

# The Ascent

SUMMER 2025

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# Let It Lie



By Peter Coelho, Rector

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**This July I hope you'll notice something different at Ascension. That something is a whole lotta nothing. Let me explain.**

Basic farming technique involves letting fields lie fallow for a season. This is done with regard to the creational limits of the land in a given area. It is done in anticipation of further growth and activity to come. This same respect and anticipation are behind our quieter July. We're letting the field that is our corporate life lie fallow.

During July, we are making a concerted effort to pare back our events and offerings. You can expect to see fewer announcements than usual, and we'll settle into a rhythm of Sunday worship with less happening midweek. This

coincides with a section of "Ordinary Time" in the church calendar, a season in which nothing much seems to happen. The liturgical color for this season is green, however, a helpful reminder that even when it seems like nothing is happening God's kingdom is growing.

The intention of this low-key July is two-fold. First, we want to give staff and leadership a time of rest. Many people will be taking vacation and/or traveling during these weeks. With fewer things on the calendar, there will be an opportunity for some restoration. Second, this gives space for increased preparation for the coming season. A great deal of planning goes into Kids' Church, community groups, the Parish Retreat, and other fall offerings. In July, preparation for the coming season of life together will be happening.



**there's a  
whole lot  
of nothing  
going on.**

As we let things lie fallow for these months, I have a few recommendations for us all.

- Pray for the church. The extra time and space these summer weeks create room for intentional prayer and time with the Lord. In addition to your regular spiritual practices, please pray for the life of Ascension, that we may be a fruitful community for God's glory, that God may guide us, and that we may be built up in the likeness of Christ.
- Participate in worship. Worship in Word and Sacrament is the primary corporate action of our shared life at all times. If anything, the importance of worship together is heightened with fewer midweek points of connection. Each Sunday, we have the opportunity to live into the reality that we are together the body of Christ.
- Cultivate community. Invite one another out to lunch. Introduce yourself to people you don't know. Have each other over for dinner. Meet up with a clergy person for coffee. These weeks are an excellent opportunity to get to know the church better.

I once heard someone say, "*Rest is spiritual warfare*." That is, it is a way of resisting those destructive forces (the world, the flesh, and the devil) that would lead us away from God and His good purposes. Rest is ultimately an act of faith. Trusting that the world does not depend on our good efforts, we cease our toil for a time. Trusting that even when we are still God is alive and moving, things are growing, we acknowledge our limits and still ourselves. My prayer is that these "fallow" weeks would be times of growing faith and life-giving resistance for us.

# Summer Reading



By Peter Coelho, Rector

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**S**ummer days are for pages. One of my favorite aspects of the summer months is using the longer days and some vacation time for extra reading. In this summer reading, I often venture beyond what might be required for sermon preparation. I try to read some books that are particularly fun or poignant and that might serve to broaden my heart and mind. This summer I hope to reread a few books that I found to be a particular blessing, and to get to a few titles that I have wanted to read for a little while.

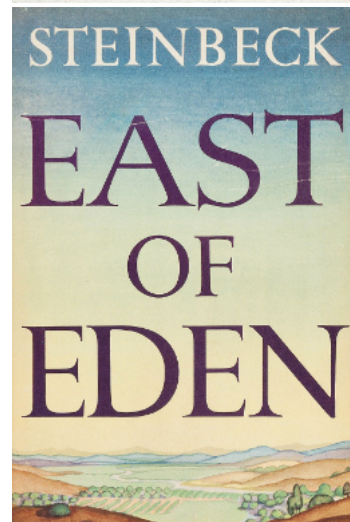
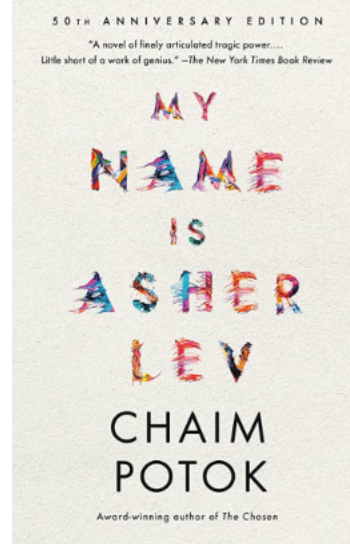
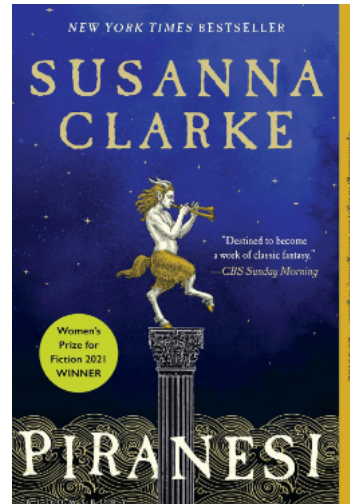
Whether it's on Letterbox or Goodreads, you can tell something about a person through the films they watch and the books they read. As you read this list, I hope you'll get to know me a little better. I'm also interested in getting to know you. If you have a book to recommend, or a book you have read, or if you do read one of these titles and want to share your thoughts, I'm all ears. This list definitely increases in ambition, the further along it goes. Fortune favors the bold, I suppose.

