

Celebrate Ascension!



Annual Report 2015

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A Letter from Pastor Chris

We are a congregation that is blessed by God - richly blessed. I want you to know how blessed we truly are as a community of faith...

In December 2014, Joyful Worship celebrated the gift of 100 musicians using their gifts to praise God through the Advent Concert Worship weekend, when more than 700 gathered to share in worship and to welcome the season of Advent.

In 2015, Ascension used 96 loaves of bread and more than 19,000 communion wafers to share in the celebration of holy communion. More than 200 chalices and 17,600 individual cups of wine and grape juice have been blessed at the altar of God this year.

Ascension has been blessed with the power of God's promise made known through the Sacrament of Baptism. In 2015, our community has witnessed 20 baptisms to the glory of God.

In 2015, Spiritual Growth at Ascension was blessed with the teaching and tending of more than 100 children in our children's ministry. 12 teachers, 6 aids, and 1024 crayons shared in this ministry. 24 high school student and adults served God and the people of Detroit along with 30,000 other students and adults at the ELCA Youth Gathering. 34 lattes also served the adult leaders of our youth while in Detroit.

In 2015, Caring Relationships, through the passion of Knit Wits, provided more than 420 winter hats to shelters and schools in the area. GriefShare provided a safe place for more than 30 members and non-members of Ascension to walk together in the midst of their grief. 34 pints of blood were collected at a blood drive and only one person *almost passed out* as a result of the donations. Five Pastoral Assistants made 260 hospital visits and 336 homebound visits.

In 2015, Mission Outreach was blessed to serve alongside our brothers and sisters at Cross Lutheran Church every first Wednesday of each month feeding more than 150 people each Wednesday. 13 people were blessed to journey to El Salvador to build relationships and enter into a covenant relationship with our sister congregation, Iglesia Luterana el Milagro de Dios de San Jorge (Miracle of God Lutheran Church of San Jorge).

The people of Ascension share in the gift of community and relationship throughout the world. 70 million people make up the Lutheran World Federation. We walk with Lutheran Christians in 140 member churches, in 79 countries, on five continents.

In 2015, members of Ascension contributed to the \$15 million goal to combat malaria in Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Our offerings provided: funds to eradicate hunger domestically and internationally; English teachers in Central Europe; leadership training for the Lutheran Church in Russia; humanitarian assistance for people impacted by warfare in Eastern Ukraine; supported refugees leaving Syria; fought Ebola in Western Africa; supported rebuilding of villages in the Central African Republic (Cameroon); and provided support and resources for the 219 missionaries of the ELCA currently serving around the world.

Ascension is currently served by two pastors, four directors, three administrators, and two musicians.

Pastor Angela celebrated the first anniversary of her call at Ascension in September of this year. It is a wondrous journey to watch the gifts of a newly-called pastor unfold in the midst of the congregation they serve. We are blessed with a talented preacher, gifted teacher, and deeply faithful spirit of joy within Pastor Angela. Thanks be to God!

Amy Gilgenbach has served as our Director of Administration since June of 2013. She is dedicated, detailed, and passionate about her ministry at Ascension. The list is far too long to share the number of details she attends to on a daily basis. As you have opportunity, please say *thank you* to Amy and give thanks to God for her ministry.



Brenda Lytle has served as our Director of Care Ministries since June 2013. She has developed our ministry of care into a beautiful expression of spiritual and physical care for the people of Ascension. We are grateful for her willingness to enter into some of the most vulnerable moments in the lives of people we serve.

Tony Acompañado has served as our Director of Youth Ministries since February 2014 and now serves as our Director of Faith Formation as of August of this year. We have been blessed by his faithfulness to serve the junior and senior high school age students of Ascension. In August, Tony approved a redesign of his position at Ascension to include Children's Ministry. In 30 days, Tony and a team of parents and teachers recreated our children's ministry to bring about an entirely new approach to hands-on experiential faith development. We are grateful for his commitment to the faith development of our children and young people.

Vicki Taylor has served Ascension as organist and choir accompanist since 1983 and currently serves as our Director of Music Ministries since September 2014. In August 2015, Vicki assumed the role of Handbell Director along with her ministry of Adult Choir Director, Children's Choirs Director, and Organist. We are witnesses to the joyful sounds of our musicians under her leadership that help shape the range of emotions we experience in worship. This is truly a moment to give glory to God for her ministry of music.



Amy Stryker has served as the Administrator for Joyful Worship and Spiritual Growth since June 2013 and Kate Mattson has served as the Administrator for Caring Relationships and Mission Outreach since December 2013. We would literally be lost without them. Amy and Kate provide hospitality on the phone, in the office, via the website, through the newsletter and e-alert, and within the pages of the bulletin. They are often the glue which holds the rest of the ministries together, as pieces sometimes fall through the proverbial cracks. Please give thanks for their ministry.

Ben Janzow has served as the Praise Band leader since 2001. He brings an energy and a passion for music that inspires our worship. His leadership of the Praise Band and the members of the Praise Band offer the promise of God's love again and again through their shared gift of music.

Ray Kinney has served as the Folk Choir Accompanist since 2005 and currently serves as the Folk Choir Leader since September 2013. Ray is a gifted pianist and guitarist, and one never knows which instrument Ray will bring to our moments of worship led by the Folk Choir. However, we do know that the music will be rich. We are blessed to have his talent and leadership among us.

