

The Ascent

FALL 2025

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How do we move from here to there?



By Peter Coelho, Rector

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In Dallas Willard's classic *Renovation of the Heart*, he emphasized the 'Vision-Intention-Means' model to address the question I pose in the title of this article, but he does so concerning personal spiritual formation. Beginning with a 'vision of kingdom life,' Willard's model builds backward, from the intention or desire to live into that vision, to the means that must be practiced to grow into it. The means for Willard are all about obedience to Jesus. It's a compelling model.

I've been reflecting on this model as we have been working through a season of consideration regarding the language we use at Ascension to describe our sense of identity and mission. We are articulating a vision of kingdom life for our church at this time. The intention and means are integral, but we begin with vision. We begin with a sense of where the Lord is leading and who He is calling us to be.

Over the course of this process, it has been a privilege to work alongside a few of the many amazing servant-leaders God has raised up at Ascension. It has also been a delight to hear from so many members of our community, both formally and informally. It has been gratifying to hear of the ways we are seeing God move, and the anticipation we have for more.

Alongside those here in the Ascension community, we have been blessed to work with an outside facilitator who has helped guide us through this process. Ted Vaughn is the co-founder of Historic, an agency that works with churches and non-profits across the United States. I was connected to Ted through some



Anglican friends who work in communication and marketing. While Ted's professional expertise has been a huge benefit in this process, his humble encouragement and focus on Christ have especially stood out to me.

This fall at Ascension, we'll share the results of this process. I'm excited to share what we have been working on and praying over together. Please join me in prayer for this upcoming season, which begins in September. In anticipation of the fall, I asked Ted a few questions about his perspective on this process, its purpose, and Ascension more broadly.

PC: Can you tell us about yourself and the work Historic does with churches?

TV: I've been engaged in church ministry since the age of 17, serving in, with, and on behalf of churches. Over the past 20 years, I've held full-time positions in a variety of church settings. Today, through Historic, I devote roughly 25% of my consulting work to walking alongside church leaders as they clarify, articulate, and implement their vision and strategy. In addition, Historic supports these churches in building strong, effective brands and communicating with their key stakeholders in ways that are both relevant and excellent.

PC: What is the goal of the process you are facilitating with us?

TV: The process with Peter and a cross-section of church leaders is to discern, clarify, and articulate the church's 'true north.' The 'true north' is an articulated description of what Ascension is moving toward. It is the desired picture of what faithfulness to God's call looks like, shared by the leadership and church.

PC: In this process we've been working on a set of statements describing Ascension's identity, mission, and values, encompassing our sense of 'true north.' What is the purpose of these statements?

TV: The statements that make up your 'true north' are critical because they provide a set of defining words that offer clarity of identity, direction, and purpose for Ascension. As Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote, "Words create worlds. They must be used carefully." This 'true north' serves as the kind of language that brings light and focus to who Ascension is and where it's headed.

PC: In this process you've gotten to know us a little. What are things you've noticed?

TV: I am a big fan of Ascension for several reasons.

- You are a winsome, diverse, and welcoming community that doesn't short-cut theological substance, conviction, and thoughtful application to today's increasingly pluralistic and post-Christian world.
- You have an unusually successful reach to young families which brings vitality and energy to the entire church community and, frankly, is increasingly rare to find in churches like Ascension that also offer such deep, thoughtful and smart theology.
- You are a church with a clear commitment to mission and a willingness to embrace change in order to pursue it faithfully. You are not stuck or stagnant and I see your leaders making bold, thoughtful decisions in response to Jesus' invitation to participate in His Kingdom work.

PC: As we move forward is there anything you'd invite us to consider, pray for, do, etc.?

TV: I encourage you to keep in mind that everything about Ascension - its people, resources, and legacy within this community - has been entrusted to you by God as a means to serve His Kingdom purposes, not as an end in itself. Churches often lose their way when they begin to exist for their own preservation, rather than recognizing the greater Kingdom story they are called to participate in. I also want to encourage you not to lose heart as the world and culture around us continue to shift at an unprecedented pace. Nothing happening in Pittsburgh - or anywhere in the universe - is beyond God's knowledge or control. He is present in it all, and every bit of it can and will be used to advance His Kingdom.

Find Your People: Building Community at Ascension



By Kevin Antlitz, Assistant Rector
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As I go about my work as a pastor and imagine what it is that we are called to as a church, my mind often returns to something Anglican priest and theologian John Stott (1921-2011) said almost twenty years ago. In a 2006 interview in *Christianity Today*, Stott said that deep down, there are three things that each of us ultimately desires. The first two are transcendence and significance. Each of us is on a quest for a purpose greater than ourselves and for a sense that our lives matter. The third is the longing for community. That's what I want to focus on in this article.

Our ideal version of it may differ but every single one of us longs for community. Each of us desires a deep and meaningful connection with other people in relationships of love. The reason we experience this is because we are made in the image of the God who is Trinity. As Trinity, God has always existed as loving and eternal relationship. As God's image bearers, we were made for relationship – with God and with one another.

This is why our church places such an emphasis on community. Of course we don't do it perfectly, but this is why we create spaces and structures to facilitate meaningful connection and relationships. Community life at Ascension takes many different forms and happens at many different levels ranging from fellowship to deeper spiritual friendships, from small group community to mentoring relationships.

One of the things I like to emphasize when it comes to building community is that it is both a gift and something that we create together. It is something we are invited into and something we need to seek out.

