatic. Instead, we seek to provide Curates with real and consequential ministry responsibilities; to expose them to the full range of senior leadership; to care for their formation; to help them cultivate pastoral skills in line with their gifts and the church's needs; and to walk with them as they discern their vocation beyond Ascension.

We officially launched the Curacy Program in the summer of 2023 thanks in large part to a very generous grant from *Made to Flourish* (MTF), a

ministry that helps start and support pastoral residency programs in churches across America. We are so thankful for guidance from MTF and the network of like-minded churches we have joined.

As our first Curacy term is wrapping up, I've asked our first two guinea pigs ... I mean Curates(!), Jess and Wes, to share a little bit about their experience.

## From Jess Bennett:

I am so grateful for Ascension's Curacy Program, not only for my personal formation but for the way Ascension has identified this use of our resources to participate in the mission of God more broadly. I know we are just at the beginning of what God is doing but I am excited for the fruit we will see years and years down the road, in Pittsburgh and beyond!

I am grateful Ascension is a healthy church. I am grateful for the leadership that has welcomed me in, shared responsibility and offered thoughtful feedback. I have had the privilege of experiencing a full range of clergy life — officiating weddings and funerals, preparing baptismal candidates, learning from difficult pastoral situations as well as witnessing the 'inner workings' of a significant transition of leadership and building project.



**Made  
to Flourish**



I have been able to experience all of this in community with a trustworthy and capable team who endeavor to faithfully shepherd God's people. How could one measure such value? I am coming out of this experience more fully formed in the love of God, more attuned to my gifting and calling, and better equipped as a leader."

## From Wes Williams:

"As a large and growing congregation, Ascension offers so many opportunities for learning and development. Whether it's helping to organize our many volunteer teams, participating in pastoral visits, or leading in our worship services Ascension has been a supportive and grace-filled context in which to learn how to be a pastor.

For me specifically, the Curacy at Ascension has been a gift of continued discernment during my diaconate and priesthood. I've had so many formative experiences. I've been privileged to be with people in hard places. I've walked with people with job struggles. I've given last rites. I've led funerals. I've had the privilege of blessing new babies and to celebrate weddings as well as other great life transitions. In all of this, I've learned that my role as a priest is being with people in all of it, praying with them and offering grace through God's Word and Sacrament."

## What the Future Holds

As Father Peter announced recently, we are excited that Jess is going to be

staying on staff as a Priest. We are delighted Jess is sticking around but Curates sticking around will not be the norm. The goal of the Curacy is to pour into them and then send them off for bigger and better things. This will always be sad and hard, but it is also good. Towards this end, we invite your prayers as we eagerly anticipate where the Lord will call Wes and his family once his Curacy concludes this summer.



## Gratitude

I want to end with gratitude. First, we are so grateful for Jess and for Wes, for who they are, for how they have served, and for all the good work they have done among us. Well done, friends!

Second, we are also grateful for YOU, the church. While the senior leadership team (Peter, Marilyn, Lauren, and I) invest a lot of time encouraging, guiding, and supervising our Curates, *you* all are the main reasons why the Curacy has been a success. So many of you have encouraged their hearts and helped them to develop their gifts. You have been so gracious as Wes and Jess have led and taught and served you.

I like to say that it takes a church to make a Priest. Ascension has proven itself to be a good and healthy place to learn the art of pastoring. Thanks for everything you've done to support our Curates in God's call on their lives.

# Avenues of Hospitality with Ascension College Age Ministry



By Jess Bennett, Curate

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**I** would describe this past semester as one of hospitality for our college age ministry — with two initiatives taking shape and bearing fruit.

The first is the sweet relationships that are happening between students and their “host” families at Ascension — people who have been willing to open their homes, share meals, and have fun getting to know our (awesome) young adults. I explained more about this in the Annual Report! When asked how it’s going, this is what I heard...

From a family: Being a host family has just been a lot of fun. Hanging out to play board games, going for walks and discussing how frightening geese can be, and providing our student with an excuse to go to playgrounds when we take our kids have been highlights of the past few months.

From a student: It’s been really nice to get to spend time with people who are generous and welcoming. It’s been cool to connect with a family that I never would have been introduced to on my own.

