

Entering the Gate into a New Year

Jesus said: "I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved..." (John 10:9, NRSV)

In her poem entitled *God Knows*, quoted by King George VI in his Christmas Day broadcast in 1939, English poet Minnie Haskins (1875-1957), wrote:

I said to the man who stood at the Gate of the Year,
"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown."
And he replied, "Go out into the darkness and put your hand
into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light,
and safer than a known way."

As we head into a new calendar year, we too need to put our hands into the hand of God to be prepared to face whatever may come in 2019. While we cannot know what joys or sorrows the coming year will bring, we do know two things. First, God is faithful and whatever may come he is our rock and our guide (Psalm 18:2). Second, we will face trials and temptations (James 1:2-4).

Given these two truths how might we prepare ourselves?
I want to suggest five practical ways:

1. Put on the armor of God

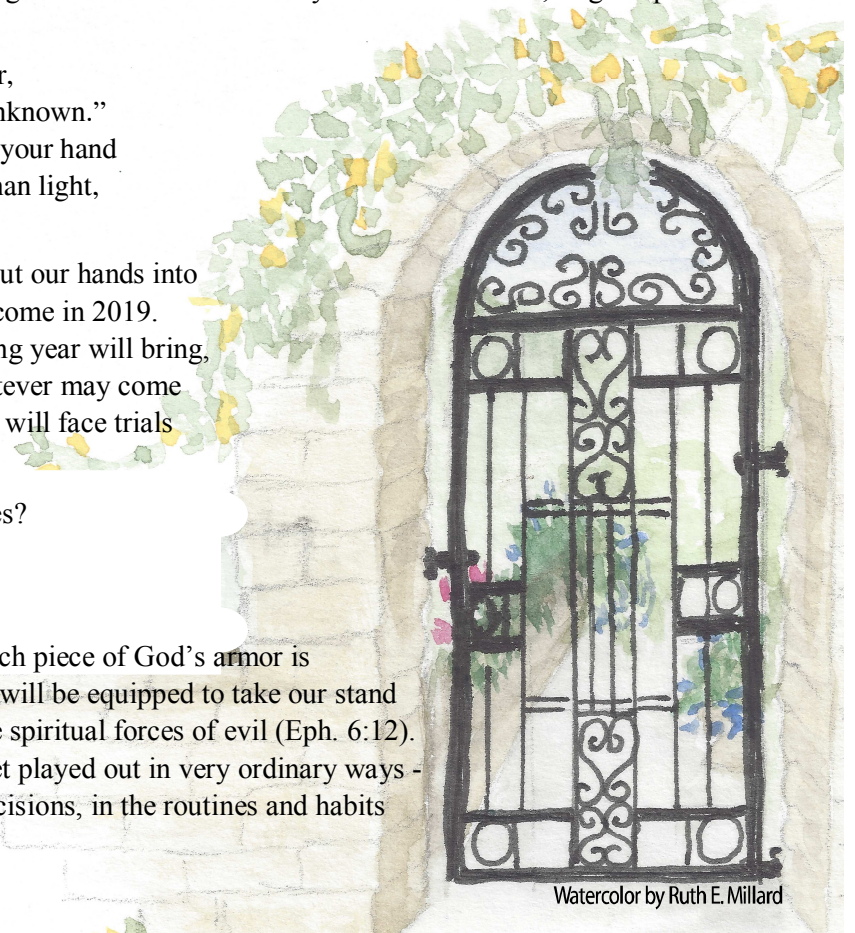
I encourage you to read Ephesians 6:10-17 where each piece of God's armor is described. As daily we put on the armor of God, we will be equipped to take our stand against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil (Eph. 6:12). And, by the way, these supernatural forces of evil get played out in very ordinary ways - in how we treat one another, in ethical and moral decisions, in the routines and habits of our daily lives.

2. Read your Bible

A new year gives us an opportunity to recommit ourselves to daily reading of God's word. There are many helpful guides and tools to assist us in this. Here are four that you might like to choose from:

- (i) The daily lectionary of the Anglican Church in North America. This lectionary is easy to use and clearly laid out with a daily reading plan to read the whole Bible in one year. Access the table of readings on line, www.anglicanchurch.net/media/Daily_Office_Lectionary.pdf
- (ii) The website www.legereme.com (Latin: *Legere* - to read) has the ACNA daily offices. Morning Prayer, Midday Prayer, Evening Prayer and Compline, the complete daily lectionary built in.
- (iii) "The Bible in one Year" (BIOY) is available as a free app for use on any smartphone. The app allows you to read and/or listen to portions of Scripture each day with a commentary from Nicky Gumbel (The rector of Holy Trinity Brompton, London) and a prayer each day.

continued



Watercolor by Ruth E. Millard

(iv) Scripture Union provides daily devotional materials on line or in print for purchase. Visit www.scriptureunion.org.

3. Pray

At our parish retreat in the Fall of 2018 we explored rhythms and practices of prayer for everyday life. The importance of daily prayer cannot be over stated. Even if we take only a few minutes to be still before the Lord, pray The Lord's Prayer, listen, confess our sins, give thanks to God, present our requests to Him, and/or remember the needs of others, we will be more prepared to face whatever may come, than if we just charge into the day ahead.

I invite you to recommit yourself to daily prayer and see if there is another person with whom you could pray together at least once a week – a friend, your spouse or other family member.