Given the rhythms of our life together, the fall is a great time to get plugged in at Ascension. As we start thinking about that, I want to encourage us to be extra intentional about inviting others in and seeking out new connections. In short, I want to encourage you to find your people. To help you with that, I want to highlight a few opportunities to grow in community.

Community Groups

The first is our Community Groups (CG). At the time I'm writing this, Ascension has 30+ CGs that meet all over the greater Pittsburgh area. Though it's certainly not the only way, joining a group is one of the best ways to grow in your relationship with Jesus and with others at Ascension. By design, each CG is unique. Some are more focused on discussing biblical and theological content. Others are more focused on community-building. Some are life-stage specific, others are more intergenerational. The best way to learn about the various groups is on the Church Center app. You can also reach out to me.

Arts Collaboratives

The second opportunity I want to highlight is our Arts Collaboratives. The Arts Collaboratives are a place for artists of Ascension to connect with other artists, encourage each other in their disciplines, and find inspiration through their shared faith and artistic passions. There are currently seven different collabs focused on different expressions of art ranging from 2D Visual Arts to Gardening to Songwriting. If you're an artist, this is a great place to find your people! Again, you can find out more on the Church Center app (Groups) or by reaching out to Josh Bennett, Director of Music & Worship Arts.

Ages and Stages

In addition to these two opportunities, Ascension offers several age- and stage-of-life specific groups including the Youth Group (CAYG) led by Daniel Trimble, Children's Ministry led by Catherine Slocum, our College-age group led by Jess Bennett, and Legacy Seniors Ministry led by Ann Tefft.

Parish Retreat

Finally, the last thing I want to highlight is our Annual Parish Retreat. For 40+ years, a large percentage of our community heads out to Laurelville Retreat Center for a weekend of fun, fellowship, worship, and good teaching. Last year we had 400+ people join us! This is a beloved tradition in our life together. Joining us for the retreat is a fantastic way to take a break from our regular rhythms and routines and make new connections and deepen old ones.

In highlighting these things, I don't mean to imply these are the only ways to find community at Ascension. Though it is much more of an art than a science, there are loads of ways to find your people. My hope and prayer for each of you is that you would!

Parish Retreat: October 3-5



By Marilyn Chislaghi, Director of Ministry
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What is the retreat?

The Parish Retreat is an all-ages gathering at Laurelville Retreat Center, about 1 hour east of Pittsburgh in the Laurel Highlands. Ascension has hosted a retreat for over 40 years. Each year we have special speakers and themes, teaching sessions, activities for all ages, campfires, singing, and lots of time to enjoy nature or fellowship with others. The retreat begins with Friday dinner and ends with Sunday lunch. Different meal plans and types of accommodation are available.

Speaker

This year's speaker is David Taylor. David is a theologian, author, speaker, priest, and director of initiatives in art and faith. Associate Professor of Theology & Culture at Fuller Theological Seminary, he has lectured widely on the arts all over the world. He has also written for many journals and newspapers including *The Washington Post* and *Christianity Today*. He lives on 21 acres east of Austin with his wife Phaedra, a visual artist and gardener, and his daughter Blythe and son Sebastian.

Retreat Theme & Advance Reading

David is going to lead us in a better understanding of the Psalms, particularly Psalms of Praise and Lament. We'll hear from him, spend some time on our own, and then workshop in small groups. There is homework prior to the retreat! In particular, we recommend a read of David's book, *Open and Unafraid: The Psalms as a Guide to Life* (about \$11 on Amazon). For those daunted by the full read, a couple chapters of the book will be posted on our app (with David's permission) for download.

Registration

Registration for Ascension's annual parish retreat will begin on Sunday, August 24 and will close on Sunday, September 21. An Early Bird Registration for hotel accommodation off campus began late July.



Parish Gatherings



As Kevin Antlitz suggested, we're passionate about people finding belonging at Ascension. Here are a few upcoming events to meet others – old friends and new!

Cookout: Cookout after the 11am service on Kickoff Sunday, September 7th. Bring a side dish to share. Help needed to set up, grill, and clean up. Sign up on the app!

2nd Sundays: Every 2nd Sunday of the month this fall we'll have Sandwiches and Salads in Bailey Hall after the 11am service. You supply the salad. Ascension will provide the sandwiches.

Men's Breakfast: On Saturday, November 15th men are invited to a breakfast. More info to come.

Women's Breakfast: On Saturday, November 1st women are invited to Ascension's annual Women's Breakfast. More info to come.

On Retreats



Retreat:

Work as Prayer, Prayer as Work
Sept 13, 2025



By Brian Janaszek, Ascension Spiritual Director
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Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed (Luke 5:15-16).

Christians, following the patterns established by Jesus, have always sought refuge from the chances and changes of life. The Desert Mothers and Fathers stepped away from their normal lives to pursue lives of prayer and devotion to God. They left home, with little desire to return. As monasticism grew out of those first desert communities, a life of prayer was, generally, seen as a vocation for the monk or nun, not for the average believer.

While prayer practices for the laity changed over the centuries, the concept of a prayer retreat was foreign until the 16th century, when a Spanish priest, Ignatius of Loyola, composed his *Spiritual Exercises*. Initially developed as a four-week retreat for the discernment of a call to ordination, Ignatius developed several versions, or annotations, of the *Exercises* to permit the laity to engage in the practice of dedicating time and space for personal prayer and reflection on the Scriptures. By the 17th century, retreats (Ignatian or otherwise) became more commonplace in the Roman Catholic church, and these practices began to grow outside of Catholicism as well.