A second avenue of hospitality has been among our neighbors at the University of Pittsburgh. It has been the vision of our capital campaign that



Ascension’s new construction would be used as a blessing in our neighborhood — and this is one way that prayer has been answered. Over the past 6 months, we’ve had the privilege of hosting Chi Alpha, a campus ministry at Pitt, for worship nights here in the Bailey Hall, on three occasions! These events are organized and led by student leaders in Chi Alpha and trust me when I say that I’ve never quite experienced anything like standing at our doors and welcoming 100+ students as they flood in to spend their evening seeking the Lord in prayer and worship. I am excited to continue seeking ways Ascension can be a good neighbor to the many ministries doing good work across Oakland’s campuses.



# First Annual Ascension Chili Throwdown!



By Kate Marwood, Hospitality Coordinator

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It seems so long ago that Ascension was having cookouts on the lawn after marathon weekend Saturday church service. Kids playing, people laughing, and long-time Ascensionite, Tom Hillman, grilling. Ahh, the good ole days. Great news! We are bringing church cookouts back, and even better than ever! This year, on Saturday May 3rd, we will have Ascension's first ever Chili Throwdown!

All of you who have secret family recipes, non-secret family recipes, or just enjoy making a hearty batch of chili - this is your time to shine! You will be able to sign up on the app and register your chili! We will have a few celebrity judges who will be judging the chili based on aroma, color, consistency, taste, and aftertaste.

For those of you who chili isn't your thing, don't worry! We will be firing up the grill as well! Please bring a side dish or dessert to share. All food should be dropped off in the Bailey Hall prior to the start of the 4pm service. We are looking forward to remembering old traditions and creating new ones. May the best chili win!



## CAYG Summer Mission Trip



By Josh Bennett, Interim Director of Youth Ministry

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Most summers our middle and high school students spend a week serving a community in a nearby city. We've worked in Harrisburg, Niagara Falls, and Louisville. THIS summer we will be serving much closer to home! We will be working in Aliquippa as part of Mt. Carmel Presbyterian Church's "Kingdom Week," July 13-18.

The team at Mt. Carmel organizes hundreds of youth, college students, and adult volunteers to serve the people of Aliquippa through home and lawn care projects, VBS programs, and other acts of service. We plan to stay in Aliquippa at another partner church, serving and spending time in the community. These trips are invaluable for our teens. We serve together AND spend time learning, praying, and laughing together. It is our hope and prayer that this will help our students to see that opportunities to love and serve others as Christ has loved us, are all around them — even here in our city!



# AIM High!



By LuAnn Pengidore, Director of Ascension International Ministry

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**A**s the spring semester ends on Wednesday, April 30, we celebrate Christ's light over darkness as we recognize with gratitude all the childcare workers, assistants, Bible study leaders, and English teachers in the Ascension International Ministry (AIM). The faithful dedication of our volunteers over 28 weeks has made a meaningful impact on our students. Many have told me this. As several students also report, Ascension feels like a peaceful and safe place. To celebrate the semester, volunteers and teachers and students will gather for an end-of-year potluck to be held on April 30th, during both morning and evening classes. The event will feature delicious ethnic dishes prepared by students.

Looking ahead, our next event will take place on May 10 in the Hunt Rooms and courtyard – a special brunch to celebrate our volunteers. In four circles of 8-10 volunteers, we will reflect on our experiences with international students this past year, discussing what needs to be nurtured, what may need to be pruned, and how we can improve the program with God's guidance.

Two new additions to our international program have been warmly received. First, our Visio Divina class led by Timmy Podnar provided a unique opportunity to explore religious art, discuss its meaning, and listen for what God might be saying. Timmy's passion for art and relationship-building has been a true blessing. She also leads a weekly intermediate Bible study on Wednesday mornings before Conversation Café and facilitates a Café group around a small table. Please keep her in your prayers as she continues leading these initiatives as well as a small international discussion group in her apartment on Tuesday nights.

Another new addition is a Friday online Bible study exploring Jesus in the Old and New Covenants, led by Nabil and Nina Jabbour. To our surprise, many mature international believers have joined as the schedule fits their busy lives.



I am pleased that Daniel Behrens and Cathy Van Every's Monday evening Bible study, along with Jim Wilson's Wednesday evening study, provided intimate settings for students from diverse backgrounds. On Monday mornings, Nancy Foster, John Schrott and I worked through a discipleship book with students.