4. Be in Community

In recent weeks we have regularly seen more than 500 people attending our Sunday services. This is great! But it's hard to know and be known among so many. That is why we have 25 community Groups meeting all over the city on any given day of the week. If you are presently in a Community group, I invite you to make your participation a priority this year. If you are *not* in a group, I invite you to try one out. (Details on p. 5)

5. Attend an Ascension class in 2019

- (i) The Drama of Scripture – one Saturday morning a month January through June (Details on p. 3)
- (ii) Parish Prayer Series focusing on healing and wholeness – one Sunday a month, after the 11am service, January through March (Details on p. 4).
- (iii) Lenten Workshops – four Fridays in Lent (March 22, 29 and April 5, 12). The Parish Retreat Prayer workshops will be repeated together with additional workshops on prayer.

May you put your hand into the hand of God in the year ahead.

Yours in Christ,

Jonathan +

Jonathan N. Millard
(Rector)



Thank you

**For your
generous giving!**

Giving exceeded
our pledge by \$22,000.

Thanks be to God!

**Thank you from
Ann Paton**

Dear
Ascension family,
I can't adequately
express how blown
away I was by the
celebration on
December 9.

Beautiful cards
Beautiful notes
Beautiful voices

I can only borrow what
St. Paul wrote to his
beloved church at
Philippi:



*"I thank my God every time I remember you,
constantly praying for all of you."*

Philippians 1:3-6

An Invitation: The Drama of Scripture

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One brief way of summarizing the vocation of the church of Jesus Christ is to say that it is the community that lives by the story of Jesus. We believe, teach, and confess that Jesus Christ is the 'desire of every nation' (Hag 2:7) and that his story is also the story of Israel. In Christ, the covenant that God made with Israel is opened to the nations. As Lauren Winner puts it, in the church the nations are given 'intimacy with the God of Israel'.

To live by this story, we have to know this story, which means we must know how to read the Scriptures which tell this story. The Scriptures set out before us a grand drama of God's rescue and restoration of his good creation, which begins with Abraham and Israel and culminates in Christ and the church which lives the story of Christ.

In the first half of 2019, we will be exploring our story by reading together **Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen's *The Drama of Scripture***. Jonathan Warren, our Associate Rector, will teach six sessions on the narrative arc of Scripture, corresponding to the six 'acts' of the drama of redemption that Bartholomew and Goheen highlight.

This new year, make it a priority to immerse yourself in the Scriptures through the Daily Office or through the many Bible in One Year programs that are available online. Join us as well for this course as we explore how these texts fit together and how they proclaim the good news of the reconciliation of all things to God in Jesus Christ. Contact Jonathan Warren at jonathan.warren@ascensionpittsburgh.org for more information.



Schedule

Saturday, January 19, 9:30 – 11am

Act 1: God Establishes His Kingdom: Creation
Reading: Bartholomew and Goheen, 1-38

Saturday, February 16, 9:30 – 11am

Act 2: Rebellion in the Kingdom: Fall
Reading: Bartholomew and Goheen, 39-44

Saturday, March 16, 9:30 – 11am

Act 3: The King Chooses Israel: Redemption Initiated
Reading: Bartholomew and Goheen, 45-118

Saturday, April 13, 9:30 – 11am

Interlude: A Kingdom Story Waiting for an Ending:
The Intertestamental Period

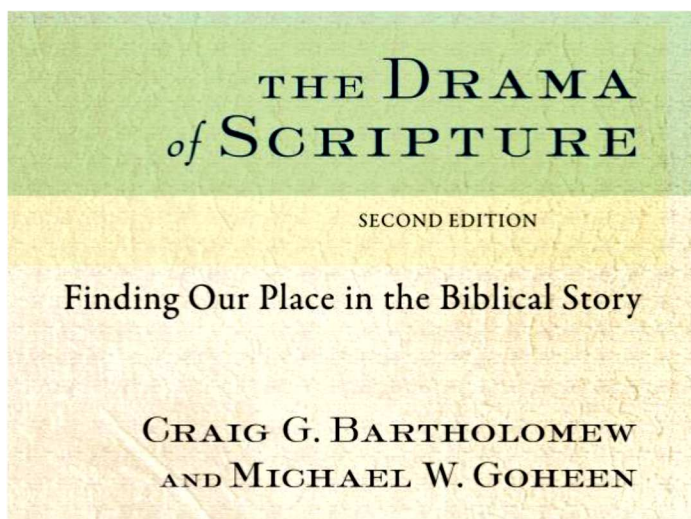
Act 4: The Coming of the King:
Redemption Accomplished
Reading: Bartholomew and Goheen, 119-184

Saturday, May 11, 9:30 – 11am

Act 5: Spreading the News of the King:
The Mission of the Church
Reading: Bartholomew and Goheen, 185-226

Saturday, June 8, 9:30 – 11am

Act 6: The Return of the King: Redemption Completed
Reading: Bartholomew and Goheen, 227-234



An Invitation: Parish Prayer Series in Epiphany

The Gospel of Luke tells us, “Jesus sent his followers out to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick.” (Luke 9:2) An impressive and possibly daunting mission!

Followers today too are sent out to preach the Gospel, yet often they do not feel equipped to respond to the second part of Jesus’ directive – “heal the sick.”

During Epiphanytide we will explore what it means to engage with our Lord in his mission of healing and wholeness. We will discover what it means to bring ourselves (and others) into the loving and compassionate presence of God for his care and healing.

The goal of this prayer series is to help us, as a community, live into one of our mission values, that of sharing Christ’s healing with a broken world. Whether or not this finds expression, for example, in official “prayer ministry,” in personal or corporate intercession, or simply in coming alongside another to pray and to care, these sessions aim to provide theological and practical foundations for the vital ministry of healing. Together we will focus on three different yet interwoven aspects of prayer: Emotional Healing, Physical Healing and Spiritual Healing.