Within Anglicanism, the Oxford Movement of the 19th century, revisiting the liturgical and formational practices of Catholicism, helped introduce retreats to the laity. These retreats tended to be more “ascetic” in nature, borrowing from the monastic practices of St. Benedict

of Nursia (among others). More evangelical Anglicans embraced the idea of retreat as well, but with an emphasis on community and a time away from “normal” life – perhaps more akin to Ascension’s annual retreat at Laurelville. These two conceptions of retreat are not at odds with one another, but rather permit us, as Anglicans, to inhabit a rhythm of life that includes both restful, perhaps even fun, retreats, and quieter, more self-focused times of prayer away from the busyness of our lives.

Jesus provides the model for the practice of regular retreat into periods of silence and prayer. Luke’s gospel, in particular, often highlights when Jesus would withdraw to lonely places to pray. First, Jesus spends 40 days(!) in the desert praying and preparing for his earthly ministry. As he begins his ministry, and finds himself surrounded by the crowd, he heals them, but he also takes time away to pray to his father. And before choosing the twelve apostles, he spends the night in prayer. These “retreats” were no luxury, but rather, given Luke’s emphasis, a critical part of his ministry.

Spiritual formation is ultimately at the heart of every Christian retreat. Jesus’ 40 days in the desert are understood to be a preparation for his earthly ministry. As faithful followers of Jesus, we are called to a rhythm of life that includes daily prayer *and* the reading of Scripture, and regular times of “retreat” where we have the space to reflect more deeply on the ways God is moving in our lives. Culturally, we live in a time where many things compete for our attention. Distraction and worry are always present. We become formed by things slowly, imperceptibly. A time of retreat gives us a space to breathe and rest and re-focus our attention on God. A time of retreat can, in the words of the Catholic priest Henri Nouwen, “[restore] ourselves to the image of God in which we are created.” Consider Jesus’ invitation to his apostles in Mark 6: “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.”

In the coming months, Ascension will offer a series of half-day retreats constructed around the liturgical calendar. In early September, in the midst of Ordinary Time, our focus will turn to the theme of *prayer as work and work as prayer*. At the start of the new liturgical year in Advent, we will meditate on the theme of *prayer as waiting*. Each of these retreats will be held at the church on Saturday morning and will offer a brief reflection (or reflections) on the chosen theme, and then provide significant space for silence, contemplation, and prayer.

Music Ministry



By Jenn Miller, Choir Director

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Adult Choir

One of my all-time favorite hymns is "Praise to the Lord the Almighty," an exuberant song of praise that affirms that God is Lord of all creation and invites us to praise him together with the very breath he has given us. We are powerfully reminded that we are not alone and that God is in the midst of us. The hymnist reminds us to look for the ways God has sustained us, "hast thou not seen" "ponder anew" "what the almighty can do" Each week as we come to worship we have an opportunity to contemplate what God is doing for us as a body of believers and what he is doing for us individually, as we remember him in the Eucharist, adore the risen Christ, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives.

Singing in the choir has become a way for me to experience and remember what God is doing in our midst. The choir is a mix of experienced and novice singers who help to lead worship at the 11am service. We rehearse on Thursday evenings from 7-9pm and briefly before the 11am service. This year we will be experimenting with rehearsal times, sometimes exchanging Thursday rehearsals for an earlier rehearsal on Sunday mornings. We will also be offering ways for more involvement through a mass choir at the retreat and occasionally singing at the 9am service. As always, you can join the choir for the season of Advent and Lent. Consider becoming a part of the choir, either for an occasional Sunday anthem, for a season or as a regular member. The choir has room to grow, and we welcome members to grow with us. Please reach out to Jenn Miller to find out more.

Children's Choir

The Children's Choir, directed by Heidi Mayhew, will be singing 4 times this year. Rehearsals will be held on Thursday evening from 5:30-6:30pm in the weeks before they sing. Children, through middle school, are welcome to join. Sign up in the app (Groups) to get more information or email heidi.mayhew@ascensionpittsburgh.org.

Choir and Music Team Dinner & Evensong

We will gather on Thursday, September 4 for dinner in the Bailey Hall and move into the nave for a service of Evensong and dedication of ourselves for the new year.



Ascension Artist Series

Come hear members and friends of the congregation share their musical talents in a concert setting in the Nave. Performances are on select Saturdays at 4pm and are free and open to the public.

Music of Mindfulness

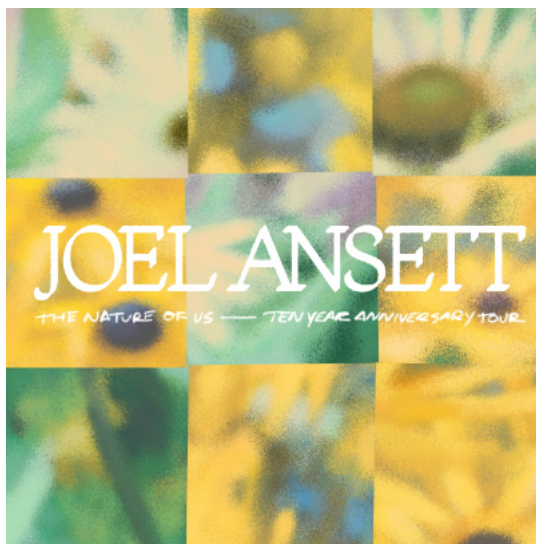
Saturday, September 20 at 4pm
Featuring Andy Kohn, Bass and Jeanne Kohn, Piano
Playing the music of Frederick Rzewski, Pauline Oliveros and Arvo Pärt

The Ascension Chamber Players

Saturday, November 1 at 4pm
Featuring strings players from Ascension and the community playing the music of Bach, Grieg and others.



