

The Witness
March 2010

Lutheran Church of the Ascension

OUR VISION: To Worship the Lord, Live by His Example, and
Reach out Through His Love

OUR MISSION: To Know and Share the Good News of Jesus Christ



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Prodigal Son or Prodigal Father?

At the heart of our Lenten reflections is the story from Luke 15:11-32 that often goes by the title, The Parable of the Prodigal Son. A man has two sons. The youngest requests his half of his inheritance and the father gives it to him. Of course the son wastes it all away. The only option left to him is to go back home and beg for his father's mercy. The father welcomes him back home and throws him a grand celebration, much to the consternation of the oldest son.

But who is the true prodigal here, the father or the son? The American Heritage College Dictionary defines the adverb *prodigal* as follows: (1) *Rashly or wastefully extravagant*, (2) *Marked by rash or wasteful extravagance*; (3) *Giving or given in abundance; lavish or profuse*.

So who is the most wasteful one in this story? Certainly the younger loses everything, so the argument can be made that he is wasteful one. However, the one person whose extravagance continually astounds us is the father. He did not need to agree to the younger son's request to receive his inheritance prematurely. He did not need to welcome the younger son back after that inheritance was wasted. He did not need to make a big deal about the younger son's return by throwing a major banquet. To the older son, all of this certainly seems to be rash behavior.

Ultimately, this is not a story about the behavior of the younger son. Nor is it a story about the behavior of the older son. This is a story about the father. The father is being lifted up in the Gospel of Luke as an example of God's extravagant love. The parable is offered as a response to the Pharisees' and the scribes' complaints that Jesus is associating with, even dining with, sinners. In their religious mindset, good and righteous people should not associate with unrighteous people. The parable challenges that mindset. It offers instead a vision of a gracious God who sends his son to save both the righteous and the unrighteous.

Some say that seeking to save the lost and the unrighteous is a waste of God's love. The Pharisees would certainly argue that. So too would the older son in the parable. However, the Gospels make clear that God's ways are not our ways. We are all sinners and undeserving of God's mercy. Yet God comes to us through Jesus Christ to welcome us back home. Is this extravagance? Perhaps. But let us be grateful that God's love is extravagant and that we are recipients of abundant grace.

Blessed by God's grace!

Pastor Dennis Kelly

Worship Notes

Our choir swap with St. Mark's was a wonderfully successful experience. From all accounts, I heard that St. Mark's choir and organist were received warmly by our congregation and Ascension's choir most certainly felt the same about being at St. Mark's. While at St. Mark's, we experienced worship similar to our own, but with a lot more procession and choral leadership on the hymns, liturgy and psalms. The amount of movement required of the choir during the service was a challenge! Completely unaware of the traffic patterns, I almost got run over by the crucifer at one point, but the choir did their best to keep me safe from harm. Probably the most significant aspect of our visit was to see how similar the struggles and triumphs are between our churches. It was a reminder that God's path for us is not easy, and yet, He continues to guide us to victory in all we do in His name.

Another special item to call to your attention is our Maundy Thursday worship service, April 1 at 7:00 p.m. The ELCA Theatre Group is proud to present *Beneath The Upper Room*, a story about the behind-the-scenes action during Jesus' Last Supper. This is not your typical Last Supper play. If you are interested in being a part of the presentation, please contact Linda Clinton.

Here are some other important dates:

Midweek services, utilizing the Holden Prayer service, take place on Wednesday evenings at 7:00 p.m. and last about a half hour

Holy Week services take place the first week of April: Maundy Thursday (4/1) and Good Friday (4/2) services both begin at 7:00 p.m.

Easter services will take place on Sunday, April 4 at our usual worship times, 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m., and will be similar to our 50th anniversary service, where we blended aspects of both the traditional and contemporary services

The Spring Musical, *All Nature Sings*, takes place on Sunday, April 18.

Our spring concert, featuring cellist, Nicholas Photinos and pianist, Yasuko Oura takes place on Saturday, April 24.

Sunday, April 25 the combined choir of St. Mark's and Ascension will worship at St. Mark's and on Sunday, May 2, we will worship at Ascension.