This series will be team-taught by The Rev. Canons Jonathan & Andrea Millard and The Rt. Rev. Grant and Dr. Wendy LaMarquand. Each gathering will feature interactive talks, journal reflections, and large and small group discussions.

The gatherings are open to all, so come to one or come to all three. In keeping with the Epiphanytide ethos, come prepared to experience the ordinary side-by-side with the extraordinary, which are hallmarks of Jesus’ healing ministry.

Epiphanytide is the time between the end of the Twelve Days of Christmas and the beginning of Lent, on Ash Wednesday. Epiphany (January 6) is the day that commemorates the manifestation of Christ to the Magi, and the weeks that follow are marked by new and surprising beginnings.

Throughout Epiphanytide, the Gospel readings highlight episodes in Jesus’ ministry in seemingly “ordinary” circumstances (a baptism, a wedding, a sermon, etc.), however, these events contain an epiphany moment of sudden and striking realization that these are signs of the in-breaking Kingdom of God. Ordinary and extraordinary happen side-by-side.



Epiphany Prayer Series

When & Where:

Following the 11am worship service
(~12:30 — 2pm)
in the New Catacombs

Sunday, January 27:
Emotional Healing



Sunday, February 17:
Physical Healing



Sunday, March 17:
Spiritual Healing



A light lunch will be provided
A donation for lunch is appreciated

An Invitation: Community Groups at Ascension

At Ascension we are called to be a worshipping community, to equip God's people, and to share Christ's healing with a broken world. Our body is rooted in Oakland, in the heart of the city, but stretches out to touch every part of the city. The principal way that we can extend the fellowship of this body to our whole city is through our community groups, which are the first line of our congregational care, a place where relational connections with others at Ascension can be established, and a place where we are able to study Scripture together and deepen in our faith. We believe these priorities are best facilitated when we see each other regularly, and so we encourage you to join a group close to where you live or work if possible.

As we enter this new year, I would like to extend an invitation to join an Ascension community group if you are not already part of one. Below are descriptions of all our existing groups, with the contact info for the group leader(s) or facilitator(s). If you are not certain what group is right for you, please feel free to contact me at jonathan.warren@ascensionpittsburgh.org.



Tuesday evening young Adult group

Community Group Locations and Contacts

Eastern Suburbs Group

This group meets every third Sunday evening in Monroeville for a meal, Bible study and prayer. This group is comprised of mostly older adults, although all are welcome.

Group Leader:

Marilyn Chislaghi
(marilyn.clifton@ascensionpittsburgh.org).

Edgewood Group

This group meets Sunday evenings for a meal, Bible study, catechesis and prayer. It's a very kid-friendly group!

Group Leader:

Joel Scandrett (jscandrett27@gmail.com).

Oakland Group

This group meets every other Sunday evening for Bible study, singing and prayer.

Group Leader:

Barbara Franzen (b.neznarf@gmail.com).

Squirrel Hill Group

This group meets Tuesday evenings for Bible study and prayer. They share a meal together four times a year.

Group Leaders:

Jonathan Sewall (jonathan.sewall@gmail.com) and
Laura Irvine (laurairvine56@gmail.com).

Women's Group - Regent Square

This group meets every other Monday evening to share, study Scripture and pray. On the 5th Monday they go out for dinner together.

Group Leader:

Melita Carter (cartermo@gmail.com).

Women's Group - Ascension

This group meets weekly on Wednesday mornings to share their lives with one another, enjoy pastries and coffee, study Scripture and pray together. Women of all ages welcome. It's a particularly good group for those with young children. Childcare is provided.

Group Leaders:

Keira Fuener (keirafuener@gmail.com) and
Jennifer Newhouse (niferm@hotmail.com).

East End Group

This group, mostly composed of young adults, but open to all, alternates between meeting in Squirrel Hill and Point Breeze for Bible study and prayer every other Tuesday night. On the off weeks they gather in various places around the city to hang out.

Group Leaders:

Lorna Williams (lorna_m_williams@yahoo.com) and
Evan Burns (burns.evan.a@gmail.com).

Ascension Men's Group - Wednesday

This group meets Wednesday mornings at 7am to share their lives with one another, study Scripture, and pray together. Men of all ages and stages of life are welcome!

Group Leader:

Allen Burnett (ajburnett4@gmail.com).

Ascension Men's Group - Saturday

This men's group gathers over pastry and coffee to study, pray, and share their lives with one another at Everyday Cafe in Homewood at 7am on Saturdays. Men of all ages and stages of life are welcome!

Group Leader:

Jay Gilmer (jaygilmer@verizon.net).

Newly Married Group

The group is for a cohort of newly married (i.e., married under five years) couples to build a good foundation for marriage and to forge relationships with other newlyweds. It meets for about 9 months--people are expected to commit-- and then the group concludes.

Group Leader:

Bonnie Liefer (bonnieliefer@gmail.com).

Internationals Group

International students and visitors are specifically invited to this group. It is an opportunity for non-Christians to discover what Christians believe and for Christians to grow in their faith. This is achieved through studying the Bible, open discussion and developing friendships. It is also an opportunity to practice English. Any level of English speaking is welcomed. This group meets on Monday evenings from 7:00-8:45pm at a home in Oakland.

Group Leader:

Barbara Franzen (b.neznarf@gmail.com).