On Monday evenings, several students received guidance in job searching, resume building, and interview preparation, thanks to the efforts of Daniel Behrens, Joan Anson, myself, and volunteers from Pitt. If you would like to help in this essential area, you can volunteer for just three weeks and see how your support might help someone secure a job.



Please keep Savannah Oliver, our program administrative assistant, in your prayers. She has done a wonderful job organizing events and supplies, tracking class attendance, setting up technology, shopping for books and weekly food, scheduling promotional materials, printing announcements, coordinating field trips and payments, and sharing opportunities with students such as baptism classes and resume workshops. Her dedication is truly invaluable!

I would also appreciate your prayers for me, particularly for wisdom and guidance as we move forward in this program.

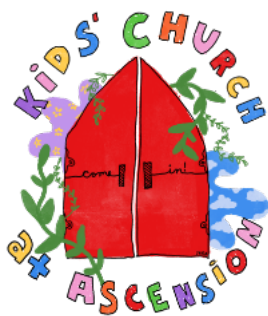
The month of May will be a time of regrouping, organizing, and recruiting volunteers. We will also prepare for our June picnic which will feature Taiko drummers. In July, we will offer ten classes to help intermediate and advanced students maintain their English skills. There will also be a 6-week beginner class and possibly a level 2 class.

If you're interested in volunteering as an assistant during the summer or during the school year, a summer or fall Bible study leader, or assisting students obtain a job, please reach out me. We often say goodbye to a few volunteers each year.

Easter tide invites us to proclaim with joy, "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and giving life to those in the tomb" (1 Corinthians 15:54-57). Praise the Lord!

Enjoy some pictures from our recent field trip to the Museum of Illusions!





# Good Shepherd Sunday:

## Trusting Jesus to Lead Us in Raising the Next Generation



By Catherine Slocum, Director of Children's Ministry  
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**O**n May 11th we celebrate both Mother's Day and Good Shepherd Sunday. While Mother's Day gives us the opportunity to honor and celebrate the incredible women who nurture, love, and guide us, Good Shepherd Sunday calls us to reflect on the comforting and powerful image of Jesus as our Good Shepherd. This day, rooted in the Gospel reading of John 10:11-16, reminds us of the care, guidance, and protection Jesus provides as we navigate life's challenges - especially in the task of raising the next generation.

While celebrating our mothers, we also recognize the unique challenges parents face today. The world feels increasingly complex and, at times, overwhelming. The three "S's"—screens, sugar, and schedules—are just a few of the modern-day hurdles that make parenting feel more daunting than ever. Our children are constantly surrounded by screens, often consuming content that may not be beneficial for their well-being. The rise in processed foods loaded with sugar has led to health issues, and busy schedules packed with after-school activities and homework leave little room for the simple joys of play and connection with nature.

Amidst these pressures, it can feel like we are navigating this journey alone. But Good Shepherd Sunday offers a beautiful reminder: Jesus, our Good Shepherd, is with us, guiding us through every challenge we face in raising our children. Just as a shepherd knows each of their sheep intimately, Jesus knows us and our children, offering His wisdom, strength, and peace. His voice calls to us, reminding us to trust Him, even when the weight of our responsibilities feels overwhelming.

In John 10:11-16, Jesus says, "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." This passage brings comfort and hope as we consider our role

as parents, caretakers, and caregivers. Jesus isn't simply a shepherd in name - He has demonstrated His deep love for us by laying down His life for our eternal security. He is not distant but is actively involved in our lives, walking with us through every storm and challenge.



As we raise the next generation, we can take heart knowing that Jesus is guiding them, just as He guides us. In a world full of distractions and confusion, He provides the steady hand that leads us toward the abundant life He promises. Jesus is the shepherd who watches over us, keeping us safe and giving us the rest and nourishment we need to flourish.

On this Good Shepherd Sunday, as we honor our mothers and reflect on their nurturing love, let us also remember that we are not alone in our parenting journey. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is with us, leading us and our children toward a future filled with hope, joy, and faith. As we trust in His unwavering care, we can be confident that He will continue to guide us through every challenge, empowering us to raise a generation rooted in His love and truth.