We welcome you to be part of Ascension's Festival Chorus, which allows you to make a short-term commitment to the choir. You may take part in our Easter celebration and/or the combined choir which will perform at both St. Mark's and Ascension. Choir rehearsals take place throughout Lent on Wednesdays at 7:30 p.m. For those who cannot be with us on Wednesday evenings, we will also be offering time to learn the music on Sunday mornings after the 9:00 a.m. service. If you have any questions, please see Minkyoo.

Starting the first Sunday in Easter, April 11, we will be experimenting with some new approaches to the Celebrate service in order to make it more accessible to a broader cross-section of our congregation and a more welcoming experience for the visitor. Please come to the service to see what is taking shape. We value your input.

May Christ's presence in your life bring you blessing and special meaning during this Lenten season.

Peace to all,

Mischa & Minkyoo



March brings us a step closer to spring, and the possibility of putting away our winter gear has us all eagerly anticipating milder temperatures. We had a wonderful gathering with all of our Sunday School families on February 26th for our 2nd Annual Winter Fun Night held at Pump It Up in Glenview. For what is becoming the most-anticipated fellowship event on the Sunday School calendar, nearly 60 parents and children came to this fun night of climbing, jumping and sliding on inflatables followed by a pizza dinner. The looks on the kids faces tell the story; it was a great night for all who came out. We are a big family at Ascension!

The 2nd through 5th graders presented their "panel discussion" for all of us during the services on Sunday February 28th. The subject of this discussion was Baby Moses and the stories of those who were present during this time in biblical history – the ruling Pharaohs, Egyptian and Israelite families – all done in an "interview" format with moderators. Thanks for all your hard work, kids, and thanks to Lisa Rude for your efforts guiding them. We all enjoyed the fruits of your labor.

Preparations for this year's Spring Musical are underway. The dancers have already been working with Lisa Rude, and the first rehearsal with the rest of the kids will be held on Sunday, March 14. Rehearsals will also take place Sunday, March 21 and April 11 during the regular Sunday School class time. A Dress Rehearsal is being planned for Saturday April 17 with the performance taking place on Sunday April 18. We appreciate your cooperation in getting your kids to Sunday School for these rehearsals and also for the Dress Rehearsal on the 17th.

We are calling all 3rd, 4th and 5th graders (parents, this means you!) to register for First Communion classes. Although the first class won't be held until April 25th, we do need to get an accurate list of those kids who will be making their First Communion. Please contact Beth or me at bngpeterson@att.net to register or if you'd like any further information. First Communion will be held on Sunday May 2nd during the 11:00 a.m. Celebrate service.

Beth and I have already gathered with leaders from St David's and Holy Trinity churches in Glenview for our first VBS 2010 planning meeting. This year's event will be held at St. David's Episcopal Church (rotating back to Ascension in 2011), and we settled on the week of Monday, June 21 through Friday June 25, 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. At a subsequent meeting, we reviewed all of our VBS options from the various vendors, but no, we are not going to let you in on this year's theme (not yet anyway!). Any of you who had children attend last year's VBS already know what an amazing and memorable week VBS will be. Spread the word: we want more kids to enjoy this week. We also need volunteers to inspire and feel inspired, so we hope you will consider joining in the excitement! Mark your calendars and keep an eye out for more information to follow!

Peace,
Greg and Beth

YOUTH MINISTRY

February was a month filled with some great service projects and fellowship activities for Ascension's youth! On Sunday, February 7th, our congregation participated in the national Souper Bowl of Caring! Both confirmation and high school youth participated in collecting food and money to benefit local and global hunger ministries. Pictures from the confirmation Food Pantry Scavenger Hunt are below (good job to both teams, but special congrats again to the winning girls team!!), and a huge thank you to all Ascension members for their generous contributions to this project for the 6th consecutive year!



Youth also had the chance to participate in a combined 'eSkape Lock-In' over President's Day weekend with other middle school and high school students from several area Lutheran churches. Around 150 youth attended in total, and we had an AWESOME TIME! The event was such a success that it'll likely take place again next year, so if you missed out this time - be sure to join us for the next one!!



The month of March brings us further into Lent and preparations for Easter. Here are a few dates and youth activities (among others!) to be sure and include on your calendar!