Young Adult Group - Tuesday

This group is composed of post-college young adults and meets on Tuesday nights for Bible study and prayer.

Group Leaders:

Clare Clifton (clare.bear200@gmail.com) and

Elizabeth Ruscitti (ruscittie@gmail.com).

Young Adult Group - Wednesday

This group is composed of post-college young adults and meets on Wednesday nights for Bible study and prayer at Ascension.

Group Leaders:

Sarah Gilmer (sarahgilmer@gmail.com) and

Bailey Nichols (bailey.nichols0724@gmail.com).

Community of St. Andrew

This group is focused on Bible study and spiritual disciplines. Members agree to a communal rule of life (a devotional discipline that intentionally orders one's time and activities so that one can deepen in the faith) and make a year-long commitment to the group.

Group leaders:

Chris Massa (chris.massa@gmail.com) and

Elise Massa (elise.massa@gmail.com).

Omnia Nova

This group meets twice a month on Sundays at Church of the Ascension. The group is focused on growing in prayer, fellowship, and understanding vocation in the world as ministry.

Group Leaders:

Mari Stout (macstout@gmail.com) and

Jim Stout (jmstouts@gmail.com) and

Brian Janaszek (bjanaszek@gmail.com) and

Jen Hemphill (bjanaszek@gmail.com).

Ascension Friday Group

This group meets for Bible study, family worship (Compline), and fellowship on Friday nights at Ascension. This is a very kid-friendly group, and many families have children who attend the middle-school youth group while the group meets.

Group Leader:

Jeanne Kohn (jeanne.kohn@ascensionpittsburgh.org)

Point Breeze Group

This group meets once a month on Wednesdays.

At each gathering, they alternate between exploring spiritual disciplines and Bible study.

Group Facilitators:

Jim Foster (jfoster@greycourt.com) and

Nancy Foster (nancy.foster316@gmail.com).

Edgewood/Forest Hills Group

This group meets on Thursday night every other week for fellowship, family worship, and either Scripture or book studies. The group is also beginning to focus on deepening in spiritual disciplines. This group is kid-friendly.

Group Leaders:

Rachel Kornfield Becker

(racheldkbecker@gmail.com) and

Matt Ulrich (matt.ulrich@ascensionpittsburgh.org).

O'Hara/Fox Chapel Group

Members of this group are focused on reaching out to friends and neighbors in Fox Chapel, O'Hara Township, and surrounding areas. They meet once a month on the first Friday for fellowship, prayer, and mutual encouragement.

Group Facilitator:

Nicole Shirk (nshirk@ccojubilee.org).

North Hills Group

This group meets Sunday nights for Bible study and prayer.

Group Leaders:

Philip Motes (pjmotes@gmail.com) and

Jenn Motes (Jennifer.motes45@gmail.com).

Brighton Heights Group

This group meets on Tuesday nights for Bible study and prayer. Members of the group make a five month commitment to attend and to live according to a rule of life (a devotional discipline that intentionally orders one's time and activities so that one can deepen in the faith).

Group Leaders:

Stacey Regan

(stacey.regan@ascensionpittsburgh.org) and

Dan Hartling (dhartling@fastmail.com).

South Hills Group

This group meets twice a month on Saturday evenings for Bible study, prayer, and fellowship. This group is kid-friendly, and some of the families involved have teenagers.

Group Leader:

Christina Silva (csilva1231@gmail.com).

Greenfield Group

This group meets every other Tuesday for Bible study and prayer.

Group Leaders:

Jordan Markley (markleyja1@gmail.com) and

Brenna Markley (brennamarkley@gmail.com).

Ambridge Group

This group meets every other week on Sundays for Bible study and prayer.

Group Leaders:

Michael Hustead (michael.hustead@tsm.edu) and

Krystal Hustead (krystal.hustead@tsm.edu) and

Sam Ferguson

(samuelferguson@gmail.com).

Ascension Sunday Group

This group meets every other week on Sunday nights at Ascension beginning December 9 for Bible study and prayer. This group is primarily for families with teenagers in the Ascension High School Youth Group which meets on Sunday nights but is open to others.

Group Leaders:

Jim Rankin (jimbokun@me.com) and

Tiziana Rankin (tizia@me.com).

God & New Year's Resolutions

-by Josh Momaney, Ascension Custodian

It's a new year. 2019! And that means people starting up New Year's Resolutions, whether it's learning a new language, losing some weight or continuing to work on genetic mutations on Panda Bears to further your plans for global domination. (What? You have your resolutions and I have mine.) However, whatever your resolutions are, remember to give them to the Lord.

One of the biggest dangers we Christians face with New Year's Resolutions is that, by their very nature, it's a change that *WE* want to make about *OURSELVES*. *I* want to lose weight. *I* want to manage my finances better. *I* want to add cybernetics so my Panda Army will have laser eyes. None of these things are in and of themselves wrong, but if you're not seeking the Lord's aid and strength first then you are looking internally for that strength. If we rely on our own personal strength, then we are not looking to the Lord. It's all what *WE* want. That's the wrong mindset to have.

Give it to the Lord. Ask for His help. What does God want you to work on? Have you asked Him? Ask for God's strength to lose some weight. Or to help you learn Spanish. God might grant it to you, or He might not. The thing is to ask that any changes you want in yourself, ask from the Lord. If we, on our own, always come up with a plan to start exercising more, or eating better, what happens? We stop our resolutions in about a month. We put down the guitar and never pick it back up. We stop taking those Spanish lessons. We never get the Nuclear Power Distribution Nodes working for the rocket jet Panda pack, so we put it down. But, if we go to God with it first, and rely on his strength, then we might see that change in our resolve to keep up with those things.