### Upcoming Dates:

May 31: Teacher and Volunteer Training  
 June 21: Volunteer Appreciation Brunch  
 August 23: Parent Orientation



# Join Us for Lunch!

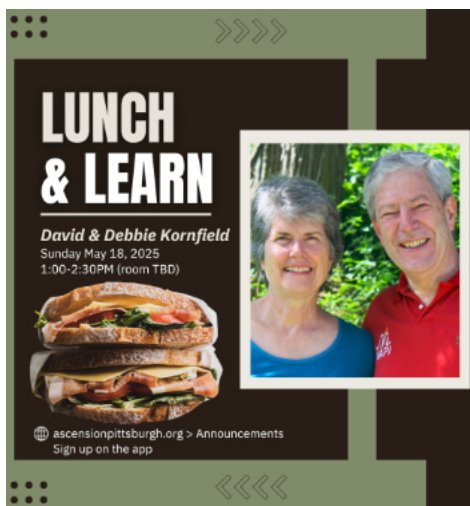


## Lunch with Jewel

Jewel Anita Hendrix has been affiliated with Ascension as a missionary for many years, serving in various places around the globe. She is currently in New Zealand working with different agencies that all focus on local mercy and justice. She has a heart for the vulnerable and seeks whole person and whole community transformation in Christ.

This past year has seen Jewel engage in a lot of work around sex trafficking. In her own words, “At the turn of the year, we hosted a NZ premiere of *Buying Her*, a film by Exodus Cry about sex trafficking. The fruit has been more than we ever imagined. Since the film things have moved forward: a hotline for NZ; the UN declared prostitution a human rights violation; an organization which is working to provide exit services for people coming out of the sex trade; podcasts and websites telling the stories from NZ; and we’ve connected with about 10 new women who are survivors. Lots of good movement that we clearly see God’s hand in.”

Please join Jewel and members of the mission committee for lunch after the 11am service on Sunday, May 25 to hear more stories of her work!



## Lunch with Debbie and David

Debbie and David Kornfield are beloved members of Ascension who lived in Latin America for many years and continue to work in the region, sometimes in person with much of it remote. In March, Debbie and David led a huge gathering, the Latin American Discipleship Summit. The lunch with them on May 18th after the 11am service will be a report on all the exciting work that happened there.

By way of background, in their own words, “The Latin American church has suffered even greater losses over the last five years than the US church. God has given Dave a vision for renewal and revival, which will begin by gathering the leaders of the major denominations and disciple-making ministries from each country. We hope to infuse them with hope, foster collaborative relationships, and inspire more intentional discipleship within the churches, beginning with the pastors and leaders.

We don’t think of the Summit as an “event” - one and done. Our goal is that the Summit be repeated in each country, bringing together even more leaders locally, and of course tailoring follow-up plans to the specific situation in each place. Fostering collaboration across denominations and para-church organizations is a God-honoring, Kingdom-building outcome, bridging traditional barriers and clarifying values and priorities. Individually and ecclesiastically, we’re not called just to build our own little kingdoms, but to strengthen THE Kingdom of God under our Lord’s headship over the entire Body of Christ.”

Please join Debbie and David, along with members of Ascension’s mission committee, to hear more!

# Refugee Rapid Response Team: Highlights from the Past Few Months



By Daniel Behrens, Ascension Missionary in Residence  
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**O**n January 31st, Fr. Peter shared an email with the parish with an “Opportunity to Help.” At the time there were about 17 newly arrived refugee families connected with Hello Neighbor who were staying in hotels and Airbnb’s. Local refugee resettlement agencies had just been instructed by the State Department to “stop work.” These fully vetted, fully legal refugee families had been suddenly cut off from the support they were promised.

I want to say a huge THANK YOU for how you as a church have responded and share with you what has developed since then. The Sunday after Fr. Peter’s email, we saw a huge response to the request for Aldi and Walmart gift cards! Thank you to everyone who donated! These brightly colored pieces of plastic are a tangible expression of your care for our newest neighbors.

We were also blessed with a strong response to an informational meeting about a new “Refugee Rapid Response Team.” We saw such compassion and willingness to help. Following that meeting, some of you got to work attending volunteer trainings. Existing Refugee Ministry volunteers mobilized quickly to put the gift cards to work and bring food to families in need across the city, also giving postcards saying “Welcome! From your neighbors at Church of the Ascension.”