> **Easter Breakfast Planning Meeting, Wednesday, March 24th from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m.** Around 130 people enjoyed breakfast and fellowship on Easter morning last year, and we're excited about being able to serve the Ascension community and worshipping visitors again this year on Easter, April 4th! We'll be meeting March 24th to pull together plans for Easter Breakfast 2010. All parents and youth interested and able to help out with set-up/clean-up, grocery shopping and serving are welcome and encouraged to attend! Please check your email for details.

> **Confirmation youth will meet four times during the month of February: for class on the 7th, 14th and 21st, and on Tuesday the 23rd for a service project.** Pastor Kelly and I will be in touch with more details about 8th graders being confirmed, so stay tuned for more info leading up to confirmation in May!

Peace to you during this Lenten season as we prepare our hearts and minds for the coming death and resurrection of our savior Jesus -
Vanessa

Adult Spiritual Growth

Adult Library

This month's selection from the Ascension Library is **The Pillars of the Earth** by Ken Follett. This novel recreates the world of 12th century England, in an epic spanning two generations of monastic, court, and village life. At the center of the story is the effort to build a magnificent cathedral in the small town of Kingsbridge, efforts requiring faith, wealth, engineering, and perseverance. Follett has created a sprawling novel with good period research, engaging characters, and a fast paced story filled with details of medieval life and cathedral design, architecture and construction. This is a lengthy (980 page), but satisfying read, an Oprah's Book Club selection. This book is catalogued under "W"-Fiction, and is available for checkout at the features bookcase immediately inside the Augustana Room.

When checking out books, please sign and date the library card in the front cover, and place the card in the holder above the returns basket on the bookcase.

John Vonnegut



Our February adult education sessions were very well received. We had the honor of having Esther Menn and Rabbi Laurence Edwards talk to us about **Judaism Then and Now**. Our next session, entitled **Islam and the Koran**, was presented by Dr. Mark Swanson. Both sessions were well-attended and very enlightening.

We'd love to have you come join us on Sunday mornings at 10:30 a.m. in March for adult education. We will have the distinguished scholar, Dr. Ralph Klein, with us during Lent for three Sundays - March 7, March 14, and March 21. His topic will be **The Passion of Jesus**. Dr. Klein has been a presenter in the Adult Forum many times. He has a unique style of presenting his topic and we look forward to his enriching our Lenten experience. Please join us.



Our five-week Lenten Bible study entitled **Ashes to Ashes - Dust to Dust: A Christian Perspective on Death and Resurrection** will run from February 24 through March 24. We invite you to meet with us on Wednesday mornings from 10 a.m. until 11 a.m. Pastor Kelly, Caryl Scott, Ed Sieroki, and others will present the series.

Reach Out Through God's Love



Thanks to Ascension's Youth and their leader Vanessa Young, and to all who supported the 2010 Souper Bowl of Caring financially and through contributions of canned goods. Monies raised (to date, \$609.25 and still welcome) will go to ELCA World Hunger and food to Northfield Township Food Pantry.

Thank you for Supporting Recovery Efforts in Haiti

Since the earthquake in Haiti a month ago, over \$4000 has been received by Ascension Church in support of recovery efforts. Thank you for your faithful and rapid response to this crisis. The ELCA has received \$4.6 million to support humanitarian relief efforts in Haiti including \$320,000 in a matching grant from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans. Rev. Daniel Rift, director, ELCA World Hunger and Disaster Appeal, said members of the ELCA have been "faithful in their giving, bearing witness to the hope for the Lutheran church and communities in Haiti."

Financial gifts are used to purchase and distribute medicine, drinking water, food, emergency shelter, sanitation and hygiene kits and other materials to aid survivors of the earthquake. Lutherans are also working to provide psychosocial services and other support. The funds are distributed to three partner organizations of the ELCA working on the ground in Haiti -- The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Lutheran World Relief (LWR), and Church World Service (CWS).

You may contribute through Ascension Church at any time; simply include Haiti Disaster Response on the memo line of your check. Thank you.

Good News Kitchen

7649 N. Paulina, Chicago, IL

"I am convinced that our work together at Good News Kitchen is a miracle. Thanks to each of you for your part." (Kelly Quackenbush, Board President)

Every night, 365 nights per year, approximately 150 men, women, and children come through the doors of Good News Kitchen knowing they will receive a hot, nutritious dinner. These meals are provided by 35 partnering organizations, each responsible for a particular night. Ascension Church is one of those organizations!