Starting things off, I'm looking forward to rereading a couple of novels that have had a significant influence on me and my imagination over the years. Each of these three books creates a world I'd like to return to.

*Piranesi* by Susanna Clarke is less ambitious than her breakout novel *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell*. However, this mysterious story is engrossing and straight-up fun. Even further, Clarke's main character and narrator has a relationship of awe and union with their surroundings that approximates what might be called a "sacramental worldview." On top of a mystery to solve, their point of view is something I want to think through again. This short book, 270 pages, is intriguing and inspiring.

*My Name is Asher Lev* by Chaim Potok is another novel that I found mind-expanding a few years ago. The book draws the world of mid-century Judaism in New York and offers a wealth of insight into creativity and the artistic process. Asher's story is heartbreaking, specific, and somehow, quite universal. I can't totally articulate how, but I know this book has informed my sense of how to be present to people.

A pastor friend of mine tries to read *East of Eden* every year, convinced of its power to form a pastoral imagination. I've read it before and was blown away by





the story of the Trasks. I can't say I completely understand my friend's perspective, but I'd like to give it another try as it was well worth my time a few years back. Obviously, this one will take a chunk of time.

In addition to the above novels, there are three books that I hope to read for the first time this summer as well.

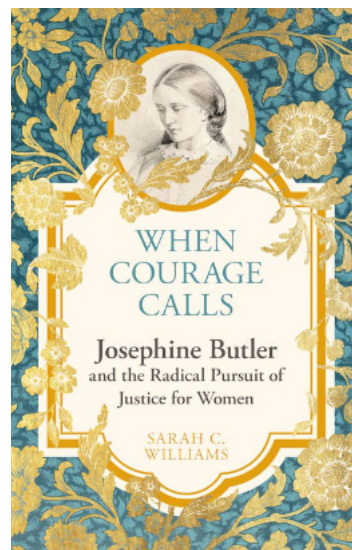
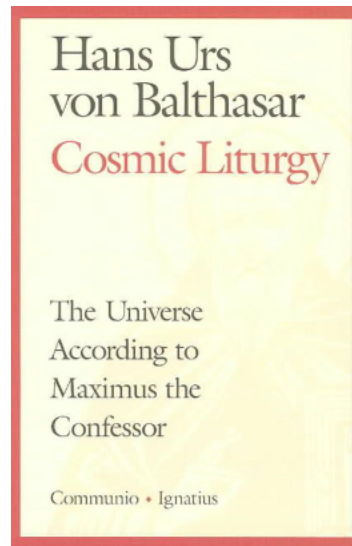
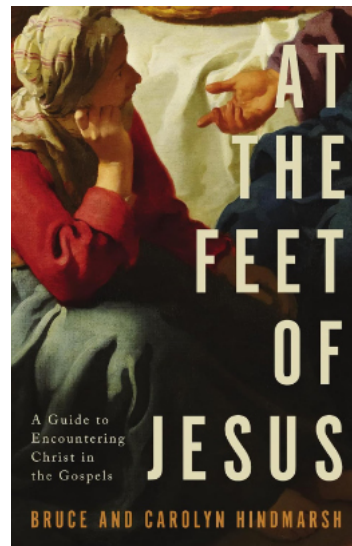
The first is *At the Feet of Jesus: A Guide to Encountering Christ in the Gospels* by Bruce and Carolyn Hindmarsh. Bruce is the Professor of Spiritual Theology at Regent College, where I studied. Carolyn teaches Greek there. They attend St. John's Vancouver, a prominent Anglican Church in Canada. This book has been recommended to me by several people, and the title alone draws me in. From what I know of Bruce and Carolyn, I am eager to be led by them into the presence of Jesus through the Gospels in fresh and new ways. This book feels like one that I need in a season of life when so many other things take up time and space.

Former associate rector at Ascension, Jonathan Warren Pagan, and I have read a few books together over the past couple of years. This summer, we plan to read *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor* by Hans Urs von Balthasar. A friend once joked with me that with a name like "Hans Urs von Balthasar," he was destined to be either a theologian or a vampire-hunter. I'm glad he chose to be a theologian and writer. I'm sure this book will be a challenge for me. It's not exactly a relaxing beach read, but I'm excited to learn more about a Church Father whom I've heard about but know little of. Father Jonathan is a lot smarter than I, so he's a good person to read something like this with!