This doesn't mean that God will grant it, but the point is to put faith in God and not ourselves. So, for 2019, I ask that you give your New Year's Resolutions to the Lord. . . I also ask that you remain calm when my Rocket Powered Cyborg Mutant Panda Bear invasion launches.



Kairos Prison Ministry International

Kairos Prison Ministry

Kairos Prison Ministry is planning another weekend inside State Correctional Institution (SCI) Greene County in Waynesburg, PA the weekend of March 21-24. We have organizational/team building meetings before every semi-annual "Christianity 101" Weekend is conducted inside the prison. This time the team meetings are taking place at Ascension four Saturdays: January 12 & 26, and February 9 & 23. We invite you to stop by between 8am to 4pm if you're interested in inquiring about Kairos. Approximately 30 people participate. Your prayer support is much appreciated. Learn more about Kairos by contacting Ron or Judy Yadrack at ron.yadrack@gmail.com or yadrack.judy@gmail.com.

Seniors Ministry

Pittsburgh: Quirks and All!

Join us Thursday, January 10th from 12:30 – 2:30pm. We will enjoy a catered lunch, fellowship, and an intriguing presentation by the Executive Director of the Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation, Louise Sturgess. This presentation reveals the quirky physical characteristics that have made—and make—Pittsburgh the unique city that it is. A brief historical introduction about “getting here” is followed by a brief section on “getting around.” Then, the presentation focuses on quirky places in Downtown Pittsburgh and in several city neighborhoods. After a few quick references to our four seasons and weather, the presentation wraps up with a nod to the continuing significance of steel (and the Steelers) to this region, and finishes with the “pop” and point of Pittsburgh!

There is a \$10 charge for lunch, but first-time friends are free! RSVPs are necessary to Rev. Ann Tefft: 412-526-1107 or tefft.ann@gmail.com. Parking restrictions will be lifted for people to park on the streets, and the Neville Street lot will be reserved for seniors.



Louise Sturgess

Special Needs Ministry



DRESSING THE PART! Celebrating the birth of Jesus

At its December meeting, members of our Capernaum Friends Club had much fun enacting the Christmas story!

In December, Capernaum Friends enjoyed spending time together and celebrating the birth of Jesus in our traditional way. After reviewing the the story of the nativity, our Friends dressed the part of all the members of the Christmas story. We sang Christmas carols, decorated ornaments and of course, we had pizza!

In WINGS, we kept in touch with Hannah while she traveled with her family to Malaysia and Singapore! Kiki and Stephen and Holden prepared all the hand held candles for the Christmas Eve service. We love doing work for our church!

We are now studying the stories of the Old Testament and learning about God’s steadfast faithfulness.

Youth Ministry

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Haiti 2019

I am very thankful that Haiti H2O is partnering with us to lead our summer trip to Haiti in 2019. We are gathering an inter-generational team, with a significant high school component, who will be flying out on Tuesday, July 30 and returning Wednesday, August 7. Would you like to join us? We have a few places left and the sign-up deadline is Sunday, January 20th.



Appropriately, the trip involves significant training beforehand. We will have a day's training on Saturday, January 26th, 9-3pm. Then we will have a monthly lunch together on a Sunday, normally the third or fourth Sunday of the month: February 17, March 17, April 28, May 19 and July 21.

Due to the generosity of Ascension and others, the individual financial commitment is only \$500 (covering flights, food, accommodation and training), which needs to be raised by you and received by Ascension by the end of June. There is an \$80 deposit to confirm your place on the team. Contact alex.banfieldhicks@ascensionpittsburgh.org for more details.

2019 Senior Church Tours

I love to hear how Ascension high school seniors graduate, head off to college or work in another city, and enjoy getting fully integrated into church there. To help that process, and to build bridges with our lovely local churches, Seniors are invited to join Leah Hornfeck and I for the 2019 Senior Church Tours. Visit www.caygonline.com for more info or contact me, Alex Banfield Hicks at alex.banfieldhicks@ascensionpittsburgh.org.



SENIOR CHURCH TOURS

Sunday	Destination	Meet Parish Hall
Jan 13	Northway	10:30
Feb 17	Bellefield	10:00
Mar 17	Friendship	10:30
Apr 28	ACAC	11:00
May 19	City Reformed	09:45

Visit a partner church, experience their worship, talk about it with me over lunch!

Campus Ministry

Adopt a College Student

Ascension has a long history of being a presence on the college campuses in Pittsburgh. If you want to see college students grow in Christ, share the gospel, and usher the Kingdom of God onto their campus, 'Adopt a College Student' may be for you. This is the process of pairing college students with Ascension folks and families and is a great opportunity for members to love and disciple college-aged students and give them an even better sense of belonging to our church through simple interactions. The ministry blesses students and you as well, as you see God working through you to make a difference in the lives of students.

With the Spring 2019 semester right around the corner, we're looking to make new connections between college students and Ascension folks and families. So, if you are an Ascensionite or a college student who is looking to sign up or for more information, contact Leah Hornfeck at leah.hornfeck@ascensionpittsburgh.org or 724-630-0167.

Transform College Students, Transform Everything



Travel back with me to February 2014. The Winter Olympics in Sochi were well underway; The Lego Movie brought in the big bucks at the box office; Derek Jeter had just announced he will be retiring from the MLB; and a young, naïve freshman was about to have her world rocked at the Jubilee Conference.

