



THE ASCENSION

HERALD

Volume 2

Eastertide 2019

From the Rector

Stewart Tabb

Just over 4 years ago I stood in the pulpit here at Ascension for the first time. And at least one of the impressions that I had at that time has grown stronger as the years have gone by: Ascension is far and away the most welcoming Episcopal Church I have ever been in. When someone walks into our doors, I can guarantee that someone other than me will talk to them, will introduce themselves to them, will learn something about them or ask them to join us for a cup of coffee. This is a rare thing indeed. Although I don't get out much, my recent trip to Santa Barbara highlighted that for me. My mom and I visited what appeared to be a vital Episcopal Church. Although they were worshipping in their parish hall, the place was packed. They had tons of activities in their announcements and lots of outreach to the community around them — people seemed to be friendly enough, they looked our way and said good morning. We shared the peace. But no one stopped for more than that; no one introduced themselves. Even the greeter —and it was a greeter rather than an usher—was too busy talking with parishioners to speak with us. And then there is Tracy. Some of you may remember Tracy who was among us for a little over a year. She had health problems, she needed transportation. This was her first foray into the Episcopal Church when she came here. She has since moved to Pennsylvania and has a hard time finding a church. She recently emailed me "I thought all Episcopal Churches would be like Ascension . . ." Unfortunately, that is simply not the case.

The other impression that has grown stronger is that there are few churches that are as good at taking care of each other as Ascension. We are very good at visiting, at bringing food and good cheer, at asking after and tending each other. The people here love each other in real ways, and we love being with each other in joy and sorrow, in fellowship and in fun.

Welcome and care and concern are great, great gifts of this community. They are at the heart of this community. Many, many people work hard to make that happen, and this past year has been spent working on the ties that bind this community together. We have worked too on the welcome of children in our midst trying to find ways to bring all God's children young and old to the table together. I am so grateful for this work of welcome and concern that we do together, because it is how we here experience the power of the risen Lord. It is our peculiar giftedness, and we need to celebrate it and grow in it as we grow in the love of Christ and in faith — the constant living into that love.

If you were to look at statistics regarding religious affiliation and attendance across denominations, you would see a downward trend that has been going on for quite some time. It's not just our own congregation that is experiencing loss. Nor is it just religious organizations — service organizations like Rotary and Fraternal organizations like the Masons are experiencing similar declines — the culture has changed -- our lives have changed -- in too many ways and for too many reasons for me to go into now.

What is Fresh Expressions?

Courtney Wheeler

In the United States only 20% of people attend church regularly — that is at least once a month. Another 20% don't attend but would say they did if asked, 20% say they would go if invited by friends but only go once, and 40% have NO church affiliation at all.

The church in the United Kingdom experienced similar declines. In 2005 the Church of England and British Methodists started new movement called Fresh Expressions to meet the challenge.

Fresh Expressions is defined as a form of church for a changing culture established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet part of any church

It is . . .

church for a community of folks who didn't know they were looking for a church
a group of folks who share a similar interest OR hobby OR meeting place
not a stepping stone to an existing church, but formation of a new type of church

The folks who create a Fresh Expressions church are part of an existing, established church who are missionaries cleverly disguised as good neighbors. . . but not tricksters; they are honest and up front; they don't use bait and switch methods.

Fresh Expressions can be likened to a floating dock, tethered to a permanent one. The floating dock can extend to areas where it is needed, and the existing dock or church give it mooring.

Fresh Expressions is founded on the premise that church can happen anywhere, anytime.

Examples:

- running group pray before and after a run
- dinner church,
- group of employees in break room at a job site enjoying conversation and maybe Bible study,
- a Bible study set in a local restaurant starting off with a core group and then attracting interested bystanders who become part of the group,
- neighbors working together to beautify the neighborhood, then go back for coffee at someone's house .. leads to regular Saturday morning bible study group

Church of Ascension is a community with great ability and affinity to be welcoming, caring and great at helping people... seems like the perfect type of folks to seek out opportunity to create Fresh expressions community

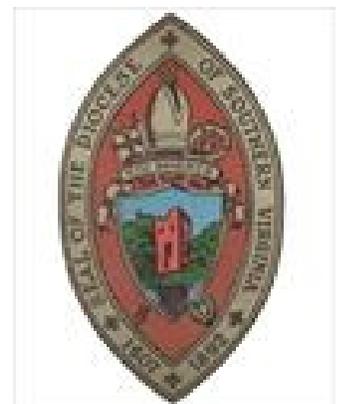
Diocesan Updates

Almighty and most gracious God, source of all wisdom and guidance, send your Holy Spirit to guide us as we seek and discern a shepherd for the Diocese of Southern Virginia. Inspire us with hope, hearts to love you, and a desire to serve one another. Grant us grace to entrust you with the future of your Church and all things. We ask in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ Our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

The Diocesan Profile is now online at <http://svabishopsearch.org>

NEW

The election of the new Bishop will be at Dinwiddie High School, Dinwiddie, VA, on Saturday, September 21.