Lastly, Sarah Williams was one of my favorite professors during my time at Regent. She is a remarkable historian and person of faith. Her short book *Perfectly Human: Nine Months with Cerian*, about carrying her infant daughter to term knowing that her child would not survive, was profoundly moving when I read it some 15 years ago. Her new book, *When Courage Calls: Josephine Butler and the Radical Pursuit of Justice for Women*, is more academic, but I'm confident it will be edifying and inspiring. The subject is one that seems perennially important.

This is an ambitious list! I'm not sure I'll make it through all these, but I look forward to trying to as a stretch goal. Other titles by Louise Perry on the sexual revolution, Dani Treweek on singleness, and creativity by Mihály Csikszentmihályi are also lurking. There is no shortage of things to read!

This summer, what book might you spend time in? Whatever it is, may God, the author of history and the perfecter of our faith, meet and guide you into all truth. May your heart and mind be filled with the fullness of God, and with fresh insight and wonder at His creation. Happy reading!



# Bishop's Awards for Excellence

**O**n Ascension Sunday we were delighted that the following awards were given to some very deserving recipients. Read about them [here!](#)

## Relational Hospitality Award

*Awarded to someone who practices biblical hospitality by welcoming strangers, forging deep connections and sharing his/her gifts selflessly with others in the congregation and community. "Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." (Hebrews 13:1-2)*

### Jim and Mari Stout

Jim and Mari Stout have been key members of Ascension since 2010. Jim and Mari lead The Workshop, a counseling center with offices at Ascension and serves many of our parishioners. In addition to being incredibly gifted counselors, the Stouts also co-lead a Community Group called Omnia Nova. This is a dynamic group that serves many of the key leaders in our parish. Jim and Mari are also much sought after teachers in the context of our community. Beyond the walls of Ascension, Jim and Mari are incredibly active serving and leading in a variety of other non-profits and parachurch ministries. They are true pillars of our community, incredibly gifted and generous with what the Lord has given them.



## Prayerful Spirit Award

*Awarded to someone who models a prayerful relationship with God to those around him or her, inspiring others to pray without ceasing and trust in the Lord. "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." (1 Thessalonians 5:16 – 18)*

### Hannah Halfhill

Hannah Halfhill has been a devoted member of Ascension since 2019 and has been a spiritual director since 2018. In her time in our community, she has helped to form and lead the





Ascension Spiritual Director Cohort. She also organizes and leads our Ignatian Experience – an abbreviated version of the Ignatian Exercises. Hannah is constantly at prayer with and for our community even as she teaches others to pray through the generosity of her time and talent.

## Agile Servant Award

*Awarded to someone who has served Christ and the church by demonstrating agility and resilience when faced with a challenge or by improving the operational excellence of the church. "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them; if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness." (Romans 12:6-8)*

### Ryan and Kelly Shane

Ryan and Kelly Shane began attending Ascension during the pandemic. Because of Covid-19 restrictions and a need for stable high school education for their three daughters, they moved back to Pittsburgh after 20 years of service among refugees in the Middle East (Yemen, Jordan, Lebanon). Kelly and Ryan did not take long to get involved – they have a love for refugees which has shown itself in their tireless commitment to the Ascension Refugee Co-sponsorship program. For the past several years they have spent hours and hours of volunteer time coordinating and leading Ascension teams and walking side by side with the refugee families we have welcomed to Pittsburgh. They showed their deep resilience and commitment to Jesus in 2025 as they met the challenges to refugee resettlement with even more hours of volunteer work. They personify fortitude, cheerfulness and diligence and we're so happy they are in our community!



# Goodbye Ascension!



By Wes Williams, Curate

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**I** first began attending Church of the Ascension regularly in 2016. It would be hard for me to list all the ways the Lord has moved over the following years. I was stubborn and prideful when I first arrived. Through the gentle ministry of this church body, bearing with me and welcoming me into service, the harder parts of me began to soften.

I can't especially name a time or place, but there was a humbling that happened, especially over the year of 2020. Fr. Jonathan Millard was an impactful and encouraging pastoral presence at a time when I needed guidance and care. He walked alongside me as I discerned a call to ministry over the following two years.

On Good Friday of 2023, Fr. Jonathan approached me about the possibility of a Curacy at Ascension. I was approved for ordination to the diaconate, with continued discernment needed toward the priesthood. He said that a Curacy is a great opportunity for that.

At the time, Meg and I were newly engaged, and hadn't factored in the possibility of a job transition coinciding with our upcoming marriage. After a few days of prayer and seeking wisdom from others, we both felt confident that accepting the Curacy was the right decision for us. I began my two-year Curacy program in July 2023.