Contemporary Artist Series



Come and hear gifted singers and songwriters perform in the nave. These are ticketed events and open to the public.

Jon Guerra in Concert: The Jesus Album

Sunday, August 24 at 7pm
Ticket information on Ascension's app

Joel Ansett Concert: The Nature of Us

Friday, Sept. 26 at 7pm
Ticket information on Ascension's app

Along the Road to Advent: What Our Children Are Learning This Fall



By Catherine Slocum, Director of Children's Ministry

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This fall in Kids' Church our children will be learning from two powerful letters in the Bible, 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy, and a short follow-up series on 2 Thessalonians. The series is called **Entrusted: Faithful Living in an Unfaithful Age**, and it's all about how to follow Jesus in a world that doesn't always make it easy. Kids will hear the story of a young leader named Timothy who was learning how to be brave, wise, and faithful, and how Paul, his mentor, encouraged him to trust God's grace, pray first, speak truth, and keep going even when things got hard.

In November, we'll shift into a mini-series called **In the Meantime: How to Live While We Wait**, drawn from the book of 2 Thessalonians. These lessons will help kids understand how to live with hope, patience, and perseverance, especially when life feels confusing or unfair. Each week will focus on what it means to be steady and strong while we wait for Jesus to make all things new.

We're excited to walk with your children through these timely and timeless truths, helping them grow in courage, character, and confidence as followers of Jesus.



Save the Date:
Saturday, November
22 (morning)

Parents, we'd love for you to join us in the Bailey Hall for a time of fellowship, followed by an "Instructed Kids' Church" experience. You'll get an inside look at the model of catechesis our children are growing up with - and how, together, we're raising the next generation to love Jesus with heart, soul, mind, and strength.



They Treat Me Like Their Son



By Daniel Behrens, Ascension Missionary in Residence

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In May 2023, Ascension volunteers partnered with Hello Neighbor to walk with a refugee family of six from Syria. We gathered furniture, bought groceries and greeted them at the airport using Google Translate, sharing awkward smiles and hand gestures as we tried to communicate. Their arrival day was just the beginning! Two years later, people from Ascension continue as friends and advocates as the family continues to adjust and face challenges.

This summer, I asked Mohamed, one of the teenage children in the family, a few questions about his experience and how Ascension has been a help. I hope you will read his story as a “Thank you” to the church for investing in his family and a “Thank you” to God for the opportunity to walk with amazing people like Mohamed.

D: What was your life like before you came to the US?

M: Before coming to America, life was extremely challenging. Access to education was limited, and learning came at a high cost - both financially and emotionally. I worked tirelessly, often 12 hours a day without a single day off, just to survive. Despite the long hours and hard labor, the money I earned was barely enough to cover even the most basic necessities, like food.

D: Can you share one of your hopes for life in Pittsburgh?

L: A new life where I was looking forward to success. And now I am walking towards it.

D: What has surprised you in the last two years?

M: How I can study and work at the same time. There are human rights, like how everyone will treat you well. The life is organized and how fast the life is here.

D: What is a challenge your family has faced?

M: After my parents divorced, one of the challenges for my mom and us was how to live and pay the rent.

D: How has Church of the Ascension been helpful to your family?



M: The church has a couple people who helped us with each step to success in this country by teaching us English, helping us with difficulty, helping financially, everything. And still we get help from the church, even after two years.

D: Can you share a highlight from your time in Pittsburgh?

M: I'm surrounded by different nationalities, good and bad people.

D: What are you doing this summer?

M: I was working in the restaurant for a year and a half. They're not paying me well. I thought out of the box: start mowing yards, doing landscaping. First, I spent \$200 for equipment and I thought I would not get the \$200 back. But after doing a great job and talking with people, knocking on doors and doing some ads online, I have now more than 40 clients and I earned more than 50% of what I have to pay to my college. Every year I will make my business bigger and bigger to pay my college.

D: What is coming next in the fall?

M: I'm going to the Duquesne University, studying biology, living in the campus, meeting new people, studying very hard to get A's, making new friends.

D: Is there anything you would like to say to the people of the church?

I will thank everyone who helped me to succeed in this country. They are always being in touch with me. I love how they treat me like their son.

Known and Loved



By LuAnn Pengidore, Director of Ascension International Ministry

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Church of the Ascension welcomes internationals. We want them to flourish here in Pittsburgh. We'd love them to know Jesus. We do come alongside them in a few concrete ways. Consider joining us. You can email me directly, or sign up using the Virtual Ministry Fair link on our website and app.

Conversation Cafe: Wednesday mornings

What is Conversation Café? We sit in groups of 4 to 6 students around 12 tables and talk about holidays, seasons, idioms, events in the news, and the environment - topics differ weekly. Conversation Café helps us build relationships. Some volunteers have eaten lunch or dinner with students outside of class, helped them find English resources, coached them through job interviews, or taken time in the summer as conversation partners. If you haven't attended Conversation Café, maybe this fall you'll give it a try. If you are a veteran, welcome back!

ESL classes: Mondays and Wednesdays

Where is the action at on Monday mornings, Monday evenings, and Wednesday evenings? Ascension ESL classes! Here is what our program looks like:

- We have 14 classes each week that meet for 1.5 hours each.
- We launch classes September 8 and we conclude December 10.
- We have students from over 41 countries
- We hold classes from level 0 (very beginner) to level 6 (very advanced).