In 2015, Ascension Lutheran Church council members, wing leaders, staff, and members of the congregation have focused more than 170 hours on the vision work that will guide our church to become who God is calling us to be in 2025.

Ascension in abundance. God's gifts given to us to share with each other and with the world around us.

Our community continues to be a place of life that shares the story of God's love. This is who God calls us to be. A people engaged in the building of the Kingdom of God. We share in God's mission for the world through our participation in worship, growing our relationship with God, building relationships with each other, and serving our brothers and sisters outside the walls of this community. These are the practices of disciples of Jesus.

Each practice – a call to action to the glory of God. Each disciple – a witness to the promise and power of the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ.

And so we look to the future with hope. "And hope does not disappoint us," writes the Apostle Paul in the book of Romans, "because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us." Therefore as God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, may we offer ourselves to be poured out into the world to the glory of God.

Thank you for allowing me to walk alongside you as one of your pastors on this journey of faith.

Rev. Christian W. Marien

A Letter from Pastor Angela

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, my first year with you has been rich and fruitful. In fact, there's no way to list all the many and varied experiences that I have enjoyed this year serving as one of your pastors. Nevertheless, here are some highlights from 2015.

MISSION OUTREACH

Our Mission Outreach Team embraces the ministry concept of *accompaniment*. We walk in partnership with El Salvador, Tanzania, and Cross Church, Milwaukee.

EL SALVADOR: I was thrilled to participate in the Agape Delegation to El Salvador. In the spirit of unity and collaboration, Ascension joined two other ELCA congregations - Grace in Thiensville and Lake Park in Milwaukee - for a mission trip to El Salvador. Our delegation included a wonderful intergenerational, diverse group: Edwin, Sarah, Marta, and Luisa Aparicio, Pr. Angela, Iva Richards, Anne Shurte, Paw Pa Soe, Bob Stoll, Peggy and Tyler Thrasher, and Pr. Michelle from Cross. While in El Salvador, we were able to strengthen existing relationships and build new relationships as well. We enjoyed an abundance of bright sunshine, warm fellowship, and vibrant hospitality. Worshiping with our sisters and brothers in Christ was an inspirational connection to the global Church. The Holy Spirit was profoundly present in an almost palpable way. Our Christian fellowship blossomed despite the cultural and language barriers. Laughter needs no translation.



One of the highlights of our trip was visiting the agroferreteria (hardware store) that Ascension helped build and continues to support. We were overjoyed to see firsthand the success of the Agroferreteria. The hardware store has doubled in size and has even opened another location so now they are a "chain." But certainly the highest point of the trip was solidifying our Partnership Covenant between Ascension and Iglesia Luterana el Milagro de Dios de San Jorge (Miracle of God Lutheran Church, San Jorge). Our delegation joined Pastor Blanca de Gonzalez, the pastor of our sister congregation, for a visitation to the homes of members of our sister parish. We shared gentle, spirit-filled moments with our sisters and brothers during these visits. At each home, I offered a house blessing in English and Pr. Michelle translated into Spanish. We also gave each family Crosses for Christ from Ascension. I cannot overstate the deep spiritual connection that we shared together through this experience.

CROSS - MILWAUKEE: On the first Wednesday of every month, a team from Ascension shares a meal with Cross Lutheran Church, our partner congregation in Milwaukee. Through the Bread of Healing Ministry we provide a hot meal served with love to 300 people. We also help to support Cross' food pantry that distributes over 200 bags of food each week. Pr. Michelle Townsend de Lopez invited me to lead the Bible Study following the meal. This is an opportunity to offer spiritual support for those who have lost hope. This faithful gathering of about 100 participants creates meaningful community for people who may be disconnected from other worshiping assemblies.

Furthermore, Pr. Michelle, along with the youth choir from Cross, joined Ascension for worship. Pr. Michelle shared God's Word and God's love with us. The choir was uplifting and inspirational, stirring our hearts and spirits. In turn, I was invited to minister in Word and Sacrament at Cross Lutheran Church. I was also blessed to attend Cross' Mardi Gras Ball. It was an exciting night and I look forward to many more! It is my hope that we can continue to strengthen our partnership with Cross through regular worship opportunities, pulpit exchanges, and fellowship opportunities.

TANZANIA: Ascension has enjoyed supporting the Mount Meru Coffee project for the last 15 years. This October, the Greater Milwaukee Synod welcomed a delegation from the Maroroni Diocese of Tanzania. We were blessed to receive Pr. Elias Lema as our guest preacher during worship. Pr. Lema also led a question and answer session during our Adult Education time. We learned a lot about our sisters and brothers in Tanzania. Our Mission Outreach Team is seeking a partnership relationship with the Samaria Parish. We look forward to deepening this partnership in the spirit of accompaniment.



SOPHIA: SOPHIA is an interfaith organization of people actively living our faith and values. SOPHIA is dedicated to dialogue with individuals, agencies, and public officials to stimulate creative and effective efforts to improve our communities in Waukesha County. Ascension hosted a viewing and discussion of the documentary *Inequality for All*. In this film, U.C.- Berkeley professor and former Labor Secretary Robert Reich, discusses the grave economic and social consequences that may result if the gulf between rich and poor continues to widen. This SOPHIA event was an opportunity for multiple congregations to engage in an important topic. Another SOPHIA highlight was Advocacy Days in Madison. During Advocacy Days, Wisconsin's people of faith band together for justice. I was delighted to be a part of such an inspirational event. It was a powerful experience to be present with nearly 1000 people of faith as we expressed our public witness of solidarity with the “least of these.”