It's hard to believe that two years have already passed. It was such a joy to serve and be among this community. My experiences have shaped me and solidified my understanding of what it means to be a priest. Thank you for being part of this journey with me, for your constant encouragement and support, and for your many prayers as I discerned and learned to walk this way of pastoral ministry.

I can confidently say that accepting this Curacy was one of the best decisions of my life (and one of the top two best decisions I made in 2023!) Now that this season is drawing to a close, Meg and I are entering into one of our hardest transitions.



We are grateful to have navigated the early part of our marriage and entered into parenthood while part of this community. I'm so glad that I could baptize Charlie at our Easter service, something that will remain part of his story as a member of this faith community.

Thank you for investing in us and helping us prepare for the next stage of our journey. Our time in this world is fleeting, and our time in it together even more so. Let's appreciate the moments we have and cherish the memories. I am so glad to be united with you in Christ and to share the mission of bringing his Gospel to bear in our lives.

Church of the Ascension is a beautiful community, and by the grace of God you continue to grow. I am confident that under the leadership of Fr. Peter and the rest of the church staff, the ministry at Church of the Ascension will continue to thrive in this next season as you love one another through it.





# Introducing Our New Curate: Katherine Franker



By Kevin Antlitz, Assistant Rector

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**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 service in 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.**

We are very excited to introduce you to Katherine Franker, our new Curate. I've asked Katherine to share a little about herself so you can get to know her a bit:

Hi Church of the Ascension, my name is Katherine, and I am so excited to meet you! I was born in Maryland, but was raised in Rochester, Minnesota. Growing up, my family was very involved in a non-denominational church. Even though I learned a lot at that church, I knew that I wanted something completely different in college. I went to Wheaton College in Illinois for my undergraduate studies. While there, I was introduced to Anglicanism and immediately fell in love with the liturgy, the church calendar, and the accountability built into the church structure.

I have always been drawn to teaching and leading, so I chose to study Elementary Education in college. But during my first year at Wheaton, I had several Bible and Theology professors ask me why I wasn't studying their subjects. I responded by saying, "What would I do with a degree in Bible and Theology?" They then handed me several books on women in ministry and introduced me to local female pastors. Over time, I learned that not only could women teach and lead in the church, but that God had been calling me to that work my whole life.

I accepted my call to ministry and started applying to seminaries. I chose Baylor's Truett Seminary because I was also able to pursue a Master's of Education while working on my Masters of Divinity. This May, I am graduating with an M.Div. and an M.S.Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction. While in Waco, I have been a part of All Saints, an Anglican church in the Churches for the Sake of Others (C4SO) Diocese. I have enjoyed preaching and leading Children's Ministry there.

That's a little bit about my call. Now I want to back up a bit and share about my draw to Pittsburgh and Ascension. Before seminary, I had seven months between graduating college and moving to Texas. In those months, I worked as a Bible teacher for Urban Impact in Pittsburgh. During that time, I attended Ascension, grew to love Pittsburgh, and started dating my now husband, Josh. Josh and I got married in 2023, and he shifted to remote work so he could join me in Waco. We are both excited to move back to Pittsburgh, where he will resume work in-person and I will start working with my dream team at Ascension. I can't wait to get to know you all better starting this August!

Katherine begins her Curacy on August 1, 2025. Even though she doesn't officially start for a couple of months, Katherine and Josh will be worshipping among us before then. Please welcome them! Also, please pray for Katherine and Josh as they transition into life at Ascension and in Pittsburgh. Pray especially that this would be a very restful and restorative summer for Katherine before she dives into her work at the church.



# Gardens Fit for an Ascension Welcome



By Julie Witmer, Garden Designer & Horticulturist

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**I**n 2023 I was invited to help create a plan for re-using the stone removed from Ascension's walls during church construction and remodeling. Around that time, I learned of research on the effective use of church property edges to invite neighbors with welcoming outdoor spaces. I recognized this as an exciting opportunity for Church of the Ascension to create a green space as outreach to our area of Pittsburgh. Could our property itself be a blessing to hundreds who pass by it every day, in addition to sustaining the congregation that gathers here each Sunday? Now, after months of planning and manual labor, there are three new green spaces at Ascension: one at the heart of our church for quiet contemplation, one for the safe enjoyment of our small children, and one for the generous ministry of welcome to our local community.

With the contractors gone, we were able to begin garden work last November with several workdays by our Ascension Gardeners' Collaborative. The sun beat down the first few Sundays while we removed the compacted turf, regraded the site, dug up old tree roots, and wheelbarrowed tons of dirt, gravel, and stone outdoors and indoors—all by hand. When gardening work is done sustainably, everything contributes to a total gain for the property as a whole, and that was certainly true of these gardens. All of Ascension's own topsoil was recycled, the church stone was used to build new retaining walls, and permeable paving was installed to decrease the risk of flooding while providing a safe surface that stands up to heavy foot traffic. Some more details for each garden area:

## The Ann Paton Contemplation Garden

The contemplation garden is a peaceful and shady woodland garden at the heart of Ascension. Here prayers are said, and our spirits are renewed with the green goodness of God's creation.