- We serve refugees, spouses of doctoral and post-doctoral students, grad students, and more
- We have one teacher and two assistants per class. The classes have between 12-21 students.
- The teachers are given a curriculum to follow.
- We also offer 4-6 Bible studies weekly.

Getting to know students through field trips

One Japanese student who recently returned to Tokyo wrote me this note: *"Thank you and the teachers for the warm and thoughtful English lessons at church. I truly appreciate everyone's kindness and dedication. Ascension classes not only improved my English but was a place that I felt welcomed and encouraged. Thank you for giving me so many opportunities to explore Pittsburgh too."* And we do explore Pittsburgh! This summer 70 of us hiked Ohiopyle and we have fun trips planned for the fall! Again, the huge benefit of field trips is the deepening of relational ties.

Join us for training!

- August 20 at 7pm: Bible Study leaders
- August 27 at 6pm: ESL teachers and assistants (new and returning)
- September 3 at 10am: Conversation Café participants
- September 3 at 7pm: New lead teachers

College Age Ministry



By Jess Bennett, Staff Priest

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We are excited for another semester connecting with our local college students and college-age young adults! Our

Wednesday night gatherings have become a sweet time of authentic relationship, prayer, games and discussion.

If you're a university student and I haven't already been in contact with you, come find me! We'll kick off on Wednesday, August 27th and hope you can join us. *(And mark your calendar for October 3rd – 5th. We're looking forward to hanging out together and serving up quality coffee at our Ascension Parish Retreat).*



Special Needs Ministry



By Marilyn Chislaghi, Director of Ministry

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A sweet fellowship of special needs participants and volunteers has formed over the course of many years. Like a community group, those who participate care for one another, laugh together, worship together, serve together, learn together.

Welcome Katherine Franker

We are pleased to introduce Ascension's new Curate, Katherine Franker, to the participants and volunteers within the special needs ministry. She will be taking up the mantle of leadership this fall. Katherine comes to us from Texas where she recently completed an M.Div. at Truett Seminary and an M.S.Ed. at Baylor University. We're excited to welcome her!

When we meet

We typically meet the 1st and 3rd Sunday of the month at 10:30am (between services) for a time

of worship, creativity, learning, meditation, and discussion. On either the 2nd or 4th Sunday of the month, we meet at 10:30am to do a service project.

Want to join our fellowship?

We always welcome fellow parishioners who want to build relationships with those who have special needs, participate in our classes and projects, and join this community in its journey deeper into the love of God. If you would like more information on what your participation in our Special Needs Ministry might look like, please respond via the Virtual Ministry Fair or contact me.

A training

We will host a training for interested volunteers on Sunday, September 28 from 11am – 1pm at the church. Please sign up on the app if you would like to join us!

Preparation, Prayer, and Parent Orientation



By Daniel Trimble, Director of Youth Formation

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Jesus had one primary priority before entering into public ministry. Prayer. Driven out into the desert by the Holy Spirit he fasted for forty days and forty nights, seeking guidance from, growing in intimacy with, and deeply relying on the Father. I said during my first night of CAYG, if I ran into the desert for the next forty days, I might come back without a job (understandably). Nonetheless, the practicality of Jesus' life is both convicting and convincing.

In between my time finishing my undergrad and starting my position at Ascension, I have spent significant time in prayer asking for guidance and wisdom to shepherd the students well. Jesus displays the importance of preparing well. Although I have been preparing, there is still more to do! So, I am asking you to join me in two ways.

First, all parishioners can join by praying for Christ's ministry at CAYG. Pray that the students of Ascension

would have tangible encounters with the person of Jesus through the Holy Spirit. Pray that he would work through our volunteer leaders and raise up new ones to reflect Christ and disciple the students to follow Jesus. Pray that he would guide me to shepherd the group in the direction that produces the most fruit and brings glory to God.

Second, if you are a parent of youth, join me at our parent orientation – it will be held August 24th from 4:15 – 5:30pm.. This is a remarkably helpful way for both parents and me to prepare for this next season. This will be a time for parents to be oriented to CAYG and to my heartbeat for youth ministry. We will pray together and discuss how to partner to disciple our students here at Ascension to follow Jesus with everything they have.

I am sincerely honored to join the team and am so excited for this next season. May the Lord bless this time of preparation!

A Celebration of 20 Years!



By Peter Coelho, Rector

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God is faithful to His church. One of the primary vehicles by which that faithfulness has been revealed in Ascension's life is through the myriad of servant-hearted leaders and members who have made this church what it is. By God's grace we have been blessed by decades of service from so many faithful, humble, and skillful disciples of Jesus, willing to do the ordinary and often hidden work of building up the church. Such pillars of this community are a part of God's grace to us.

This past July marked 20 years since Marilyn Chislaghi joined the staff team at Ascension. Over the past two decades, Marilyn has faithfully served in a variety of capacities. Behind the scenes, there is little that occurs at Ascension which does not bear the mark of her wise, careful, and joyful service.

I have only had the privilege of working alongside Marilyn over the past year. In that time, I have been blessed and encouraged by who Marilyn is and the work she does. Over the years, many others have had a similar experience working with Marilyn. Below are a few notes of appreciation from some of them. Check them out, join us in gratitude to God for Marilyn, and if you see her here, be sure to congratulate her!

Rev. Lauren Scharf: I knew from the moment I met Marilyn that she was someone I wanted to work with. I got that chance serving with her on the Bishop Search Committee and now have the joy of working with her at Ascension. Marilyn is probably the most competent person I know, but that is just the beginning. She is deeply faithful, profoundly insightful, and so very kind- not to mention her fantastic sense of humor. What a true blessing she is to me and to all of us!