JOYFUL WORSHIP

LONGEST NIGHT: In addition to our traditional Christmas services, I introduced a Longest Night Service. The service is called *The Longest Night* because the winter solstice is the longest night of the year and the service is held on, or near, this date. Worshipers were invited to enter God's presence and feel safe. In this judgment-free zone, all emotions are welcome; anxiety, grief, tears, and even anger are wholly acceptable. This service of prayers, readings, and thoughtful music offered a time to take a moment of holy calm in the midst of our circumstances and reflect. It is a time to pause, breathe, and lament. It is in our shared discontent, that God reminds us that we are never alone. This is what it means to be the body of Christ.

Another highlight for me in worship was introducing the ELW worship setting two. Most recently, I've enjoyed the handbell workshop. I've always wanted to learn how to play handbells. I was pleasantly surprised when our Director of Music, Vicki Taylor, announced that she would offer a workshop for beginners. The beginner workshop was well-received and well-attended. I found it to be fun, exciting and challenging all at the same time. We might just have another bell choir at Ascension.

CARING RELATIONSHIPS

GRIEFSHARE: Our GriefShare outreach ministry has been extremely successful. The GriefShare support group is for people who are grieving the death of a loved one. The actual GriefShare program is centered on a non-denominational video series. Participants gather weekly for 12 sessions and follow a journal style curriculum. We've even had new members join Ascension through GriefShare. This fall is our third GriefShare session and I have the distinct honor of leading this session.

SMALL GROUPS: During Lent, our Small Groups enjoyed Max Lucado's video series, *Before Amen: The Power of a Simple Prayer*. Our five-week Lenten journey began with a Power of Prayer retreat led by Pr. Chris. Then we continued on a journey to the very heart of biblical prayer through learning how to embrace a prayer life that brings peace and rest. During our Fall Campaign, we engaged Dr. Powell's video series, *How Lutherans Interpret the Bible*. As Lutherans, we have wonderful gifts to offer the body of Christ. This six week series invites us to explore important questions about Lutherans and the Bible. We have 10 groups and approximately 170 participants. I also enjoyed starting a Sunday night small group for this campaign.

We Share God's Life

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Ascension is exploring a restructured worship schedule to incorporate an education “hour” between services. During the adult education time, I led an abbreviated session of *How Lutherans Interpret the Bible*. The sessions have been well-attended and we have enjoyed segments of the Powell’s videos followed by lively discussions.

GERMANY REFORMATION

TRIP: Oct. 31, 2017 marks the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther posting his 95 Theses – an act that sparked the Reformation. Our Presiding Bishop, Elizabeth Eaton, has encouraged all of us to become involved in the coming celebrations. In honor of the ELCA’s observance of the 500th anniversary, Ascension will embark on a Reformation Tour in Germany in 2016.

LIVE WEBCAST

CONFRONTING RACISM:

Our Presiding Bishop, Elizabeth Eaton and William B. Horne II, an ELCA lay leader and member of the ELCA Church Council, addressed the hard but undeniable fact of deeply embedded racism in American society. Ascension offered a viewing of the live webcast followed by a discussion led by Pr. Chris. Bishop Eaton urges us “to deepen [our] involvement in and commitment to this important work to which we all are called.”

SYNOD COUNCIL: I have accepted the invitation to serve on the Greater Milwaukee Synod Council.

CONTINUING EDUCATION: This year I participated in the Frederick Buechner Writer’s Workshop at Princeton Theological Seminary, the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago Leadership Conference, Crossroads Anti-racism Conference, and the African Descent Lutheran Association Gathering. I was also invited to be the guest preacher for the opening worship service at the Greater Milwaukee Fall Theological Conference.

To God be the glory for the things that God has done!

Rev. Angela E. Khabeb



Joyful Worship

Ascension Music Ministry--Proclaiming God's Word Through Music

Ascension's Music Ministry continued to grow and flourish in 2015. The annual Advent Concerts in December 2014 included choirs, handbells, Praise Band, Folk Choir, and a guest string quartet. December also saw the return of a children's pageant. In April, we celebrated Christ's resurrection Christ on Easter Sunday with the sounds of choir, bells, brass, Praise Band, and joyful congregational singing.

August brought our first Hymn Festival to Sunday morning worship. Hymns were chosen from congregants' suggestions, and assembly singing was enhanced by the use of various instruments and our beautiful organ and piano. The response was positive, and a second Hymn Festival is being planned for early 2016.

Joyful Worship continues to lift up well-known settings of the liturgy at our early service. Settings are from from Evangelical Lutheran Worship along with a setting entitled *Now the Feast and Celebration* and the *Feast of Life* liturgy led by Ray Kinney and our Folk Choir. Our mid-week Lenten services were shaped by *Holden Evening Prayer*. In late summer, a new setting of the liturgy was introduced and sung during worship. Ben Janzow and the Ascension Praise Band continue to offer contemporary Christian music and musical leadership at our late service. The order of service for 10:45 has been reshaped to begin with a Call to Worship offered by a variety of Ascension musicians.

