



# THE ASCENSION HERALD: EASTER

Volume 2

May 2017

Friends,

The Reverend Stewart Mason Tabb

This is an unusual article for me. It is an actual email conversation I had recently with a gentleman I do not know, but who had seen our Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/AscensionEpiscopalVA/>) and postings. He had questions. What I pass on to you is the first of our exchanges, but there were more.

I commend the gentleman for his courage to engage in a conversation about things that are clearly important to him. As I told him, so I tell you, I am always happy to have conversations in person. In fact I think it best that way! Still, the email conversation between the gentleman and me covers a number of issues already on my heart and mind for the mission of Ascension.

As I see it, it all boils down to learning and discerning how to follow Jesus each and every day as the first priority of our lives. That takes community: community to surround us and keep us safe, community to help us stay on the right path, and community to challenge us to rethink what we know as we navigate sometimes treacherous waters. It also takes an openness to be uncomfortable, challenged and stretched. Being that kind of a community is what Ascension is about.

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Question: Can I ask a question ? It's about TEC (The Episcopal Church) and being conservative.

Answer: Sure you can.

Question: I am conservative. I am fighting with the stance of the church. Is there room for both modern and traditional views? If so, then how? I just can't seem to see where same sex union is justified.

Answer: This is a long conversation that is best had in person, and I'd be happy to do that but for the fact I am leaving town today for a conference.

There is always room for a spectrum of views and interpretations within the Episcopal Church and within Ascension. That said, it is difficult to maintain a spectrum when the first labels we apply to ourselves are conservative and liberal rather than followers of Christ. Christians: that is the label that must be of utmost importance. In seminary, I heard a wise theologian and Biblical scholar say that there is always something to be conservative of -- and always something to be liberal with.

When you use the label "conservative," are you using it only with regard to traditional views of gender/sexual orientation and gender roles and identity as they apply to marriage, or are you using it in in another way? You indicate that you can't see how same gender marriage is justified. The simple answer is that the Episcopal Church has spent over a generation thinking and praying with each other and has discerned that it is justified by God's grace and love for all people.

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## Facebook conversation *continued*

That prayer and discernment have led the Church to understand that God's grace breaks all bounds of and barriers to love. There is precedent for that decision biblically: the story of Peter and Cornelius the centurion, found in Acts.

As I said, there is plenty of room for a spectrum of interpretation within the Episcopal Church, but only if we all stay humble and respectful with regard to each other and our interpretation of Scripture, and open to discerning the movement of God through both the Scriptures and each other; in other words, if we make following Jesus our first priority. Jesus was an affront to the religiously respectable people of his day, and he was crucified by the law and order party of his times, yet he spoke of being the fulfillment of every jot and tittle of the law. How can that be? The Bible is not to be used as a weapon, nor is the Bible God. Only God is God, and I am convinced that the Holy Spirit is alive and well, leading us into all truth, as Jesus said. That requires that we learn to bear one another in love and that we move beyond labels into life in Christ, where there are none.

May the peace of the risen and living Lord be with you.

Stewart

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## Finance

Michael Murphy

Pledges for the first quarter of \$80,819 were below the budget of \$87,000 by \$6,181, but total quarterly income was only \$4,592 below budget. Easter is often a time when income goes up, and it was in the 2nd quarter this year, so I expect income to look better next quarter. Quarterly expenses of \$118,635 were \$3,292 higher than the budget of \$115,333. This leaves a \$26,872 difference between income and expenses. A Bell Tower Fund was created for construction of the lovely bell tower we have in front of the church. I hope everyone has had a chance to hear the wonderful bell. In summary, pledges are somewhat lower than budgeted, but it is encouraging that expenses are only \$3,200 more than projected.

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## Laundry Love

Ann McMellin

The Love in Laundry Love is about sharing God's Love with our neighbors.

The Laundry in Laundry Love is about turning those piles of dirty clothes we all create into stacks of fresh, clean, dry clothes.

Posters in the laundromat let people know when we are coming.

## Laundry Love *continued*

Volunteers are given the prepaid cards that run washers and dryers in the modern Laundromat. Then the fun begins!

Your job as a volunteer is to approach a customer, introduce yourself and offer to pay for their laundry. Most will happily accept the card and the detergent and dryer sheets we have on hand.

Waiting for clothes to wash and dry can be boring – a perfect opportunity to chat with our neighbors – we keep the conversation light – there are usually lots of children who are happy to chat about school or their favorite game. We also have snacks to share!