## Children's Garden

This area, tucked into the strong stone walls of the nave, is a place for parents to take a rest while their toddlers navigate the low steppingstones through the smooth gravel. Ornamental grasses will enclose this space, lightly waving in the wind, while the newly re-grown lawn, where older children can run and play, is also in full view.

## Stone Courtyard

This is a social garden made for sharing a summer's lunch, a firepit during St Nicholas Market, or a quiet moment together in the middle of a city walk. I took inspiration from the Carlucci Commons plantings along Ellsworth to create a design for the outside gardens that visually ties together the old narthex with the new. There has been much excitement among the local homeowners, walkers, and apartment dwellers about this garden! It is my hope that whoever sits in the courtyard will enjoy a moment of peace and also become curious about life within the church walls and stained-glass windows. As I sat in the completed courtyard garden for the first time this past May, I overheard someone walking through the garden comment, "This is where I want to be on Sunday morning." Amen, may it be ever so.

## A Collect for the Care of Creation

*O Lord, you made us to till and to keep the earth, grace us, we pray, to preserve its beauty and to protect it against harm as well as to delight in all of its variety and to steward all of its riches, so that we might care for it as you care for it, in wisdom and in love. We pray this for your sake, our neighbor's as well, both near and far. We pray this in the name of the One who sustains all of creation, Jesus Christ himself. Amen.*

"A Collect for the Care of Creation," W. David O. Taylor, Prayers for the Pilgrimage (InterVarsity Press, 2024).







# Introducing Our New Youth Pastor: Daniel Trimble



By Peter Coelho, Rector

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**I** am excited that Daniel Trimble will be starting as our new Director of Youth on July 1st. Many of you will remember Daniel from his time serving as a youth intern at Ascension last summer. Daniel has since graduated from university, is soon to be married, and will be moving back to Pittsburgh this next month.

In the search process, Daniel stood out from other qualified candidates due to his maturity as a servant leader, his ability to connect with students, leaders, and peers, and his deep love for Jesus and the church. Daniel exhibits the qualities of a remarkable pastor. I look forward to him leading, serving, and equipping our students to adore and follow Jesus in all of life, for all of life.

A huge thank you is due to Brian Perry, Mandy Jabbour, Britt Gowen, Jim Stout, Micah Halfhill, and Grace Witmer for their excellent work serving on the interview team for this position. Alongside Father Josh and me, this team prayerfully interviewed several candidates and thoughtfully deliberated.

In July, Josh+ will assume the Director of Music role, while also dedicating a few hours a week to overseeing Daniel. Josh+ and Daniel have a long history and deep trust. I'm grateful that Josh's wisdom, presence, and experience will continue to be a blessing to Daniel and CAYG. Additionally, several key leaders with extensive experience in youth ministry will be serving in various ways and supporting Daniel as he begins this role.

Please join me in praying for Daniel, his fiancée, Meg, and for CAYG. May the Holy Spirit work powerfully among students at Ascension, so that they may grow in awareness of God's love and power shown through Jesus, and be sent out as agents of and witnesses to that love and power.







# Summer Celebration: Inspiring Faith and Vocation in Our Youngest Parishioners



By Catherine Slocum, Director of Children's Ministry  
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**W**e are thrilled to announce the return of our beloved *Summer Celebration* series at Kids' Church! Running for six weeks from July 13 through August 17, this unique series brings together members of our own congregation to share with our children about their vocations and hobbies—and how their work is an expression of their faith.

Each week, a guest presenter will join our children during the 9am and 11am services to offer a glimpse into their daily lives, whether as a writer, gardener, weaver, scientist, or artist. They'll share stories, tools, and hands-on activities that not only entertain but also plant seeds of possibility in young hearts and minds. These sessions are not only fun but deeply formational. Children are naturally curious and often dream aloud about what they might become. The *Summer Celebration* gives them the chance to hear real-life stories of faith in action—often for the first time.

This summer's lineup is full of engaging guests, including Rhonda Smith, author of *When Did God Make the Dinosaurs?*, Benn Carlucci, filmmaker and Kids' Church video producer and Chef Father Jack Gabig, hospitality and culinary teacher. Children will have the opportunity to dig in the dirt, explore colorful yarns, create their own videos, and even build neuron pathways—all while hearing how God's call can be lived out through work and creativity. Each week will include a short liturgy, a Bible verse focus, and a



practical activity for the children to do at home, encouraging ongoing exploration.