Denise Cox: I don't know where to begin in my admiration and respect for Marilyn. Her steady hand, sharp mind, ability to strategize and her deep knowledge of the Ascension congregation has enabled many aspects of the life of Ascension to grow but especially Global missions. She is the glue behind the scenes. In addition, she is a fun travel partner. I have enjoyed exotic cuisines with her in SE Asia and Israel – including fish skin chips!

Jim Wilson: I have known and worked with Marilyn quite a lot over the 20 years of her service at Ascension; in this brief appreciation the matter I would like to focus on is

what I will call her comprehensive capacity as demonstrated on an important committee - When Father Doug McGlynn left Ascension and we had to find a new rector I was asked to serve as the Chairperson of the search committee. Appearances being what they are I was given much credit for the composition, work and results of the search committee. But appearances can be deceiving - as anyone who has worked closely with Marilyn will tell you she is something of a stealth leader. That is, her leadership is quiet, not always visible and very, very effective. That the committee functioned well, that we as a group remained on task and that we achieved a good result after some shaky interim stages to our process, was due in no small part to Marilyn's capacity to do what needed to be done in the moment, set direction in her quiet manner and come alongside the people in the process in the manner of what is now called a force multiplier, that is she made the good parts better and helped to diminish any negatives. And she does all that she does in a genial and good humored way that makes it easy to be around her and to acknowledge that even though by title I was supposed to be in charge, I was really, in many respects, following Marilyn's lead and happy to do so (also part of her capacity). Thank you Marilyn for all you are and all that you do.



Rev Tish and Rev Jonathan Warren: When we were hired as co-Associate Rectors at Ascension, the outgoing Associate told us that we should 'quit if Marilyn leaves.' We have never met anyone so gifted in so many areas. She is pastoral but with extraordinary operational and executive capacities. She is preternaturally calm, unflappable, and non-anxious in intense and stressful situations, while remaining on task and organized. She can handle conflict and speak truth prophetically as well as anyone we've ever met. She can come into any situation and bring order out of chaos. One doctor she saw when we were at Ascension said that she had the genetic predisposition to be a sharp-shooter. God has taken those abilities and put them to work in the church.

From the first moment we arrived at Ascension in 2017, Marilyn and Charlie became part of our family. Tish's dad died the first week we were in Pittsburgh, and our second

week in Pittsburgh we found out both that Tish was pregnant and that she was having a miscarriage. While we went to an appointment, Marilyn and Charlie volunteered to watch our older girls. That relationship grew to be so sweet and special - "Mar & Char" remain our kids' surrogate grandparents in so many ways. They poured into them and welcomed us into their lives—spending holidays and birthdays together, having special getaway trips with the girls. What a gift to work with Marilyn for a few years at a church that pursues the kingdom of God in the way Ascension does. We are beyond blessed to count her as a close friend. Here's to 20 years of service!

Karen Gowdy: Growing up, my daughters always loved going to Marilyn's house, and they felt right at home there. Whether it was playdates or hosting choir rehearsals, Marilyn always showed them great care and hospitality. She later recruited me to join the staff at Ascension and has been a great person to work for. Thank you Marilyn for all you do!

Rev. Alex Banfield Hicks: When people asked me why I think Ascension has flourished over the last twenty years, I would smile and say two words: "Marilyn Chislaghi." It is only now that I discover she really has worked here for twenty years! Marilyn has always beautifully combined humility and emotional health with a razor-sharp mind and strategic instincts. Such is her clear-eyed focus and steady and unflappable nature that one friend suggested she might have been a very successful professional sniper. I will always be thankful for my eight years working on the same team as Marilyn, and am eternally grateful for her encouragement and wisdom.

Ginger Weeber: Congratulations, Marilyn! I am grateful for your skilled, compassionate, strategic work at Ascension. And I count it a privilege and delight to have worked with you over the years. Besides your strategic mind and hard work, you have a deep heart of compassion. You pay attention to what is going on in people's lives, and you offer support - emotional and practical. I remember when Bovey got cancer. You and Charlie walked with him and Kathryn through his illness and death. You helped Kathryn with all of the burial details and decisions. You and Charlie had a profound ministry of presence with them and their children. And you continue to love and serve Kathryn and the children. I have learned much from you about how to step into decisions and processes, and how to let go of what isn't important in the long run. I am grateful for you, friend, and deeply admire and love you.

Stacey Regan: A few years after Marilyn had become Ascension's Parish Administrator, I received an email from her asking if I might consider a part-time office position at the church. I was stunned. I had been a stay-at-home homeschooling mother (now with 4 teenagers) for 17 years. Why on earth would she think of me? "Oh, I just think you have the skills needed for the job." (This turns out to be one of her superpowers.) Out of curiosity I scheduled a meeting to find out just what the job would



entail. Yes, it was a skills and personality fit. When might I start? In her very calm way she said, "Tomorrow would be good, since it's the last day for the person whose place you are taking."

That was 18 years ago. I had the pleasure of reporting to her directly until that position split into the Director of Administration and her current Director of Ministry role. Besides emailing me multiple managerial employment opportunities and at one point sending me to interview for a job at the diocese, she encouraged me to apply for the new Administrator position. Marilyn is an incredibly thoughtful, intelligent, gifted woman, and I often say to people, When I grow up, I want to be like Marilyn.