The people we serve through Laundry Love can get more laundry done or have a few extra dollars to spend at the grocery store. Most of all, they come to know that they have neighbors who care about them.

As volunteers, we get the fun of recalling our own laundromat experiences, giving away money, and the blessing of meeting and chatting with our neighbors!

## Laundry Love

Where? Soaps-N-Suds at Wards Corner--7629 Granby Street

When? The fourth Monday of the month at 6:15 PM

Why? Clean laundry promotes the dignity of all. Join us as we meet our neighbors and help them with clean clothes.



## The New Bell Tower

It was a chilly March morning as employees of Gresham Crane, members of the Ascension Building and Grounds commission, and the representative from Verdin gathered in excitement to install the long-awaited bell tower. Students from the Dayschool stood huddled in the parking lot watching the crane remove the

bell from the tractor trailer, set it on the ground, and then hoist it to its new location next to the church. There is a video on the church's YouTube page. Go to <http://bit.ly/2pmlsZ> and enjoy.



## Monte Carlo Night

Tickets are available now in the Church and Dayschool offices. They are \$50 each or a pack of 4 for \$170--OR--\$55 each at the door. Saturday, May 13 from 6:30 to 10:00. Proceeds will benefit the playgrounds and Mission trip to Appalachia.



*Destination Monte Carlo:*  
Saturday, May 13 2017  
6:30-10:00 P.M.  
Rose Hall - Episcopal  
Church of the Ascension

**Fun:**  
Games  
Silent Auction  
Raffles

**Food:**  
Hors d'oeuvres  
Beer  
Wine  
Dessert

Tickets: \$50 in advance, \$55 at the door  
All Proceeds benefit Ascension Episcopal  
Day School & Ascension Youth Mission Trip

## Christian Formation and Young Children in Preschool Mark Hattler

Early childhood education is about promoting the development of the whole child — meeting the needs of young children in all developmental domains (physical, cognitive, social, emotional, creative, and spiritual). Of these domains, one area that is often neglected (and little talked about in the profession) is spiritual development.

According to author Brendan Hyde, there are many reasons for this. “Spiritual development is not as well understood or researched as other areas of child development (Hyde, 2008).” Another reason for this lack of spiritual education in classrooms is that developmental theory and practice are not strongly connected in the education profession when it comes to teaching spirituality. In theory, spirituality is widely accepted as being crucial to healthy development, but within the education profession, there is virtually no training offered in this area.

In other words, the education profession, as a whole, does not know how to effectively approach spiritual education, and is extremely reluctant to even begin the process of figuring it out. To a large extent, this problem exists because of religious considerations. On the one hand, the perception (or misperception) is that spirituality can only be taught through the lens of specific religious practices, and therefore, to teach spiritual values, one must promote specific religious institutions—which is then perceived to be “non-inclusive” and in violation of the “freedom of religion” clauses in the constitution. However, on the other side, institutions that attempt to teach spirituality from a non-religious perspective, are often accused of being “biased,” “secular,” and “anti-religion.” (As a side note, I believe we tend to confuse “freedom of religion” with “freedom from religion,” and it is vitally important that we learn how to make this distinction both institutionally and legally.)

Fortunately, at Ascension we are not limited by such considerations. We primarily teach spirituality through a Christian formation lens. We have chapel once a week with either Stewart or Lynn, and we have Christian music with Ginny. We openly talk about God, Jesus, and the Bible. However, at the same time, we celebrate all the religious traditions of children in our school. We can do this because we honor and cherish the positive commonalities inherent in all major religious traditions.

Young children do not understand the differences between religious practices beyond simple things like Christmas vs. Hanukah. But they are beginning to have foundational spiritual experiences that, if nourished properly, can lead to a rich spiritual life as adults. Children understand and learn what they live. From a child’s perspective, there are perhaps three important spiritual ideas that need to be addressed:

God is loving and compassionate, and cares deeply for you.

God welcomes, accepts, and acknowledges you, and wants to have a relationship with you.

God listens deeply to you.

As early educators, parents, family members, parishioners, and friends, when we discuss and put into practice these ideas, we are building the foundations of a rich spiritual life for our children; listening deeply to them, being compassionate and loving towards them and their families, and warmly welcoming them and their families everyday into the school and church.

Ultimately, regardless of our religious beliefs, we all have a spiritual life that needs to be recognized and nourished. When not nourished, it suffers. When abused, it can be harmed, sometimes irreparably. At Ascension, our greatest charge is to give children a deep sense of belonging, of being accepted and loved. This is a path we can all walk with children towards a sense of “oneness” and a relationship with God.