Thanks to heavy lifting by volunteers and Hello Neighbor’s ongoing work with a skeletal staff, these 17 families are now in permanent housing! Many of them have also completed the process of receiving an EBT card for groceries, which means that gift cards are supplemental, and not the lifeline they were at the start.

This first wave of action gave way to other needs. The Rapid Response Team has driven families to receive vaccines, walked children to school, shown families how to use the bus, introduced them to the library, provided English learning resources, given rides to church, helped sort mail, gone on play dates at the park, and had countless clumsy conversations with help from Google Translate and volunteer phone interpreters. I am so proud of how these volunteers have made the love of Christ visible to families in need!

As of this writing, the “stop work” order is still in place and resettlement agencies are making hard adjustments due to the continued withdrawal of federal support for refugee resettlement. As Hello Neighbor has adjusted, we have tried to adapt and remain responsive. As our volunteers have made connections, we are now





***One of our new neighbors from South Sudan, celebrating her birthday with an Ascension family***

focused on 7 family groups from eastern and central Africa. It is hard to know what the greatest need will be week-to-week, which often prevents us from making longer-term plans and involving others from the congregation. Step by step, these families are bravely moving toward stability in their new homes.

Through the months of tumult, the volunteers on the Rapid Response Team have shown remarkable patience, flexibility and courage. We also owe a debt of gratitude to Ryan and Kelly Shane who have spent countless hours coordinating with Hello Neighbor, sharing needs, training volunteers and, through all the chaos, providing excellent pastoral care. Their sacrifices have allowed our team to act quickly and touch many lives.

The last months have felt very dark and the path ahead is becoming steeper for refugees and those advocating for their wellbeing. Let me say THANK YOU again to the Ascension community - to those who gave gift cards, came to meetings, shared ideas, made connections, joined the Rapid Response Team and prayed. It is seeing the light of Christ shining through his church which has made this dark season endurable. Thank you!

# Music Ministry in the Month of May!



By Gary Harger, Traditional Worship Music Coordinator  
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## Pop-up Choir: How Can I Keep From Singing?

Sunday services are cancelled on the weekend of the Pittsburgh Marathon, so we'll be worshipping on Saturday, May 3 at 4pm. Come join a pop-up choir of 50 or more voices singing that evening. We'll be singing an arrangement of "How Can I Keep from Singing" by Z. Randall Stroup. Last fall, Father Kevin gave a memorable sermon about why we sing and, among the many reasons he mentioned, this spoke deeply to my heart: "In a wonderful and surprising and profound way, singing unites our hearts into one."

So, let's unite our hearts together. You'll get the music 2 weeks in advance along with a few tracks to help you learn your part, then on Saturday, May 3 under the direction of Jenn Miller, we'll get together at 2:30pm to put it all together and sing it as the offertory at the 4pm service. All ages and levels of experience are welcome. (Any singers under 18 should have at least one parent singing in the pop-up choir as well.) Sign up on the app or e-mail [jenn.miller@ascensionpittsburgh.org](mailto:jenn.miller@ascensionpittsburgh.org). Be sure to let us know your full name and which voice part you would like to sing.



## A Concert of Piano and Clarinet Music

*Saturday, May 10 at 4pm*

Join clarinetist Janice Coppola and pianist Catherine Crotty Saturday, May 10 at 4pm as they present a recital featuring music by Milhaud, Poulenc, Aubin, Babin, Kovacs and Benny Goodman. Catherine Crotty and her husband, Jack, have been members of Ascension since 2009. Catherine holds degrees in piano performance from West Virginia University and The Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music. She was principal keyboardist with the West Virginia Symphony Orchestra for over twenty years.

Janice Coppola is a classically trained clarinetist who holds bachelor's and master's degrees in music performance from the Cleveland Institute of Music. Janice has performed as a classical, jazz and klezmer clarinetist, and has appeared with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, performed on stage at the Pittsburgh Public Theater and played in many different venues with her klezmer group and other ensembles.



## The In-Between: a Concert on the Themes of Waiting and Wanting

*Presented by Church of the Ascension Music Performers Collaborative*

*Saturday, May 31 at 4pm*

Acts 1 reads: "And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father..." After all the emotional highs and lows the disciples experienced - traveling with Jesus, watching Him die, seeing Him alive again - now they are told to wait. They don't even know exactly what they are waiting for! In this moment between Easter and Pentecost, the Music Performers Collaborative members come together to present a concert on themes of waiting, the unknown, and yearning, through diverse musical genres and disciplines. The concert is free of charge and open to all. Come explore these themes with us through music that provokes, challenges, and comforts.