With gratitude, we celebrated the musical gifts of Heidi Bischmann, long-time director of the Handbell Choir, and Rhonda Kwiecien, choir accompanist and organist for the past two years, as they departed for new opportunities. At the time of this writing, we are in search of a permanent choir accompanist/additional organist. We are grateful for the musical talents of Jacob Beranek and Sharon Goodrum as they support us in the interim.

Fall brought a change in our worship times as a new Children's Ministry program and Adult Education time were introduced. Music is now being incorporated into the Children's Ministry program, including both singing and the use of instruments. We are grateful to the generous donors who have made this possible for the children of Ascension.

The Ascension Choir welcomed six new members this fall, while the Angel Choir (grades K-3) and Joyful Sounds Choir (grades 4-9) number about 24 children combined, and the Handbell Choir maintained their membership. Our first Handbell Workshop offered this fall was a resounding success, with twelve individuals of all ages embarking on what was for most, their first experience in ringing handbells and/or in reading music.

The Reformation celebration on October 25 included the joyous sounds of The Nordic Brass, along with Ascension choirs and handbells at the early service. The following Sunday, we lifted up the lives of the saints who have gone before us with the observance of All Saints Day on November 1. As we round out the church year in November, we celebrate Christ the King Sunday on November 22. A midweek Advent worship service will be offered on Wednesday, December 2, and all of Ascension's musical groups will once again join together in presenting our annual Advent Concert Worship on December 12 and 13. The third Sunday in Advent will bring the return of the children's pageant, and the Longest Night service will be held in the evening. Ascension will offer Christmas Eve worship at 2:30, 4:00, 5:30 and 11:00 on Christmas Eve and at 10:30 a.m. on Christmas Day.

It is a great joy to watch the musical gifts of so many being offered in praise to God's glory!



Vicki Taylor, Director of Music Ministries

Spiritual Growth

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

Since Sunday school wrapped up this past spring there have been significant developments in the transformation of Ascension's Children's Ministry. Following the unexpected resignation of Jennifer Koutnik, a coordinated effort between the church council and a newly-formed Sunday school steering committee carried out an extensive research and evaluation process of Ascension's current ministry offerings and also identifying the hopes and dreams of the congregation for Ascension's Children's Ministry. Information was gathered from listening sessions with concerned parents, dedicated Sunday school teachers and volunteers, congregation members, and children's ministry leaders from a diverse mix of congregations throughout the Greater Milwaukee Synod, Waukesha County, and surrounding communities.



With the information gathering process completed, the council and steering committee proposed changes to worship times and prepared to begin the search for a new Sunday school director. Considering a variety of options, the council and steering committee inquired if I would be interested in reshaping my position from Director of Youth Ministries to Director of Faith Formation. Presented with the opportunity to develop a comprehensive children, youth, and family faith formation ministry, I gratefully accepted.

A guiding mission statement was created and that has helped shape our current Children's Ministry program, and, throughout the month of August, glimpses of the new program were shared with the congregation in a series of Faith Formation Focus moments. The response to the new proposed direction was extremely positive, and, on Rally Day, September 13, 2015, a new chapter in Ascension's Children's Ministry was successfully launched. Some highlights of the new program are: immersive teacher training; cross+generational, lectionary-based, highly interactive curriculum customized for each age group; integration of music and puppet ministries; service-learning opportunities for all ages; resources for parents and families; improved communication; a new teacher resource center; connection to worship; and more. Led by the Holy Spirit, we are pleased with this new direction, yet we will continue to evaluate and re-evaluate the effectiveness of the new program at helping students and adults live a vibrant faith life and pass faith across the generations.

CRASH

Building on the energy and excitement leading up to and experienced at the ELCA Youth Gathering in Detroit this past summer, and inspired by initiatives learned from the Gathering, CRASH continues to reshape its identity to remain an important and relevant presence in the lives of Ascension's teenagers.



While CRASH is primarily focused at students in 9th – 12th grades, considerable effort has gone into developing opportunities that honor relationships across multiple generations and that engage the diversity of the world around them. The faith development of students is encouraged through Sunday night youth group, service opportunities with organizations like the Milwaukee Rescue Mission and Hope Center, fun events like rock climbing and laser tag, special anti-bullying events, participation in Ascension's Mime group, adventure/service based trips and retreats coordinated with partner and local congregations, and many other opportunities. Special attention is also given to encounter teens in the places outside of church where students are engaged in their daily lives: sporting events, concerts, plays, and sometimes just hanging out at Starbucks for coffee. Every opportunity is taken to remind students who they are and whose they are.

JOLT

Ascension's high-energy, relational focused confirmation program for junior high students continues to be led by Pastor Chris, with the support of several adult volunteers including myself. JOLT meets Thursday evenings from October–April and then culminates with the highly anticipated Adventure Camp in mid June.

Thursday evening JOLT gatherings are filled with fun, fellowship, and small groups that explore how our lives intersect God's story for the world. This year, with intentionality toward drawing our student communities and their families closer together, several service-learning and exciting fellowship events are also being offered. Adventure Camp is four fun-filled days of whitewater rafting, high-ropes challenges, and much more and offers students the opportunity to be challenged, affirmed, supported, and celebrated in a fun, Christ-centered environment away from the distractions and stresses of everyday life.

This journey of faith formation is specifically designed to excite students about their faith, involve them in the life of the church and the communities around them, but most importantly, remind them of the great love God has for them and the world.