## Formation in surprising places

Lynn Farlin

I seem to drag my feet when newsletter deadlines roll around, and this month was no exception. But I must confess that I think that the Holy Spirit played a part in my tardiness this month. As I write this, I'm at a Vibrant Faith Conference in Minnesota, and I just returned from an evening worship experience that was powerful. To be honest, I should tell you that my instinct was to flee from the room when they said we were invited to a "different kind of worship experience." But something made me stay in my seat, and I had an unexpected joyful and spirit-filled experience. I even sang, which most of you know is not a strength in my wheelhouse!

At times, I'm guilty of thinking of worship as somehow distinct from formation. But tonight, those lines blurred for me. While there were some familiar liturgical threads in the service, it was outside my Episcopal comfort zone. Nonetheless, I had some "ah-ha" moments and was invited into the story of Lazarus being raised from the dead in a completely different way.

The wine for communion was not in a silver chalice but in a hotel paper cup, but it was holy. I thought of our Ascension community several times during the service and wished that you could have shared in the experience because I knew I would not be able to adequately describe what made the experience formative for me.

Perhaps it was because I was out of my comfort zone, or maybe it was the community of fellow conference folk, or the odd hotel multipurpose room setting; whatever it was, it had impact.

As I left the room with a colleague, we looked at each other and said "wow – how cool was that- I'm so glad we stayed." Know that I have no intention of moving to Minnesota or drifting from the Episcopal traditions I love! But the experience did make me think about how powerful, and sometimes unexpected, formation can be. As the person who is tasked with setting our Christian formation programming efforts in motion, I of course wish more folks would engage in Sunday school, Advent and Lenten seasonal programming, and Bible studies, etc. But the reality is that formation opportunities can happen in lots of ways and in unexpected places. At its core, formation is about exploring, and expanding our relationship with Christ. It is a journey that takes some intentionality on our part. Had I fled from the room this evening, I would have missed out on the experience. I think the Holy Spirit kept me in my seat this evening for some grace filled formation.

But the experience has me wondering if you have the urge to flee from the room or if you're feeling that subtle tug to go deeper in your formation journey? What can we do as a faith community to equip you for the journey?

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## Music is Formation

Ginny Chilton

*"Zaccheus was a wee little man, a wee little man was he. He climbed up in the sycamore tree, for the Lord he wanted to see."*

Do these words bring back memories for you? Maybe the tune to this song popped in your head as you were reading the words just now. Maybe you even remember how the next verse goes.

I'm willing to bet a large number of us know the story of Zaccheus mainly because we were taught this song as children. Music is so formative! And not just Bible stories, but God's love itself is written on our hearts through music. "Jesus loves me! This I know, for the Bible tells me so." Children's songs are the easiest to remember and evoke the strongest images.

## Music *continued*

But the truth is all music forms us, and it forms us more deeply the more involved we are with it. In other words, a song you hear on the radio can make an impression on you, but once you sing it yourself (and *definitely* once you sing it with other people), it becomes written on your heart. The truth in the song is no longer something you have to conjure up, but something that becomes a part of you and every move and breath you make.

Stewart is always telling us to “follow Jesus each and every day as the first priority of our lives,” and we have a choice whether to let this be a chore or a joy. Let music help you make it a joy! Good music will form you as a follower of Jesus with every minute you spend listening to it. And it will seal those truths for us forever when we sing them ourselves, together. Thanks be to God!

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### **Catch the Spirit!**

Celebrate the youth of the parish on Youth Sunday, May 14. The Youth have designed and will lead the service at 11:00 -- including preaching -- and we will send the seniors off to college with our prayers and blessings!

Come get to know each other and the direction of the church better at the Parish meeting, Sunday, May 21 at 9:20 AM. We'll enjoy breakfast together as we look forward to what's next for Ascension. Hear about the direction of the parish as we move forward and vote on a slate for Vestry: Lana Butler, Susan Motley and Tom Westfall. It is important that you be there. Please mark your calendar!

Join us for our Ascension feast on May 25. The celebration begins with worship at 6:00 PM. and concludes with a meal of Fried chicken! Please bring a side dish to share!

And the Spirit descends and lights our way and our hearts on Pentecost, June 4! That day we will share one bread, one cup, one Spirit AND ONE SERVICE at 10:00 AM. That service will be followed by a reception allowing folks from both the 8 and 11 o'clock services to get to see each other and chat. **Wear red!**

**Church Calendar:** Ctrl+ click for [Event Calendar](#)