## Musical Performer Spotlight: Catherine Crotty



"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." James 1:17

I am blessed to have collaborated with many fine musicians over the years and have learned from all of them, but the person with the most profound musical influence on my life was the Russian pianist Olga Conus, a friend of Rachmaninoff, who was in her eighties when I studied with her. For a few years when I was in my twenties, I traveled by train from Charleston, West Virginia to Cincinnati for lessons. The train left Charleston at 2:30am and arrived in Cincinnati five hours later. My lessons were from 11am-1pm. One time, I almost fell asleep at the keyboard! She took me back to the basics and taught me how to use my hands. I was in such awe that I was afraid to call her one time to cancel a lesson. My fear was immediately gone when a little boy answered the phone and called out, "Grandma, come to the phone!" I am forever grateful to her. Now I am in my eighties and, encouraged by my dear husband, am blessed to be still learning and collaborating with other musicians.

When Jack and I moved to Pittsburgh eleven years ago to become part of Ascension, the Holy Spirit spoke two words to me - prayer and piano. My immediate reaction was, "Lord, You still want to hear me play?!" It has taken many years to hone the gift God gave to me. When I am at the piano practicing, I feel His presence with me, and I am grateful. Lord, I give back to You all that I have and all that I am.



# Coming Up!



## Marathon Weekend Service

*Saturday, May 3 at 4pm*

On the weekend of the Pittsburgh Marathon, our Sunday services are cancelled. Join us for worship on Saturday, May 3 at 4pm. After worship we'll have a meal together and will celebrate with Ascension's first "Chili Throwdown!"



## Chili Throwdown

*Saturday, May 3 at 4pm*

Register your chili on the app. Prep your favorite chili and bring it to Bailey Hall by 4pm, clearly marked with your name. Winners of the Chili Throwdown will be announced at the end of the service!



## Service of Evening Prayer: Listening

*Wednesday, May 7 at 7pm*

We will host a service of Evening Prayer on the theme of Listening, both corporately as Ascension leadership is having discussions around vision and values, and individually as each of us discerns the leading of Jesus in our own lives.



## International Ministry Volunteer Appreciation Brunch

*Saturday, May 10 at 9:30am*

We will celebrate our faithful volunteers. If you have been part of this ministry, please sign up on the app and let us know you plan to attend!



## Baby Bottle Campaign

*Sunday May 11*

Our Annual Baby Bottle Campaign in support of the Women's Choice Network – a local Christian agency that provides support for women with unplanned pregnancies – begins Mother's Day and concludes Father's Day. Please pick up a baby bottle, fill it with change, coins or bills, and bring it back to the church by June 15.



## Legacy

*Thursday, May 15 at 12:30pm*

Join us as we learn from Dr. Karen Scandrett, Gerontologist, on the topic of "Understanding Memory Loss." Lunch is \$15, first timers are free! Sign up on the app or email [kafisher208@gmail.com](mailto:kafisher208@gmail.com)



## Workday

*Saturday, May 17 at 9am*

Join a crew getting stuff done on our facility. Eat your Wheaties and come in clothes that can get dirty. Sign up on the app to let us know you can come.



## Arts Collaboratives Retreat

*Saturday, June 14*

The Arts Collaboratives welcome you to join us on June 14 for an Arts Retreat! We will have time for quiet reflection, discussions about art and faith, and fellowship over lunch. Keep an eye out for the RSVP on our app and website!



# Fearfully & 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 Carol Amidi, artist and long-time member of Ascension.*

**J:** I usually ask people how they came to Ascension

**C:** My first day at Ascension was the first day Doug McGlynn was here as rector (1990). I wasn't Anglican and I thought, "this looks scary, this big black church with red doors!" But I braved it, and I came in, and I've loved it from that day on.

**J:** What is happening in your life now?

**C:** That's heavy. I'm moving out of the city and away from Church of the Ascension. I'm starting the grieving. I'm moving to St. Louis. I have family there.

**J:** Can you tell me more about that?

**C:** My father is quite old, and my brother is taking care of him and my brother needs some help. I'm hoping to come back here; this is my family.