**That freshman was me
and this is my Jubilee story.**

I wasn't exactly sure what to expect going to Jubilee for the first time. All I knew was that when they announced it at our campus ministry group people cheered, and that was a good enough reason for me to go. I wanted to be a part of whatever this excitement was. While Jubilee did turn out to be a ton of fun, filled with excitement and joy, it was also full of deep and challenging messages. One that deeply resonated with me was the talk about The Fall given by Dan Allender. Dan talked about shame and the way it affects our lives in ways that are even deeper than we often realize. However, as Christians our hope is in Christ, and He is our shame-bearer.

This talk changed my life. As Dan was speaking, I realized that I had A LOT of shame that I had never really dealt with. I remember feeling extremely overwhelmed and having no idea how to process this. Thankfully, I found that space to



process what I was thinking and feeling with others in our ministry. I began telling a couple people about these shameful experiences and allowed them to bear this burden with me. Maybe for you this is a customary practice, but for me, it went against every ounce of my being.

I felt completely exposed, and it was terrifying. These were some of my close friends, but I had only known them for a few months, and I didn't know how they would respond. I didn't know what they would think of me after this. But in God's grace and goodness, they responded with compassion and love, and I grew so much closer to them as a result. I learned that I wasn't alone, and I gained a sense of solidarity and mutuality with them. I had tasted community in the Kingdom of God, and I realized how much I had been starving myself.

From then I made many intentional efforts to break down my walls and let people in. I found that when you do this, people tend to let you into their lives as well. I had begun having more intimate, deep, genuine relationships than ever before, and it clicked—this is the way God intended for us to live and by the Cross of Christ we are free to do exactly that. Dan's talk was a catalyst to me realizing all these things about myself, others, and the Kingdom of God. Sure, I may have had this eye-opening experience at some other time through some other means, but for me, Jubilee 2014 and Dan Allender's talk transformed everything.

Now, as a campus minister, my desire is that students would have their lives transformed by Christ like I did, and Jubilee is one of the ways this can happen. If you share this desire, join us for lunch on Sunday, January 6th in the Hunt rooms after the 11am service to hear from students about why they are excited about attending CCO's Jubilee Conference this February! There will be opportunities to learn more about Jubilee, pray for students, and sponsor students so they don't miss this transformational opportunity to grow in their faith!

Dinner and Compline



Danyel Johnson and Alex Banfield Hicks started this monthly gathering of young adults about a year ago, and 2019 will see Leah Hornfeck, Wes Williams, Elizabeth Ruscitti, Morgan Mitchell and Clare Clifton take these events onwards and upwards. Tish Harrison Warren will continue to be present, often officiating at compline, and we are excited to reveal a new roster of guest speakers as the months unfold. Do pray for this team and for these opportunities to build bridges within and beyond Ascension, that all may know that "our help is in the Name of the Lord: The maker of heaven and earth."

For more information on Campus Ministry, Jubilee or Dinner and Compline, contact Leah Hornfeck at 724-630-0167 leah.hornfeck@ascensionpittsburgh.org

Fellow Students
COME FOR LUNCH
SUNDAY January 6th
IN THE HUNT ROOMS
after the 11am service

Missions: Ascension International Ministry

What are Thanksgiving and Christmas all about?

What do Americans do?

How do I survive the darkness and cold of Pittsburgh?

These are some questions that internationals are asking!

One of the goals of the International Ministry is to bring internationals into the life of Church of the Ascension in order to help them learn about American culture and feel more at home. This can take many shapes and forms. Here are highlights!



Enjoying the International Ministry
Christmas Dinner December 19th

- This past October, several internationals joined us at our parish retreat at Laurelville.
- A weekend after the retreat, Ascensionite Aaron Pelot kindly allowed an entire contingent of internationals to attend his wedding (American weddings are a particular fascination!)
- Over the Thanksgiving holidays, we were especially thankful to you as a congregation and that 38 internationals ate in Ascension homes or community groups.
- A car full of students went to Hartwood acres for a tour of the mansion lit up for Christmas and walked the beautiful grounds.
- 75 students and Ascensionites joined us for a Christmas dinner, songs and a tour of the sanctuary with Jonathan Millard on December 19th.
- We had a Nativity movie and discussion on December 26th in the Hunt Rooms.
- Nine students have signed up to help with Shepherd's Heart and have begun to cook with Jonathan Sewell.
- An average of 40+ internationals have been attending some kind of Bible study either before class, after class, in the Franzen home, or on Sunday morning.
- Timmy Podnar has invited many of these students from her Monday morning study to her home to get to know them better and give them help on language study.

Thanks for all of you who have served this ministry in some way or have just reached out to an international. If you are interested in any part of this ministry, we could use you. You may contact: LuAnn Pengidore at PittsburghEnglish4U@gmail.com

Prayer Requests:

We have had approximately 45 internationals involved in some kind of Bible study or church services either on Monday mornings, Monday night, Sunday mornings or Wednesday evenings. Pray for these students as some are returning home to their countries that they would remember what they have heard, keep seeking and communicating with God.

Pray for the many teachers, assistants, pastors, singles and families who have helped in the international ministry-some of them help faithfully week after week and others just at a needed time. We pray for their encouragement and strength and health and that God will bless their efforts with internationals and bring a harvest.

Pray for the many internationals who are coming into the church for English and ask God to help us warmly welcome them into our lives and homes.

Pray for the break in January that it would be refreshing to teachers, a fun time for students on field trips and that students would return in January for English classes.