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From the impact of divorce to the number of two career families to the rise of youth athletic leagues that play on Sunday -- suffice it to say, that non-affiliated and no longer affiliated folk — the so called none and dones -- are now almost half of the US population. Many people now are either spiritual but not religious or not spiritual at all. Church as we have known it in the recent past must change to meet the times. No one can tell you what the church will look like in 25 years; most of the experts out there will only say that it will look and feel different.

That is a hard truth. Very few people are comfortable with change. As we change we will need to keep a couple of things in mind. Change like this is not unprecedented. The apostles of the early church went out into a culture that was at best unfamiliar and at worst hostile to who they were and who they represented. Still, they went out, built relationships and communities and shared their stories of the transformative love of Jesus.

The stories of the early church show an agile church that miraculously was equipped to do the work that God gave them. The Spirit moved, people showed up, things worked out. God gives people what they need to succeed.

As I reflect on that and the rich gifts of welcome and deep concern that God has gifted Ascension with, I can't help thinking that they are the key to our way forward.

What we keep we lose, only what we give remains our own. That was the motto of the Episcopal high school that I attended way back when. It is a value that I am grateful to have learned and it is a value very much in keeping with what Jesus taught us. If we seek to save our life we must give it away in love and service.

What does it look like to build communities of welcome and concern outside of our church walls and beyond the block on which we worship? This is the question we must answer because it will be how we share the gifts that God has given us. There are so many people in this world who need welcome, who need to experience the love of God in Christ that is so central to our lives. How can we build communities where inclusion is the rule, in which there is no us or them, barriers or boundaries? How can we take deep care and concern for people to where they are?

This is the privilege of those who serve the risen Lord. We are gifted that we might share what we know. I have every confidence that God not only has provided, but will continue to provide all that we need for the work that lies in front of us.



**Children age 4—Rising 5th
Graders**

**Join us for Vacation Bible
School**

at Church of the Ascension

July 8-12

(9 AM-Noon)

REGISTER NOW AT:

<https://vbspro.events/p/coa-tpb>

It has been four months since the reopening of our Food Pantry and things are going very well. Most of our former clients have found their way back to us and we have added many new clients, as well. We usually serve from 12 to 20 needy guests each Tuesday and Thursday. This amounts to well over 100 people per month. Most of the folks who come to us are either senior citizens, the disabled or the working poor. In general they are most grateful for the food they are receiving. Let me give you an example or two. Last week we had a retired woman come in who told us that she did not like coming for grocery assistance but she had a large dental bill to pay and our help would allow her to pay a few extra dollars towards that debt. Another woman, a grandmother, had just taken in four of her grandchildren and could not stretch her social security check far enough to feed them all. We not only gave her two bags of food but also gave her information on the Food Bank and other local pantries she can visit in order to feed her family.

I cannot stress how much our food pantry helps those in need in our area. Of course, this would not be possible at all without the wonderful volunteers who work tirelessly twice a week greeting our clients, enrolling them in our computers and bagging the groceries. We also have a regular crew of men who go to the Food Bank on Friday mornings and load up 500 to 800 pounds of food, drive it back to the church and then stock the shelves, the closet and the freezers for the next week. Thank you, volunteers! By the way, if anyone would like to join our volunteer corp, please give me a call or catch me after church.

I also need to thank everyone who donates financially to our pantry and/or those who put food into our Blue Barrel when they come on Sundays. None of the food we get from the Food Bank of Southeastern Virginia is free. We purchase the food at a discount but we need to raise funds continually to keep our budget operating. The food pantry does not receive money from our church budget; we must raise the funds to purchase our food. This is a very expensive ministry and I am both grateful and proud that our church steps up to the challenge of feeding the hungry in our neighborhood. Thank you!

Greetings from the Finance Chairman**Chuck Beers**

As a part of our year-round stewardship program, the Vestry committed to keep the parish informed of the financial status of the church on a regular basis.

We have the figures under the 2019 operating budget through April 30. We are \$1198 ahead in pledges which leads to us being ahead about \$2000 in total income. Expenses are \$1200 under budget, but because of the deficit budget of \$25,000 we have spent \$13,000 more than we have received.

Fun Facts: We have two scholarship funds that were given many years ago to enable us to underwrite participation in such things as Chanco, Mission Trips, and other events. The other fund is for college educational expenses. If you are interested please let Nellwyn in the office know and she will send you the info. nbeamon@ascension-norfolk.org

Back by popular demand: Pickup Choir! What is pickup choir? An opportunity to sing the anthem with others who like to sing. The only requirements are that you arrive that morning at 9:15 to learn the anthem. You may sit with your family in the congregation and then come up at the proper time. No robes! Emailing Ginny Chilton would be helpful but not required: gchilton@ascension-norfolk.org No prior choir experience is necessary. Join us on June 16, July 21, and August 18!