Although we briefly pause to reflect on the amazing ways God has blessed the faith formation journey for Ascension's children, youth and their families, we look forward with anticipation and excitement for the countless ways the Holy Spirit will stir up a curious passion to discover God's amazing story of love for their lives and the world. And so it is with great joy, deep appreciation, and a humble heart that I say thank you for entrusting these ministries to me as Director of Faith Formation.

Tony Acompanado, Director of Faith Formation



Caring Relationships

The Caring Relationships Wing is comprised of Care Ministries, small groups, and many different social ministries at Ascension.

CARE MINISTRIES

The great thing in this world is not so much where we stand, as in what direction we are moving...we have some wonderful ministries moving in our Care Ministries this year and we have so much to be thankful for as they are changing the lives of many in our congregation and community.

Not only have we focused on the growth in each of our ministries, but in 2015, we have provided programs that enrich health and wellness in our community.

- We have an active group of men and women who have participated in yoga and tai chi.
- We continue to offer monthly blood pressure monitoring between services. We have a group of health professionals from Ascension who volunteer their services each month.
- We have hosted blood drives and flu vaccine clinics.
- Care Ministries provided informative professionals to speak on living wills, estate planning, and Social Security.
- Brenda attended GrapeVine workshops this past summer in order to provide presentations in Winter 2015 and 2016 on evidence-based, health-related topics for our congregation. One of our presentations will be on the *Healthy Aging Brain* and the effects of dementia and Alzheimer's in our lives.
- We held three Red Cross babysitting classes for teens in June and August. We certified a total of 28 teens in CPR, first-aid, and childcare.
- We sponsored an AARP Safe Driving class this past spring.

So many people are suffering with grief and loss. Families are fractured and broken in divorce. Care Ministries has reached out into the community and invited many people into our church for these programs, at the same time, accommodating our members in need. We have several ministries providing care and support for people in the midst of turmoil and grief.

- **GriefShare** is a ministry for those that have suffered loss of loved ones. Pastor Angela is the facilitator this fall and we have had up to 15 participants in each session. This is the third time Care Ministries has offered GriefShare. Many participants find comfort by connecting with others that are grieving and knowing that God is there through their difficult times. After GriefShare Spring 2015, Pastor Angela created a Bible study called HOPE (Healing Our Pain...Eventually). This group consisted of eight members who met monthly throughout the summer.
- **DivorceCare** is a new ministry for people dealing with the effects of divorce. Kathy Kuhn facilitates, and we have had 5-6 participants. DivorceCare offers support to a group of people that feel like their lives have been turned upside down. This faith-based program gives them tools to help put their lives back together.
- **DivorceCare 4 Kids (DC4K)** is a new ministry, which focuses on children. Pam Hamm is the facilitator. We have four active participants ranging in age from 6-10 years-old. These children struggle with the effects of divorce in their lives. Many are grappling with anxiety and school issues and are happy to be with other children who share common experiences and stresses. We have made this program a "safe place" to share their feelings: a participant's mom shared that her son has not had any "anger outbursts" since he started this DC4K program. These children can feel isolated in the process of divorce, and DC4K helps children learn that they are never alone with God in their lives.
- **Meals for GriefShare, DivorceCare, and DC4K:** Ascension volunteers have provided meals for our GriefShare and DivorceCare participants. All meals for the 12 week duration of the programs have been provided by Ascension small groups and ministries.

TOUCH A HEART MINISTRIES

- Meal Ministry, leader Iva Richards: Since January, 41 meals were delivered to families/individuals by the cooks from Care Ministries Meal Ministry. Thirteen volunteers were kept busy.
- Home Visitation, leader Beth Hoffmann
- Prayer Shawl Ministry, leader Barbara VanVoohris: 12 prayer shawls were gifted to our spring session GriefShare participants to help heal their grief and 15 prayer shawls are being made for the fall group.
- Baby Blanket Ministry, leader Sue Mathews
- Transportation Ministry, leader Judy Franke
- Crosses for Christ, leader Joan Birner
- Spiritual Care Ministry, leader Kay Stone: A new ministry that helps to make a spiritual connection with Ascension members whether hospitalized, in a rehab facility, or homebound. The first Spiritual Care Ministry bags were delivered in Dec. 2014 to our homebound members by our lay ministers, and the response was very positive. Starting in Jan. 2015, the Spiritual Care bags were given to hospitalized members, and so far, 33 bags have been given to adults and three bags to children.
- Living Letters Ministry, leader Linda Hansen: Cards are sent to many Ascension members both monthly and for one time occasions. "Thinking of You" cards were sent to military servicemen, GriefShare and DivorceCare participants, homebound members, and cancer survivors. "Welcome" cards were sent to both new members and new staff. "Congratulations" cards were sent for first communion, confirmation, and graduation. Additionally, "Thank You" cards were sent out to worship leaders, Mime ministry participants and helpers, Sunday school teachers, the Altar Group, youth trip chaperones, small group leaders, and Christmas concert participants. Living Letters also provides cards to other ministries for their use as requested.
- Sunshine Ministry, leader Lin Wollschlager: This ministry uplifts the spirits of our Ascension families that are hospitalized, those in need of encouragement, have a new baby, or are experiencing bereavement.