The heart of this series is captured beautifully by a quote we share with our presenters from Rev. Tim Keller: "Work is rearranging the raw material of God's creation in such a way that helps the world thrive and flourish." Through *Summer Celebration*, our children are learning just that—how to see God's hand in every vocation and how their own gifts can one day reflect God's love to the world.

We are so grateful to the members of Ascension who share their time, stories, and talents with our kids. And we're excited for what these six weeks will sow in the lives of our youngest parishioners!

# A Reflection on Hope



By Daniel Behrens, Ascension Missionary in Residence

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**I generally use this space to share about ministry activities, like the Refugee Rapid Response Team, the Sudanese worship service, or meetings for Spanish-speakers.**

**These efforts are ongoing and ever-changing, and I hope you will ask me or any volunteer to share what is going on. But in this article I want to share more personally about how we as Christians can lean into difficult ministry without losing hope.**

This year, I have been asking “What is my hope?” not just for me, but for the well-being of our refugee neighbors, for this country, and for the church in the United States.

I think it is important to recognize that the New Testament idea of hope is bigger than feeling optimistic. Some people are better at feeling optimistic than others. In the Bible, hope can refer to something we confidently expect in the future, the foundation of that expectation, or the experience of having that expectation. Having hope is not the same as feeling hopeful!

Let me share three foundations for Christian hope in working with refugees (or any hard relationship!) which make acting and even feeling hopeful possible. I am preaching to myself, and letting you listen in! (You may recognize this as the “Mystery of Faith” which we acknowledge each week before coming to the Communion table).

## Christ Has Died

Jesus, the Son of God, entered the fullness of human experience. From his birth to his evacuation to Egypt, to the dreadful days of Holy Week, Jesus experiences persecution, displacement, betrayal, bigotry, concern for his mother—the depth of emotional and relational pain. And he experiences sleeplessness, exhaustion, aching knees, splinters, thirst, and thorns—the depth of physical suffering. In Jesus, our God chose to become a “man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3).

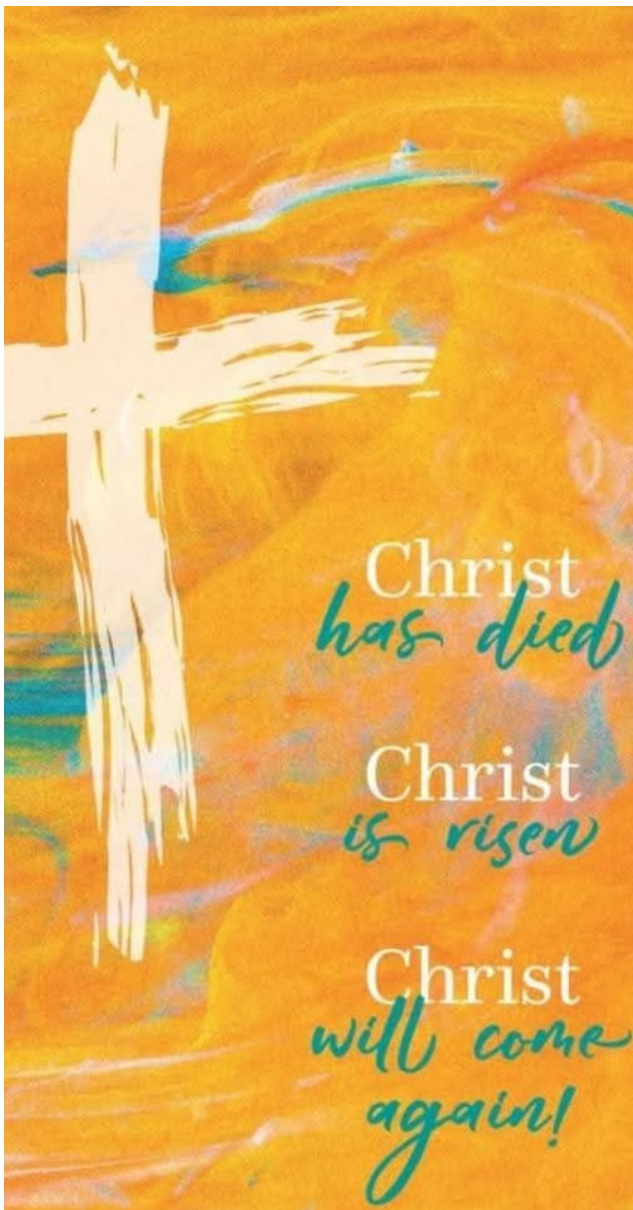
That means that he understands every nuance of what our refugee and immigrant neighbors have experienced and are experiencing. Even as we so often do NOT understand what others have suffered, we witness to a God who does. Our hope rests on the foundation of this shocking truth: The Son of God has taken on a human body and a fully human life, even to the extent of experiencing death. Christ has died.