Short Term Mission Trip in January

Steve DeFusco and his daughter KayLynn travel to Haiti



Steve DeFusco and his daughter Kaylynn are pictured with Br. Dr. Leon Pamphile, who was instrumental in founding FLM (Functional Literacy Ministry) in Haiti.

As we approach this season of giving and thanking God for all He has given us, I thought it would be appropriate to share our plans for mission and outreach as we return to Haiti in January 2019.

It is only through the caring heart and invitation of my daughter, Kaylynn, that I have been blessed with the opportunity to provide care for a very needy population in Thomassin, Haiti. After a fruitful six month stay aboard the Mercy Ship in Cameroon working as an RN, Kaylynn has returned to oncology nursing at the Hillman Center and again will be traveling with me to Haiti in January 2019 on a Medical/Dental mission trip along with many that have served to develop what has become an active clinic run by Haitians. It is hard to believe all that has been developed since our first trip out in 2012.

The mission statement of **Functional Literacy Ministry (FLM)** has been to help Haitians help themselves and this has truly been lived out as the clinic has been fully operational and care continues on a day to day basis after our mission team leaves. Haiti is the most impoverished third-world country in the western hemisphere. Nearly 80% of Haiti's eight million people live in absolute poverty. With the unemployment rate around 70%, a per capita income of \$350 a year, and an illiteracy rate of over 50%, the needs of Haitian people are both fundamental and great. More information about FLM can be found at www.flmhaiti.org.

Reflecting on a recent Sunday message on giving, I considered the why, the how, and the 'how much should we give' as we prepare and plan for this time away.

Why: God has blessed us with an ability to care for the medical and dental needs of others. Giving benefits others and "it is right so to do" – we have never given without being blessed tenfold!

How should we approach this: By giving our first fruits and not just what would be comfortable –Kaylynn has taught me much here, choosing to give first and to worry about her own needs later and, to no surprise, she has always been provided for. God has always made it possible to accomplish more than we could imagine.

How much: On this trip it has always been the best approach to give all you have. God has always carried us day to day and living amongst those who literally have nothing but their strong faith in God you can return only to be thankful for all we have as individuals and as a nation.

Please keep us in prayer as we begin gathering supplies for this medical mission. Pray for our safety, health and travel and our ability to reach out spiritually and medically to those so much in need. We thank you for your support in the past and welcome any support for the future.

Love in Christ,
Steve and Kaylynn DeFusco



Ascensionite, Steve DeFusco (DMD) is working with a dental patient on a previous trip to Haiti.

Noticing What's Real

**As we begin the new year and Epiphany,
we combat distraction and abstraction through
formation and incarnation**

-by Tish Harrison Warren, Writer-in-Residence



Technology is not a neutral tool. Our use of technology shapes us---one could even say it “disciples” us.

One way that new technology, particularly the internet, shapes us is to habituate us into dividing our attention. We are more capable of surface attention--consuming small, bite-size bits of information-- but less capable of depth attention. In his great book *The Shallows*, Nicholas Carr wrote, “Once I was a scuba diver in a sea of words, now I zip along the surface like a guy on a jet ski”. Carr makes the point that the way we now [almost constantly] consume small snatches of information actually rewires our brains so that we lose the capacity to follow long arguments and maintain attention. The implications of this shift for our theological debates can scarcely be overstated because, of course, sound theology requires us to sit with a complex argument over time. And we are actually losing the neurological capability to do so.

The implications of this shift on our spiritual formation can also scarcely be overstated--one simple definition of discipleship is learning to give attention to the right things.

Matthew Crawford, a philosopher, author, and motorcycle mechanic, has written about what he calls the ‘crisis of attention’ in our day. We live in a world of unprecedented distraction where whole industries exist to bait us with shiny objects that lure our attention away from the moment, the person, or the task in front of us.

How do we combat this? One way is to embrace practices of formation.

The Christian life, I’ve come to believe, is a craft as much as it is a set of beliefs. We have to take up habits and practices that shape our loves, our telos, and our attention.

We are not going to cultivate attention to the work and words of Jesus simply by trying to conjure up love for him in our hearts, greater and greater ardent emotion. After the fractious 2016 election, Andy Crouch said, “To be of any use to the world in these times, we have to practice the spiritual disciplines that make us different from the world.” And a chief place we do this is in our use of technology.

Apple-- more than the church--understands that what we live our lives for, our aim and our loves, are most often determined not simply by what we claim to believe but instead by the stuff we actually do...the way we spend our attention, our hours, our days. I never wake up in the morning and recite a creed: I believe in Steve Jobs, maker of heaven and earth. Yet, my use of my smart-phone trains me into a habit of resisting boredom at all costs, and shapes me into a person who cannot tolerate silence, who consumes more and more entertainment and information, and who skims the surface of relationships, arguments, even my own heart.

Taking up practices of fasting from technology, of rest, silence, embodied community, and prayer allows us to approach our ordinary days in a different light. Andy Crouch, says in his (highly recommended!) book *The Techwise Family* that, “The most powerful choices we will make in our lives are not about specific decisions but about patterns of life: the nudges and disciplines that will shape all our other choices.”

As we approach a new year, we can think intentionally about our habits of attention and the kind of nudges and disciplines we need to fix our attention on things that call us to abundance: practices that teach us to bask in God’s unrelenting love for us, to care for those flesh-and-blood people around us, and to notice God’s goodness and glory in our lives.

Our use of technology not only trains us toward distraction; it trains us toward abstraction. Social media in particular can encourage us to prioritize online relationships over face-to-face, embodied friendships.