Jim Foster: Marilyn is deeply faithful, pragmatic, and clear-eyed. She leads with strength, humility, and grace. And she gets things done! More than anything, though, I know Marilyn as our sister in Christ. We're fellow members of the body of Christ, joined in shared discipleship and mutual care, and sealed into an eternal communion rooted in Jesus himself. Marilyn lives this calling with integrity and love, every day, and I am profoundly thankful for her presence in my life and in the life of this church.

Rev. Jonathan Millard: Marilyn, your fabulous work for the Lord and his people at Ascension these past 20 years has been such a great gift and blessing. I could not have accomplished what God called me to do without your excellent input and faithful support during my time as rector of Ascension. Even if some days I wondered who was working for whom, bringing you onto the staff team was one of the best hiring decisions I ever made! Congratulations and "well done good and faithful servant."

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 Ascension staff priest, Lauren Scharf.

J: I love it that you are here. You bring honesty and transparency to your job.

L: Thank you, that means a lot.

J: You know I ask about struggles in my interviews. Can we dive in?

L: I would love to! I can name a couple significant battles that I've had in my life, but the one that has really shaped me is definitely my experience with chronic pain. I was young when it started - 21. When it began I had just started a new medication, and I believed that that is what had caused my deterioration. Nobody at the time would affirm that. Nobody believed me. Nobody knew what to do with me. Now, 15 years down the line, there's all this new research that says that in fact this medication does cause this kind of pain. This is validating, but a little bit too late in some ways. At the time, though, we didn't know if my pain would end or if it would progress. Medical people didn't even believe me, let alone help me know what the future could look like. Being in pain every day with no kind of hope for it ever ending ... All I could think of was living day in and day out with this kind of pain for decades, and that felt impossible.

I became a Christian when I was 16, so this was a formational experience with the Lord: When a really bad thing happens, how do we deal with that in terms of our faith and what that means about God. I learned quickly and in a really acute way how to live with a God who wasn't going to heal me (at least as far as I could tell), and what that means about who God is, and who I am in His eyes. The emotional and spiritual pain around it was actually worse than the physical pain.

J: Has your pain improved at all?

L: At some point the Lord intervened and said to me, "You've made getting out of pain an idol and I want you to stop". I felt this deeply from the Holy Spirit. This happened



in a Rite Aid parking lot when I was about to go fill a prescription to try a new medicine. He said, "I'm going to care for you, and you need to stop". And so, I did. I stopped everything cold turkey. Note: I don't recommend that people go off their medication. Like, nobody should do what I did, but I did.

The pain remained, but I started picking up the pieces emotionally and spiritually. I started finding the right people. I found a wonderful spiritual director who I'm still with today and she walked me through this experience. I wouldn't wish the pain again, but I wouldn't change it either because I think everything about it has made me into who I am today.

I was at seminary, and I was experiencing God speaking around my ordination and being so loud and so clear and it felt like there was affirmation after affirmation (because I wasn't even considering the ordination process!). He seemed to be so loud about that, but pain was the thing I wanted him to talk to me about and He seemed so silent. I tried to listen to the Lord. The one moment I can mark as the Lord speaking to me was the 'Rite Aid moment'.

You asked me if the pain had improved! Four years ago,

after a decade of learning to live with my pain, I felt permission and I circled back to the same specialist. There was new data that showed that a surgery could be helpful, and I had that done. And after healing from the surgery, I talked to the Lord and said, “OK Lord, I feel like you have forsaken me in this, the pain isn’t gone, but I’m going to follow you anyway. This is my lot.” I wasn’t angry anymore or even that sad - just honest with the Lord.

But I did ask also: “If I’m going to have this for the rest of my life, could you give me something? I would love something so it’s not 24 hours a day, day in and a day out, like could you cut me a break?” About a day or two later I was in the grocery store, and I was grabbing a water bottle. I grabbed an ‘alkaline water’ because they’re supposed to be healthy. I drank the water, and I was out of pain for the first time in 15 years.

Who knows why this seems to help me. My doctor and I have theories, but we still don’t know enough about my condition to really say why it would help. But I do believe it was the Lord’s response to my ask. And now, after 15 years, my pain is pretty well controlled and can even be zero a lot of the time! This is a new way of life that I’m still kind of learning! How do you exist in the world not in pain?

J: I’m thinking about how people can trust God in suffering and horror. Texas floods are so on my mind.

L: In my own journey I got more or less (some days less!) comfortable with not knowing. I got more comfortable with the mystery: God is good and He’s powerful and for some reason He’s not intervening. I don’t have to like it, but it is true. I think there will be answers someday, but not today.

I’ve learned to be as present as I can to the Lord and to other people. Even in giant tragedies, we see small mercies. We see the church acting like the church. We see Christians that love Jesus and are present to other people who are suffering and are willing to enter into it. That makes me feel hopeful.

I also think if there is an answer. The only answer that even comes close to being good enough to me is the cross. Part of my spiritual healing was letting Jesus in as a fellow sufferer, allowing Him to show me His wounds. While I still didn’t know why it was happening, at least I wasn’t alone in it. There was a watershed moment when I spoke with the Lord and I said I don’t need you to heal me. I don’t need to know why. I need to know that you know that it’s happening and that you care that it’s happening. There was no ‘Rite Aid moment’ after that, but there was a slow unraveling of Him showing me - I see you. I see you and I care that this is happening and I’m not going to abandon you. What we have to offer as Christians facing all the suffering in the world is we have a God who won’t abandon us. For all the scars we can show Him, he can show us his as well.

J: What do you think makes a difference between those who become hard and those who become soft in suffering?