W. E. B. Du Bois 1868 - 1963: "Children learn more from what you are, than what you teach."

As Episcopalians, we declare the belief that God loves all...no matter what. So how do we emulate this love to our children and youth in a world that encourages self-preservation and climbing over anything in your way to get to the top? It starts with modeling love for ALL, and what better place to plant that seed than in our own church community? Often, when we think of catalysts for change, we are reminded of water metaphors such as a stone casting ripples in a pond or single drops in the ocean. We also know the story of Jesus and the women at the well (John 4:4-26). To be the change, we must be thirsty. We must long for the life-giving water that is Jesus and his example to the world.

This year for Vacation Bible School we are attempting to embrace this example through a curriculum centered around clean water access. "Water All Around the World" states that by believing Jesus Christ to be the living water for our bodies and our souls, we are called to serve people of the world who need safe drinking water. The children will learn through stories, crafts, activities and acts of service that God's love can work through them as well as for them. With the help of youth and adult volunteers, the children are able to make connections with role models who guide them on a week long journey immersed in the cleansing waters of God's word. I invite anyone interested in participating to contact me.

Fortunately, we have a long-standing tradition of service provided by Ascension's youth in the form of Appalachian Service Project Mission Trips. The EYC members feel strongly about participating in this ministry. This year we are taking 12 youth and 6 leaders to Kanawha County, WV, to rebuild homes. We will travel to this poverty-stricken community not only to serve but to learn from these families. ASP's theme for this year's missionaries is "Be the Peace" from 1 Samuel 25:6 when David sends a message to Nabal, a friend he has yet to meet.

Thus you shall salute him:
'Peace be to you, and
peace be to your house,
peace be to all that you have.

We go to West Virginia not only to repair and rebuild, but to bring peace and grace both there and back home again. I encourage everyone at Ascension to be a part of this trip through sponsorship, prayer or simply asking the youth about their experiences both as they prepare and after they return.

As we are studying in women's Bible Study, the Good News brings us together for a common goal of love in the world. When we pursue this wholeheartedly, it is infectious and melts away the discrepancies, disparities and differences. What we are left with is God's dream for his most beloved people! Walk in love, friends!

MARK YOUR CALENDARS: Monday, July 22nd, 7:00 PM at Ascension



Returning this summer for another benefit concert: Pianist Ben Brafford is a native of Gastonia, N.C. He received the Master of Music degree in piano performance and the Doctoral of Musical Arts degree in choral conducting from UNC-Greensboro. Serving as Organist and Choirmaster at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church in Greensboro, he conducts four choirs weekly and is Director of the Holy Trinity Music School located on the church campus. He maintains a piano studio at Holy Trinity Music School where he teaches students of all ages each week.

Last year's concert raised over \$1200 to benefit NEST (Norfolk Emergency Shelter Team). One hundred percent of the funds raised will go to a benefit yet to be determined.

Eastertide is the season where we get to hear a little each Sunday from the book of Acts, a record of the wild experiences of Jesus's first disciples as they went into the world to tell the good news. After having taken a good look inside ourselves during the season of Lent, in Eastertide Jesus pushes us from the nest and we find ourselves, like those disciples, bumping our way through actual discipleship in the real world.

It's exciting, especially at first, when the memory of the risen Lord is fresh in our minds. Think of the last time you had a personal revelation, or you read a book you adored; you couldn't wait to tell someone. But at some point the newness wanes and the vigor you felt at first is no longer enough to properly fuel your work in the world.

That is, I believe, where your Christian community comes in. For the members of the choir, for instance, we feel refreshed in our knowledge of the risen Lord when we work intensely on an anthem and it comes together on a Sunday morning. We hit just the right chord and there is something sacred born that is more than the sum of the individual notes and voices. The Day School children and I felt the Lord's presence when we were dancing with colorful scarves to Saint-Saëns' "Aviary," and suddenly a beautiful blue jay swooped by the window. A few weeks ago the Lord graced me with his presence when I wasn't particularly looking forward to a Vacation Bible School planning meeting, a meeting which, by God's grace, became an opportunity for all of us to open our hearts about what we wanted for our church's children and what new things we could try to make our hopes a reality.

Much of God's work is difficult and tedious. Not every gathering of the faithful at our church produces a golden moment you treasure for weeks or years to come, but it is because we did not neglect to meet that we gathered what needed to do what Jesus sent us out to do. This Eastertide, as you flap your fledgling disciple wings, I hope Ascension can be your place to flock and renew yourself week after week.



Two liturgical events in the life of the church are fast approaching. **Thursday, May 30**, is our name day—Ascension Day. We will celebrate with a potluck at 5:30 PM and a service at 6:15 in the church. Bring a dish to share and a voice to sing and enjoy a favorite and casual service.

Then, on June 9, we will celebrate Pentecost at 10:00 AM for **one** service only that day. The color is **red**, and all are encouraged to wear **red**. Because this coincides with the last day of Sunday School before the summer begins, we will have the annual picnic outside after the service inside. Hot dogs and hamburgers along with drinks will be provided. Suggested donations are \$1.00 per hot dog or hamburger. Please bring a side dish to share.