The particular temptation in our moment of history is **abstraction**: to proclaim a love for the world, while hating actual people we know; to proclaim a love for God, but not know how to embody that in the small moments of our day.

We can have 2000 followers on twitter or instagram, but not have any close friends or not know the person who lives

across the street from us. I often quote an old Peanuts cartoon where Linus quips, “I love mankind! It’s people I can’t stand.”

In our moment of history, people—perhaps especially younger people-- can come to see justice seeking as using the right hashtag but not as loving and serving the actual people on our block, in our dorm, in our families, even especially those people who we think are wrong.

How do we combat the temptation of abstraction?

I’d like to submit that the incarnation of Jesus dealt a death blow to any spirituality that is abstracted. We do not serve a far off God, but one who came into the concrete, who took on skin, and lived most of his life as an average guy. Jesus had bad breath and aching feet; he worked and loved his neighbor, his actual neighbor, who didn’t think he was anyone all that special. He loved actual people with proper names.

Former archbishop Michael Ramsey wrote that:

*The glory of Christianity is its claim that small things really matter and that the small company, the very few, the one man, the one woman, the one child are of infinite worth to God. Let that be your inspiration. Consider our Lord himself. Amidst a vast world with its vast empires and vast events and tragedies our Lord devoted himself to a small country, to small things, and to individual men and women, often giving hours of time to the very few or to the one man or woman. In a country where there were movements and causes which excited the allegiance of many – the Pharisees, the Zealots, the Essenes, and others – our Lord gives many hours to one woman of Samaria, one Nicodemus, one Martha, one Mary, one Lazarus, one Simon Peter, **for the infinite worth of the one is the key to the Christian understanding of the many.** (emphasis mine)*

To approach life as if attention to concrete people and places around us matter, as if the most important person to us is the one in front of us, is indeed a radical way to live.

The only place that we can love God and serve others in the real, limited circumstances that we find ourselves in today.

The hope we celebrate each Christmas, and indeed each Sunday, reminds us that it is the concrete, not the abstract, that saves the world. Specifically our concrete and real God, in his concrete and real incarnation, made a people, his church, who live our concrete and real lives in ways that He uses to make all things new.

God is working, and wonderfully so, in the very real, messy, ordinary, and palpable reality of our lives. Our small, daily acts of prayer and loving our neighbors are what God uses to change the world.

And, astonishingly, you (and I) are loved by God—not as an abstraction, not as merely a particle in the vast sea of humanity, not as your (or my) ideal self, not as you (or I) imagine we should be—but as who you (and I) actually are, with all our complexity, and failure and beauty, with a proper name.



Apple-- more than the church--understands that what we live our lives for, our aim and our loves, are most often determined not simply by what we claim to believe but instead by the stuff we actually do...the way we spend our attention, our hours, our days. I never wake up in the morning and recite a creed: I believe in Steve Jobs, maker of heaven and earth. Yet, my use of my smart-phone trains me into a habit of resisting boredom at all costs, and shapes me into a person who cannot tolerate silence, who consumes more and more entertainment and information, and who skims the surface of relationships, arguments, even my own heart.



**This piece is adapted from Tish’s talks for the Staley Lecture Series at Wheaton College and from many of her talks around the country*

Tish Harrison Warren, Writer-in-Residence

Team Thailand

Our discernment team will travel to Thailand January 10 – 19 to explore a global mission partnership between Ascension (as well as Trinity School for Ministry and the Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh) with the Deanery of Thailand that was established by the Diocese of Singapore. Team members include Marilyn Chislaghi, Denise Cox, Andrea and Jonathan Millard, and Joel Scandrett. Several days will be spent in Chiang Mai visiting the church, small groups and church leadership, and observing ESL classes and children's programs at the Community Center and Anglican school. The team then heads to Bangkok to visit the Lat Krabang church as well as the Cornerstone Center, a hub for campus ministry and ESL classes. Following two days in Bangkok, the team will travel to Singapore to have discussions with diocesan leaders.

How can you be in prayer?

- Pray for the health of team members – before, during and after the trip
- Pray for travel, rest and team stamina – the flights are lengthy (the outbound journey is 24+ hours) and the agenda is full!
- Pray that the church in Chiang Mai, Bangkok and Singapore is encouraged by our visit
- Pray for godly discernment of a future partnership in Thailand. What specific shape might a future partnership take? ESL classes? Children's ministry? Prayer Ministry? Theological education?
- Pray about the biggest question of all - What might God want to do??



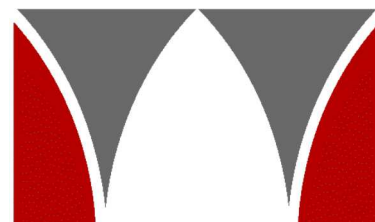
Saturday, February 23 9am – lunch Ascension Hunt Rooms

Our next Explore Ascension class will be is for all those who are new to Ascension, who wish to find out more about Anglicanism in general or Ascension in particular. It is also part of the pathway to membership. So, mark your calendars!

The class is co-taught by all Ascension clergy – Jonathan Millard, Jonathan Warren, and Tish Warren. We begin with breakfast and conclude with lunch. Childcare is provided. Are you interested in registering?

There are a couple of options:

- (1) Visit www.ascensionpittsburgh.org and sign up there;
- (2) Email Marilyn at marilyn.chislaghi@ascensionpittsburgh.org.



CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION

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

Worship Services

Sunday

9:00 a.m.
Holy Eucharist

11:00 a.m.
Holy Eucharist

Wednesday

Noon
Holy Eucharist
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