## Christ Has Risen

Without Easter, there is nothing good about Good Friday. A God who merely enters our suffering and dies is not very hope inspiring. But Christ is risen. The world, the flesh, and the devil do not have the last word. Good Friday should make us honest about evil, but Easter saves us from fatalism and cynicism. We can hope in a God who raises the dead.

How does the resurrection make hope possible in refugee ministry? For me, it shows





that new life is always possible, both on a small and big scale. This conviction makes it possible to do the next thing, even when we don't feel hopeful, when all we see is death and we cannot imagine a good outcome. Death and evil are real, but new life is always possible. Christ is risen.

## Christ Will Come Again

How does Christ's return sustain our hope? It is absolutely essential!

As I enter middle age I am sobered by how slowly most people (read: myself) and things change and how fragile many seemingly good things are. Walking with refugee families, seeing them struggle toward stability and some kind of good life, usually feels like a slow grind with very uncertain results. New life happens but it is painfully slow, and progress can be undone in a moment.

But if Christ will come again, then there is hope that our struggles will be part of something bigger and better and more durable. There is hope not only for the salvation of individuals but for the healing of the world. Wars will stop and swords will be turned into farming tools (Micah 4:3). The mighty will be brought down from their thrones and the humble will be exalted (Luke 1:52). We see glimmers now, but when Christ returns, we will see him and his Kingdom in full noonday brightness (Rev. 1:16). There is hope, hope that it won't always be this way! Christ will come again and make all things right.

Thank you for coming with me on this search for Christian hope. I have a long way to go, but I think these three foundations will bear all the weight we put on them. I pray that these strong realities will help you and me to practice and even feel hope in whatever hard work God calls us to in this season.

# Summer Fun in International Ministry



By LuAnn Pengidore, Director of Ascension International Ministry  
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Contact LuAnn if you are interested in participating or volunteering! Conversation Café is held in the mornings on five Wednesdays in July. The International Community Group continues year-round and meets every other Sunday morning. Bible studies are also active this summer. You are welcome!





# Little Free Pantry

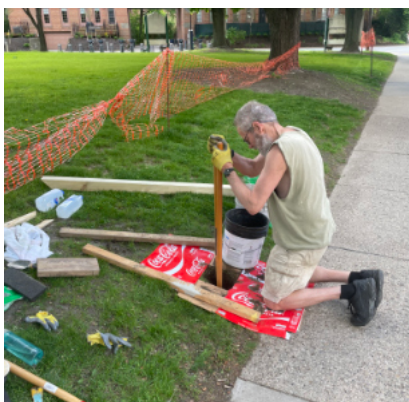


By Kate Marwood, Hospitality Coordinator

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A big THANK YOU to the community at Church of the Ascension that has helped kick off our Little Free Pantry project! We are thrilled to report that the Pantry has been built, installed, and is ready to serve the community. As a reminder, this Pantry is a way to connect with the local community, and to help relieve some food insecurity. The community outside of Ascension is invited to help stock the pantry, but as the Pantry hosts, Ascension will maintain and make sure the pantry is stocked. We will be collecting items all year around, and there will be a drop-off area near the kitchen in the Bailey Hall. Here is a list of things that we can use to stock the pantry: non-perishable food items such as canned fruits and vegetables, canned proteins, soups, dry goods etc. Personal care items (nothing sharp) such as toothbrushes, toothpaste, wipes, soap etc. can also be beneficial for the community. Thank you so much for participating in this project and showing hospitality to our community.

Special shout out and thank you to Art Stormer who built the pantry, and to Tyler Marwood and Brian Von Bloch who helped install it!



## ASCENSION BLOOD DRIVE

BAILEY HALL  
SATURDAY JULY 26, 2025

Sign up in advance  
to donate



CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION [ascensionpittsburgh.org/latest-news](http://ascensionpittsburgh.org/latest-news)

Ascension will host a blood drive on July 26th from 10:30am – 3:30pm. The blood drive goal is 30 donors with 50% of the schedule being filled by July 1st. The blood drive schedule is now open for donors to schedule their appointments.

During the summer months the blood supply shortage is even more critical than usual. Please sign up for an appointment! An incentive from Vitalant: All Registered Donors will be entered into a Drawing to Win A New Car!



# 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 Kelsey Regan, long-time member of Ascension, who has struggled with self-harm.*

**James:** How did you come to Ascension?

**K:** I was born in Texas and most of my extended family is still there. When I was 2, my dad got the opportunity to study at CMU. Our family looked for an Episcopal church in Pittsburgh after we moved. That was 32 years ago, and I've been here ever since.