**J:** That sounds so hard. How has God met you in the process?

**C:** Excellent question. There's been a lot of sadness in my life. So I feel prepared. One of the things that helps me through these things is that I don't know what God is up to. I'm not going to always understand what He's up to. But He's still good, and so I hold on to that. "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end." That's truth, and whether I feel it or not, I hold on to that. That has gotten me through a lot, a lot of things that don't make sense. Some things end up being really good, and there are some things that I have yet to see the good.

**J:** I think trusting God during sadness is so hard. There's no easy answer for grief. I'm so curious about how art ministers to you in tough times.



**C:** Sometimes I make art when I don't have answers. I start out like a child, really - angry, scratching and it ends up being more and more calm. I paint in layers. The under layers that you don't end up seeing get covered with calm. They become covered with calm. When my pieces are good, I feel as if I have been listening to God in the process. My most successful pieces are things I've done with Him.

**J:** Wow, that's such a beautiful metaphor for transformation.

**C:** Yes, and I hope redemption is the same thing. There's entropy, and I think of redemption as something that happens to entropy.

**J:** God brought order to chaos in Genesis 1.

**C:** And we see sort of the dissolution of that, but also the earth is groaning waiting for Him. But we'll see the complete redemption - a new heaven, new earth, new bodies. That comes back to the question of what the place of art is. I think it can communicate something that words can't. What would these new creations be? You can draw or paint something that doesn't exist, you can paint a feeling that is altogether new.

**J:** So beautiful. I have trouble controlling my hands, but I'd love to experience what you describe, being a maker.

**C:** Just brings tears to my eyes. I'd love for you to watch me make work. It's very humbling, because I don't feel as if I am the author of it. I really feel like God is working through me. I wonder if that's what happens with you in an interview, where there's a point in which God is giving you words and thoughts that are even beyond you.

**J:** When you are reflecting, do you think in words?

**C:** I'm shaking my head - no. Do you reflect in words, James?

**J:** I see colors. (*Note: James has synesthesia - a crossing of senses. For him, colors have sounds.*) Some colors are more upsetting - like orange - but not always.

**J:** I wonder about how the church can capture and value the right brains in our midst.

**C:** I think the Worship Arts is a wonderful step in that direction. Because there are so many things beyond words - music can touch things, the arts can touch things. Sometimes things can get limited when you define them with words.

**J:** I'm glad our church tradition includes so many senses. I love the colors and symbols and the music. I wish for more silence. Worship does not mean a non-stop wall of sound.

**C:** It can be assaulting, can't it? I can feel that way with visuals. I sometimes have to step away from all that's going on in church. As rich as it is, sometimes at Easter or at Christmas it's too big for me and I don't know how to filter. After my first visit to Ascension, Pastor Doug McGlynn introduced himself to me and asked, "What did you think of the service?" And I said, "I have no idea what's going on here!" He said, "You need to just sit, watch what's going on, and enjoy what's going on." That was the best piece of advice for me and helped me.

**C:** I'm so grateful you asked to interview me. I've always wanted to get to know you, James. I'm leaving at the end of the month. I'd love to ask you some questions

**J:** Go ahead and ask me anything.

**C:** I always wonder if you felt lonely.

**J:** I did, but Jesus was my best friend.

**C:** When you read the Bible, what really resonates with you?

**J:** I'm still learning Bible. I know the liturgy, which of course includes lots of Scripture. I love the story of Hagar because God saw her. I'm weird and don't have a big social group, but I always knew I was loved here, and that Jesus saw me.



**C:** I could see from my distance that Jesus saw you. It seemed very obvious that you were seen and picked out, selected.

**J:** He's not the usual CEO. He makes some odd choices.

**C:** Definitely. Thinks out of the box. I thought we'd talk about sad lament, but I feel so much joy getting to know you.