MILITARY FAMILY MINISTRY -- Leader Sheri Greger: The Military Ministry has a mission to support military families connected to our church and provides outreach to servicemen and women in our community. The following list highlights some of the activities we were involved in over the past year: Military Ministry sponsored a care package collection drive for servicemen and women in Sept.-Oct. 2015. It has helped to properly dispose of tattered or old flags. Flags were displayed lining the Ascension sidewalks on Memorial Day. In June, a group of Ascension members gathered at Mitchell International Airport to welcome back WWI and Korean War Veterans participating in the Stars and Stripes Honor Flight. June 6, 2015 was the 71st anniversary of D-Day. It was an exciting and humbling experience as the veterans were welcomed back home. Military Ministry is partnering with the Knit Wits and Living Letters to provide support to our veterans and enlisted service personnel as well. The Knit Wits are making baby blankets for the USO new moms as well as working on lap-ghans for local veterans. Living Letters is making cards to send to our current serving military. Recognition on Veteran's day will take place with patriotic carnations on Nov. 15.

COLLEGE CARE MINISTRY -- Leader Becky Klotz: This ministry organizes the collection and packing of care packages to send to Ascension's college students. The packages arrive before final exams. The collection takes place in November.

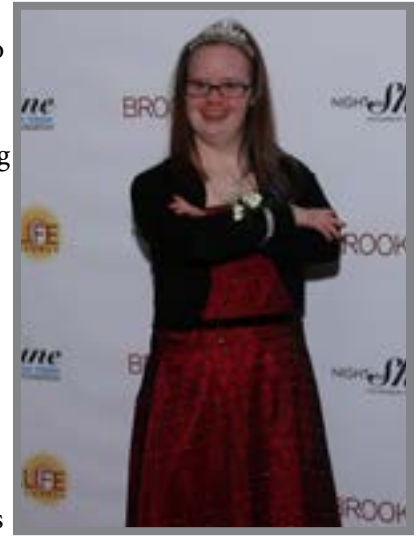
NEW LIFE MINISTRY -- Leader Kay Stone: Baskets are assembled and given out to Ascension's newest babies. The Knit Wits crochet and donate hats, mittens, and booties for the newborns. This ministry spans across generations to include our youngest children.

Reflecting

SPECIAL FRIENDS -- Leader Marge Schroeder: This group provides activity and fellowship to those in our congregation who have physical or mental challenges. It has members ranging from 5 years-old to 45 year-old. They come together and learn “that respect, care and love must be shared, for it’s only through sharing that friendships are born.”

Special Friends offers a range fellowship opportunities: Touch of Glaze, Country Springs Water Park, Bowling at Sunset Bowl, Green Meadows Petting Zoo, picnic and boating at Pewaukee Lake, miniature golf, AppleFest at Retzer Nature Center, Milwaukee County Zoo trick or treat Spooktacular, and the Waukesha Christmas parade. Special Friends has also tried many new activities this past year including a Holy Hill tour (Basilica of the National Shrine of Mary Help of Christians) and picnic, laser tag, Horwitz Planetarium, the Salvation Army Feed the Kids service project, and a trip to Green Meadows Petting Farm with the CRASH kids.

In addition to their own events, Special Friends joins with other groups such as the Tim Tebow Prom, the Medical College sports activities, and various special needs dances in Waterford.



BEREAVEMENT -- Leader Bob Grady: Mailings are sent out to families that suffered loss at one month, three months, six months, and one year, and at the first Christmas without a loved one.

YOUNG AT HEART -- Leaders Arlene Davis, Celeste Defenbaugh, and Beth Hoffmann: Young at Heart is a dynamic group of age 55 and older who like to get together once a month. They enjoy potlucks, entertainment activities, speakers, and card/board games. They take bus trips and involve themselves with service projects for the community.

PASTORAL ASSISTANTS -- Iva Richards, Bonnie Thiesenhusen, Sally Wagner, Paul Wehmeier, and Jim Hahn: Bill Rudd stepped down from his Pastoral Assistant role. Ascension thanks him for his 13-14 years of service. Each Pastoral Assistant visits Ascension members in the hospital on their designated day of the week. They also make monthly visits to our homebound members. They provide prayers, communion, and comfort to those in need.



Brenda Lytle, Director of Care Ministries

SMALL GROUP MINISTRY

Small Group Leadership Team: Pr. Angela Khabeb, Craig Greenwood, Noel Leopold, Kathy Riutta, Deborah Scheffler, and Karen Schmiechen. Pr. Angela is acting as the small groups leader until we can identify a new lay leader. Our 2015 Fall Campaign focused on engaging scripture through a Lutheran lens. Our resource was *How Lutherans Interpret the Bible*. The Small Group Leadership Team is excited to remind Ascension that as Lutherans, we have wonderful gifts to offer the body of Christ. We are engaging the sacred texts with a prominent Lutheran Theologian, Dr. Mark Allan Powell, who is a Lutheran



pastor and Bible professor at Trinity Lutheran Seminary. The campaign was a six-week video series that invited us to explore important questions about Lutherans and the Bible. We had ten groups and 170 participants. Pr. Angela also started a small group on Sunday nights during the campaign.

The Small Group Leadership Team has also branched out to the Adult Education time between services. Pr. Angela led an abbreviated session of *How Lutherans Interpret the Bible*. We have enjoyed lively discussions and segments of the Powell's videos. The Daniel Plan is also part of the life of Small Groups Ministry and there will be an Adult Education opportunity for the congregation to learn more about what The Daniel Plan has to offer.