Would you like to be part of the miracle? A group of 4 or 5 from Ascension serve on the **THIRD TUESDAY** of each month. Be a part of a group by signing up on the sign-up sheet on the bulletin board across from the office. **Donations of specific food items listed are always WELCOME.** Since we serve a repetitive set menu, check the food list and sign up! **Monetary donations are also WELCOME.** Checks may be made out to the church, designated "Good News Kitchen."

Some questions you may have:

Do I have to drive to the Kitchen? Only if you choose. We go down as a group in a van or car, departing from Ascension at 4 p.m. and returning by 7 p.m.

Do we cook the food to be served? No, there is a cook who prepares the hot food. Duties are: wash, cut, and/or organize unheated food in large trays, then serve food at a station of your choice.

Can a family serve? Yes, families are welcome except for children under 12.

Do you have other questions? Call or see Irm Claiborne (847.256.3302).

Focus on Health



Ascension Church cares about the good health of people in our congregation and our communities, health of body, mind and spirit.

Lay Home Communion Ministry Training Sunday, March 7, 12:15 p.m.

Each month Ascension people bring the communion we share in worship to people who can't get to church because of health limitations. Both the person serving and the one served experience the joy and gratitude of being in Christian community through these communion visits. You are invited to share in this life-giving ministry. Prospective and present lay home communion ministers will have lunch and receive training with Pastor Kelly on **Sunday, March 7, 12:15 p.m.**

At Ascension Church, communion is usually sent out on the first Sunday of the month to people who are at home, in hospitals and in rehab and nursing centers. Home communion ministers serve in the months they are able and in the settings in which they are comfortable. They visit on Sunday or early in the next week and use the established *Sending of Holy Communion* service during communion. I hope you will consider learning more about our congregation's home communion ministry. Please contact me by email Gail@Ascension-church.org or phone 847-446-8335 x 25.

Blood Pressure Checks

Blood pressure control is one important factor in maintaining our good health. The Health Ministry Team offers blood pressure checks each month, usually on the fourth Sunday of the month, 10:00-10:30 a.m. in Fellowship Hall. No appointment is needed; just stop in.

Blood Drive Thanks

Thanks to all who shared the gift of life by donating at Ascension's LifeSource blood drive in February. If you were unable to be present that day, please visit the website, www.LifeSource.org or phone them directly, 877-543-3768 to arrange to donate at a convenient time and place.

Stephen Ministry

Going through a tough time emotionally or spiritually? A Stephen Minister is a member of our congregation who is trained to listen, care, encourage, pray, and walk alongside you during difficult times. To learn more, talk with Pastor or a Stephen Leader.

Monday Morning Yoga

All are invited to join in ongoing yoga classes on Monday mornings at 9:00 a.m. in the confirmation classroom. Come to stretch, relax and renew the body. A certified yoga instructor, Pat Constabileo, teaches classes. Cost: \$10.00 per session.

Peace and good health,
Gail Price

Fellowship

Ascension Women's Luncheon

Thursday, March 4

The next Ascension Women's Luncheon will be held at 12:00 noon on Thursday, March 4th at Hackneys on Lake Avenue. Our speaker will be Terri Gens, Senior Director of Development at Lutheran Social Services. She will give us an update and more information about Lifebooks and speak about LSSI's Headstart Program in Englewood, both of which our congregation has supported with gifts and monetary donations. All women are invited to come and bring a friend. Terri Gens is a delightful and enthusiastic speaker so you won't want to miss this opportunity to hear her.

Martin and Katy Luther Are Coming to Dinner!

In celebration of the 50th Anniversary of Ascension Church, Martin and Katy Luther will be with us for an evening of fun and family fellowship. Pastor Johan and Sonja Hinderlie will travel here from Minnesota to take on the character of the Luthers, complete with period costumes. Their easy table talk will bring faith to life.

Supper begins at 6:00 p.m. and includes family-friendly food. The main course (good German fare!) will be provided, and you are invited to bring a salad or dessert to serve 8-10. Bring children and friends, too. A free will offering will be received and nursery care will be available.

To assist with meal planning, please respond by calling the church office or signing up on the bulletin board.