**J:** Tell me about your painting, the one called "My Soul Waits in the Morning"

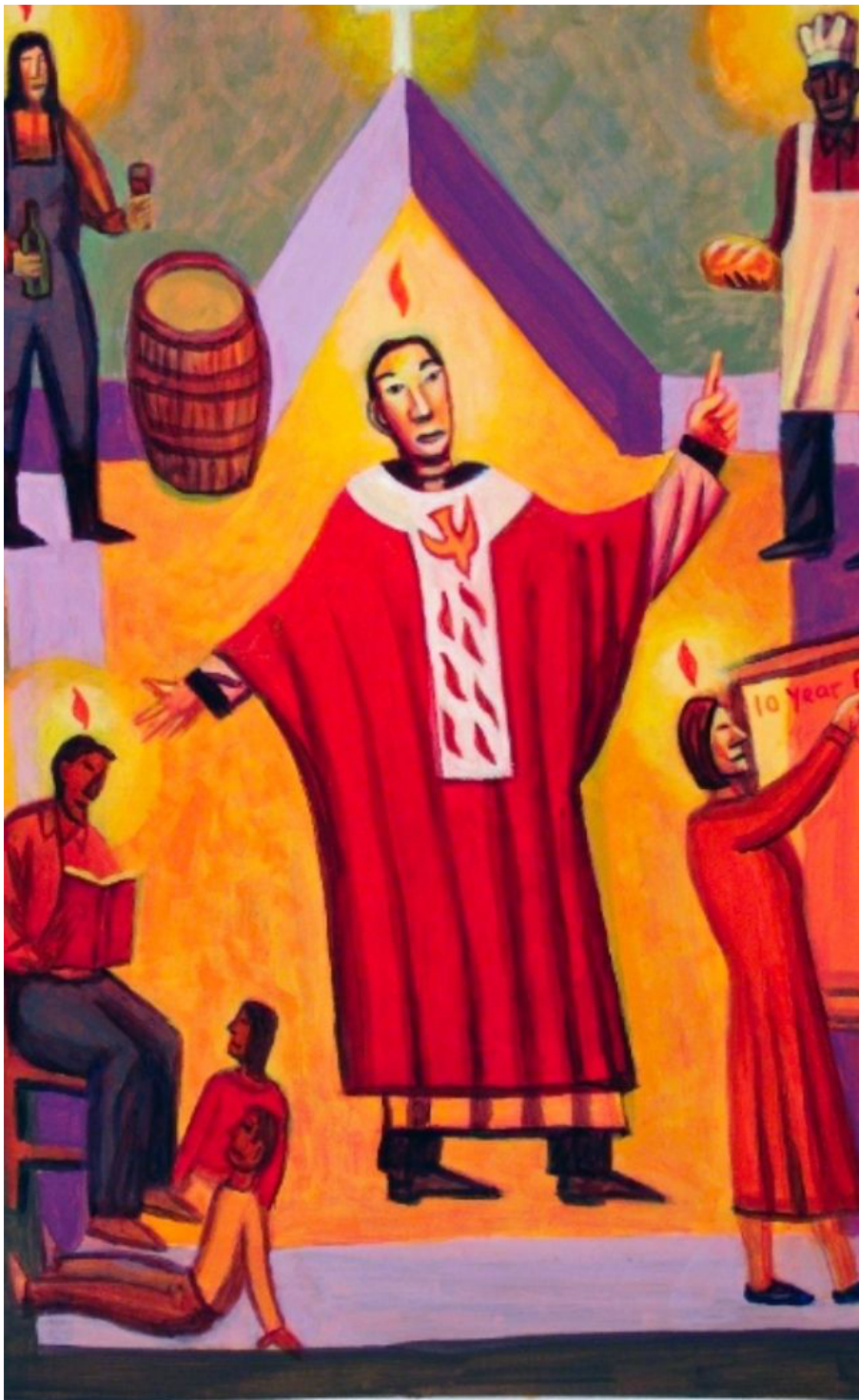
**C:** This is about seasons of depression. The circles represent counting - days of waiting. There are tick

marks near the circles, like you would tick days of a calendar. The tick marks also look like crosses, an "amen" to a prayer. There is a figure curled up at the bottom - I asked a dancer to show me "despair" and this is what they did. The taller shadow I see as the Christ, coming to aid. Because of what Christ has done we are elevated. All the days of counting get their worth. This is about redemption. A hard time is a place to get really close to Jesus.

**J:** How did you get close to Jesus in the dark times?

**C:** When you are so empty and know you have nothing to offer, it leaves you wide open to receiving Him. If I can muster up joy, I don't have room for His joy.





# Pentecost Sunday

Sunday June 8  
9am & 11am  
All are welcome

Don't forget to  
wear red!



CHURCH OF THE  
ASCENSION

Artwork © James B. Janknegt

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

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