L: I know that there was a time when I tried to be hard. I was in seminary. I was writing papers about the glory and goodness of God and then privately going home and trying to talk myself out of being a Christian because it was too painful to have to be suffering and not feeling like I had a god that was responsive to my suffering. So, what I did during that season was systematically cut every string that I had thrown out to the Lord to connect to Him.

However, he came and found me. I think when people are able to walk through suffering and stay soft, it’s simply because the Lord helps them. I also think having community and support systems really matter. I have a great family. I have a wonderful husband who walked through every step of this nightmare with me, carrying hope and faith for me when I couldn’t carry them myself. I had and still have this wonderful, amazing group of friends and I’ve always been so blessed to work with just the best coworkers. They are all the tools the Lord used to help me get through this without losing my faith or losing myself.

J: Tell me more about the loving.

L: One of the most important things we can do for people is to be honest and transparent about our own lives. When people were able to be honest with me about their own places of difficulty, they became safe people for me. That’s one of the things that I always want to do in my ministry - make sure that this congregation sees me as a real, flawed, fallible person who has walked with the Lord through hard things. I want people to hear that it’s OK to struggle and ask why and be really mad and need other people to carry your faith for you when you can’t. I think it is vital that the church is a community where we can be honest.

J: How do you respond when people try to fix your pain?

L: People always mean well. I learned to just take that for what it was, which was a misguided, but good-natured attempt to help. There was a long season, though, where I would have to just stop people - they would have a vitamin or a mineral or a vegetable or whatever for me to try. But it can be overwhelming and I can’t try everything. I do gently counsel people that it’s not always helpful. It can be overwhelming and what you need is people just to be present to your pain, not to fix it

J: It is so hard to learn to ‘let go.’

L: Our lack of control is a big part of suffering. It’s one of the more painful parts - what suffering showed me was that I really believed on some level that I was in control and in charge. It’s one of the rewards of suffering - having a trust that’s been built with the Lord. You’re not surprised if something terrible happens, and you also know that his

Continued on p. 23

LEGACY SENIORS MINISTRY

2025/26 Schedule



By Marilyn Chislaghi, Director of Ministry
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Legacy Senior Ministry begins again this fall with its series of monthly luncheons and talks. The group meets at 12:30pm in Bailey Hall on 3rd Thursdays. Lunch is \$15. First-timers are free! We hope you plan to come and bring a friend. Each month you can RSVP in advance on the app or email kafisher208@gmail.com.

If you have questions, please reach out to me or to the Rev. Ann Tefft (tefft.ann@gmail.com). This year's program highlights are as follows:

- September 18 *Running the Race: Engaging as we Age* with the Rev. Ann Tefft, Liturgical Assistant and Leader of Legacy
- October 16 *Thomas Cranmer and Other Burning Issues of Anglican Church History* with the Rev. Kevin Antlitz, Assistant Rector
- November 20 *Learning to Pray with C.S. Lewis* with Dr. Bryan Hollon, President of Trinity Anglican Seminary
- December 18 *Old Testament Prophecies of the Coming Messiah* with the Rev. Alex Banfield Hicks, Vice President of Advancement, Trinity Anglican Seminary
- January 15 *J.R.R. Tolkien's Christian Imagination* with Dr. Joel Scandrett, Associate Professor of Historical Theology, Trinity Anglican Seminary
- February 19 *A History of Music at Church of the Ascension (1897- 2025)* with Gary Harger, Organist and Director of Traditional Worship
- March 19 *Preparing for Death: A Story with 3 Suggestions* with Marilyn Chislaghi, Director of Ministry
- April 16 *Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and Give to God what is God's* with Bishop Alex Cameron, Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh
- May 21 *Ascension Day: The Ramifications of Christ's Enthronement* with the Rev. Peter Coelho, Rector
- June 18 *Workshop: Retirement with Intentional Design* with Joan Anson and Ann Tefft (tentative)

Two Opportunities This Fall for Service and Prayer



Joining a team at Ascension is the best way to play your part in our vision. Meet like-minded people, learn new skills, and find your fit: we can do so much together when we all get involved.



This fall join others for Evening Prayer on Wednesdays monthly. We'll focus on different themes each evening. Mark these dates in your calendar: September 17, October 15, and November 19

Fearfully & Wonderfully Made Cont.

hands are not off the wheel and you're not alone. Your lived experience tells you: The Lord didn't abandon me then and He's not going to abandon me now.

J: So good. I sometimes worry about the future, but He has never left me.

L: That's beautiful. I'm just aware also of what a gift every day is. That sounds so corny. I'm aware that at any point I could go back to where I was or worse, so I try to just stay present to the Lord, to notice where he is right now with me and to receive it. I have to consciously stay present to just today, one day at a time.

L: James, what's your favorite part of the service? That's what I like to ask.

J: Eucharist. Being with others who receive. Walking forward in emptiness.

L: Yes, I love watching people come and seeing people I know really well. Rich people, poor people, people that are in good health, people who are sick. And just prior to that the priests give it to each other because we also come empty-handed. It's really beautiful. This makes sense for the church too — we were all on a sinking ship and we were all rescued and that's why we're here.

J: I could listen to you forever.

L: It's been an honor James.



LEGACY SENIORS MINISTRY

***Running the Race:
Engaging as we Age***

with Rev. Ann Tefft

\$15/lunch (1st time free)



DATE

THURSDAY, SEPT 18, 2025



TIME

12:30PM-2:30PM

RSVP ON THE APP



ascensionpittsburgh.org



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

Website www.ascensionpittsburgh.org

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About The Ascent *The Ascent* is published by Church of the Ascension.
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Kristen Parise, Publisher



**CHURCH OF THE
ASCENSION**

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