**James:** What keeps you here?

**K:** When most of your family is far away, you create a new family. Ascension has been my home and family, and it's where the people are that I love the most.

**James:** I'd like to know more about your ministry in general, especially your work in seminary and teaching about self-harm.

**K:** I'm working on a doctorate at Trinity Anglican Seminary on approaches to self-harm therapy. It's a pastoral focus, to train religious leaders to recognize self-harm signs and to be aware of treatment options and to encourage recovery. Self-harm can be seen as a coping mechanism, trauma and an addiction. Sometimes there's a stigma regarding counseling, but it's seen as OK to talk to a priest. So, we want to train priests better in that regard.

**James:** Tell me what you'd like any person to know about self-harm, or what to say to people who struggle with self-harm.

**K:** When meeting someone who self-harms, there are 2 mindsets to try to avoid: one is fear that you're going to say the wrong thing. So, you don't say anything at all! The other is to be unrealistically positive. Sometimes Christians

feel an expectation to be happy, or that if you pray harder the problem will go away. Or they may think that if you get therapy or medication, that's not trusting God.

Sometimes people will say "things happen for a reason" which can be confusing and even upsetting. It's important to sit with what's uncomfortable. The "reason" for something may only be that we live in a broken world.

People often want to provide a quick fix. It can be helpful to just sit with someone and witness their grief. With self-harm, the person may not be feeling like they're really human. In my experience, self-harmers are usually very gentle people.

**James:** Can you say more about your personal journey with self-harm?

**K:** I started self-harm around 14, and at 19 it had become very difficult. I had help from a priest (let's call him "Father Stanley"). When I realized I couldn't handle it, he gave me three options: get admitted to Western Psych, start a 12-step program, or go to counseling. I chose counseling. Agency is so important when you begin to address a problem. He paid for my first two sessions so that he could be sure I went.

I also needed physical therapy and time away from school so that I could heal - "get clean". People may say, "Oh I have control over this, I can stop" - but in my experience the first thing you lose is the desire to stop. I realized that I couldn't wait until I wanted to stop - that was never going to happen. People at Ascension were on top of it - I needed to admit that it was happening and that I needed to defer school. I am so thankful for my support system. I've been clean for 15 years as of March 25. I love that because, if you know The Lord of the Rings, March 25 is "destruction of the ring day." I see the ring as an addiction, and we remember that everyone who bore the ring lost the desire to get rid of it.





It's important to find safe and helpful things to read about self-harm. The materials cannot provoke cravings. And ultimately, the intervention had to come from someone bigger than me, someone I couldn't argue with (addicts are very good at arguing and defending themselves, convincing themselves). We need to come to face THE ONE with whom we cannot argue.

**J:** I'm curious how someone has the idea to harm themselves. How does it start?

**K:** I think we all have difficult feelings and situations. We come to end of ourselves, and that helps us grow. With difficult emotions and difficult situations, sometimes we feel as if we can't ask for help. We isolate. We may feel so bad on the inside that we try to make our hearts hurt less. We try to express what we're feeling, not verbally, but physically. The "inside feelings" come out externally. We feel as if we have gotten the feelings out, but the problem is still there and now we also feel shame.

It's better to sort through problems in community, but now we have isolated. Self-harmers experience suicidal ideation. Self-harm is not a suicide attempt. It's suicide prevention. I don't want to burden someone else or kill myself - how can I relieve the pain? I will externalize the pain.

**J:** Incarnation of pain.

**K:** The name of my dissertation is "the sacrament of self-harm". Sacraments are the outward and visible sign of an inward spiritual truth. The sacrament of self-harm, a very unholy sacrament, says "I am less than human. No one can help me. God cannot help me. But this will make me feel better."

**J:** Wow. That's a good summary. How can the church be a space where people don't hide?

**K:** People in the church can express appropriate vulnerability and can ask others how they are doing and can offer help.

**J:** I think lament needs to be more of our corporate practice.

**K:** I agree. I especially appreciate our songwriters who are working on songs that speak to pain and express emotions to God.

**J:** I think we need to be a people who name the ugly and scary, bring it out so we can talk about it and shed light into the darkness.

**K:** Jack Gabig says all the time. "Isolation is poison." When Jesus meets a man plagued with demons, he asks the name (Legion)—there's something about naming that reveals that evil does not have ultimate power. There's no shame in naming our addictions. Naming it strips away the shame.

**J:** I'm so thankful for you, Kelsey.

# How to Read the Psalms

for all they're worth!



ASCENSION PARISH RETREAT  
OCTOBER 3-5, 2025

WITH DAVID TAYLOR

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

Website [www.ascensionpittsburgh.org](http://www.ascensionpittsburgh.org)

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