SOCIAL MINISTRIES

There are numerous Ascension ministries that are more social in nature, which involve groups of people with similar interests gathering to support and plan volunteer activities for our church and community such as the Quilters and Crafters, Knit Wits, Girlfriends, Dining Divas, Supermoms, and the AMEN Men's Ministries.

SUPERMOMS -- Leader Jessica Jahner: Supermoms continue to grow and learn with the new Supermoms Committee. The leadership roles have evolved over the past year as they move forward with the future of Supermoms.

The annual rummage sale was held in spring 2015 and was a great success. With the monies raised from this year and years past, Supermoms held the first annual Groovin' in the Garden event in August. A potluck-style dinner with the "main course" provided by Supermoms and grilled by Amen provided fellowship amongst all who attended. The main event was a concert by our very own Ben Janzow and Dirty Boogie. Even though the weather didn't wholly cooperate, all who came enjoyed a more intimate gathering in the narthex.

Other activities Supermoms organized this year included a Fall Campaign small group, a holiday gift exchange, a cookie exchange at Martha Merrell's, and an Easter egg hunt. For the future, Supermoms hopes to continue to create fellowship and spiritual growth opportunities for mothers and children of Ascension.

In the next year, Supermoms hopes specifically to do more to connect the members as well as the activities of Supermoms to other ministries at Ascension. Supermoms looks forward to organizing and planning Fall Fest with other fellow ministries for Fall 2016.

AMEN MEN'S MINISTRY -- Leader Kurt Burie: AMEN continues to provide opportunities for the men of Ascension to strengthen their faith, serve their community and church and have a good time with other members of Ascension.

Christ's Light

AMEN Ministries continued several Bible study group opportunities for men. Regular Bible study groups meet every Monday evening and Tuesday mornings. AMEN also offered a special Holy Week Bible study and a small group Bible study that aligned with the church's Fall Campaign. Additionally, AMEN sold tickets to the annual No Regrets men's conference hosted at Elmbrook Church in February and promoted the event throughout the church.

During the summer months, AMEN Ministries hosted grill-outs after every outdoor service to provide the members of Ascension a good time while enjoying each other's company. In August, AMEN sponsored a father/son camping trip at Ottawa Lake State Park. Participants enjoyed time with each other and each father/son team was provided a devotional activity to work on during the weekend.

AMEN actively reached out to the community in many ways including sponsoring a prison ministry book/Bible/devotional material drive for two local correctional institutes in which reading material was collected and distributed by members of AMEN. Additionally, members of the Monday evening men's Bible study group began providing meals every Wednesday evening in 2015 to the residents of the Siena House in Waukesha. Every Wednesday, several volunteers would provide food and beverages to the residents and in the summer months they would grill out with the residents. AMEN Ministries also volunteered at Hope Center serving Friday evening meals and leading the pre-meal prayer.

KNIT WITS -- Leader Maddie Goetter: This group of about 75 women from Ascension and the community enjoy knitting, crocheting, and looming and want to help others. Their mission is to help keep the less-fortunate warm one stitch at a time, so they make hats, lap blankets, baby items, and other winter accessories for charity.

The Knit Wits take an active role in some of Ascension's other ministries such as the Military Ministry and the New Life Ministry. They provide baby items such as blankets, hats, mitts, and booties to new military moms in WI and they make lap blankets for veterans at the VA Center in Milwaukee. They make hat-booties-and-mitten sets for the New Life Ministry and create Angel Blankets for families grieving the death of an infant.

Knit Wits also continues to make hats and scarves for local charities, such as our partner Cross Church, the Salvation Army, Hope Center, Hebron House, and Waukesha's Christmas Clearing Council.

DINING DIVAS - Leader: Sandie Pfeiffer This group of women gathers every 5-6 weeks for friendship and fellowship to try different restaurants around the Waukesha County area and is open to any woman interested in dining together. The group has tried numerous restaurants over the past few years including Bonefish Grill, Vino Cappuccino, Fish Bones, Five Generations, People's Park, 8-12, Clarke Irish Inn, and, most recently, Cooper's Hawk.

Becky Klotz, Wing Leader

Mission Outreach

This past year, the Mission Outreach committee continued to study the best ways to do mission outreach. We used recently published and widely-accepted books, contacted other congregations within the Greater Milwaukee Synod, and used reports from the ELCA. Our goal is to be sure that the outreach we provide is truly helping people and not doing what makes us feel good but may actually be harming those who need us.

ELCA AND GREATER MILWAUKEE SYNOD

We continue to support the ELCA and the Greater Milwaukee Synod through our financial means. When we work together with the national church body, we can be a part of a great mission with proven results. During this year, the ELCA met their goals for the malaria campaign. Through the financial backing of the ELCA, this dreaded disease is being conquered. As members of the ELCA, we are called to respond to the fact that 1 in 8 people in our world do not have adequate food. Working with and through our congregations, ELCA World Hunger is uniquely positioned to reach communities in need. From health clinics to microloans, water wells to animal husbandry, community meals to advocacy, gifts to ELCA World Hunger make it possible for the ELCA to respond, supporting sustainable solutions that get at the root causes of hunger and poverty. Lutheran Disaster Response brings God's hope, healing and renewal to people whose lives have been disrupted by disasters in the United States and around the world. In partnership with Lutheran congregations and Lutheran social ministry organizations, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service has welcomed more than 379,000 refugees to the United States since 1939. This ongoing partnership and work is driven by God's love for all people and a vision for congregations to be welcoming and generous centers for mission and ministry



OUTREACH FOR HOPE supports life-giving ministries with the poor in communities of the Greater Milwaukee Synod. These ministries not only provide help with daily necessities, but most importantly, they are centers in the heart of their communities for providing transformation and hope. Ascension has been integral to the success of the Outreach for Hope Bike Ride. This year, they surpassed the goal of raising \$120,000 and are currently at \$150,000. More than 45 Ascension members participated either as volunteers, riders, or sponsors. Ascension also had a strong participation in the Outreach for Hope Lenten Devotions, a Dollar a Day for Poverty.

REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT: Mission Outreach continues to support the refugees who have come to our area. Two refugees became US citizens this year. There are now 28 US citizens among the 85 Burmese refugees in the Waukesha group. We are awaiting word on a new family.

OUR PARTNERSHIPS

Ascension practices the accompaniment model with our partnerships. Our partners are based on the ELCA Companion Synod recommendations. "When companions engage one another in authentic relationships, everyone's lives are changed." We are a church that believes God is calling us into the world — together. Companion church relationships enrich and deepen our ministries by exposing us to global challenges and perspectives as we seek to work with one another to build up the body of Christ and the world (from ELCA). Ascension members serve on the synod committees for all of our partners.

EL SALVADOR PARTNERSHIP: This year has been an exciting year for our partnership with the Lutheran Church of El Salvador. From April 6-12, twelve Ascension travelers along with ten from Lake Park Church, Milwaukee and four from Grace Lutheran, Thiensville traveled to El Salvador. This trip provided an opportunity to get to know our partners at San Jorge and to walk more closely with them in their ministry. Delegates were also able to meet the scholarship students sponsored by Ascension in Rutilio Grande and visit the agroferreteria that Ascension helped establish. Together with our Salvadoran brothers and sisters, delegates worshiped together, created together, learned together, sometimes cried together, and often laughed together. Throughout the trip, all grew in faith together. They sang together, worshiped together, cried together at the memorials, cooked and ate together, played together and even did the chicken dance together. What fun! What love! What joy! All realized

that language does not have to be a barrier to Christian love. We share the same God, the same saving faith in Jesus regardless of where we live, the color of our skin, the language we speak. We are all part of God's family and now we will build on the relationships that were established.

In order for all of Ascension to feel more a part of the trip, there was a Virtual Mission Trip experience provided. Each week there were ways to learn more about El Salvador and our partnership so that the entire congregation can feel more connected to our partners. One of the events was a dinner and a showing of the film *Romero*, which depicts the ministry of Arch Bishop Oscar Romero during the civil war in El Salvador. Bishop Romero was recently named to sainthood within the Catholic Church for his deep rooted conviction to the faith. There was a great response from Ascension members and friends from other congregations.



Pastor Michelle from Cross Lutheran Church participated in the mission trip. Her presence was a way to build both our partnership in El Salvador and our partnership with Cross. The history of Cross/El Salvador/Ascension dates back to the years of the Salvadoran civil war when Cross served as a sanctuary for Salvadorans and Ascension, as a sister congregation supported their efforts.

We continue to grow in our partnership with San Jorge and are starting to share prayer requests on a more regular basis while also looking for ways to develop the partnership more fully.

MERU DIOCESE OF TANZANIA PARTNERSHIP: Our main focus for our partnership with Tanzania has been the Meru Coffee Project. Coffee Project's mission is to develop and grow justice-based relationships, building on fair prices and practices between the Meru coffee growers and coffee consumers. The Mt. Meru coffee project's objectives are to encourage economic and social justice - empowering the small coffee farmer and the people of the Meru region with the capacity to improve their standard of living. Economic Justice is achieved when the Project provides farmers with a fair price for their high quality coffee. A fair price provides a sustainable farm income and boosts local farm village economies. Social Justice is achieved when Project generated funds are used to upgrade coffee growing practices, improve processing facilities and equipment, and provide short term micro loan services for the small coffee farmers. A fair price allows the farmer to support their families with dignity, send their children to school, access and pay for health care, and have funds needed to improve agricultural practices. Ascension uses Meru coffee for all fellowship and service events and has it available for sale both by the cup and in take-home bags to support the project.

Ascension along with other congregations in the Greater Milwaukee Synod supports the Tanzania Water Project. Clean water is one of the most powerful ways to make change in the world. When families have access to safe water they are healthier and stronger. Women and children have more time for work and school. And they earn more money and secure better opportunities for the future.

The Greater Milwaukee Synod, El Salvador, and Mt. Meru teams considering forming a sub-committee to look at building increased unity in what we do with our global partners

Saint Luke's Church is much more involved with Meru than they are with El Salvador, with hopes to gradually increase their level of involvement with El Salvador. They are interested in our two congregations working together with our approach to our global partners. We will share experiences and work together on our global mission events.

The synod and Global Missions sponsored a youth from Tanzania and El Salvador to attend the National Youth Gathering. The youth were in Milwaukee from July 3-14 prior to the Youth

Gathering and Ascension was able to host them in Waukesha for the July 4th week-end to experience the American celebration. They were able to join in worship and an Ascension youth event.

The Greater Milwaukee Synod is hosted a delegation from Mt. Meru in October. Ascension was able to host Pastor Lema for a day of worship. He preached on Oct. 18 and led the Adult Education hour, sharing about the Tanzanian Lutheran Church.

Ascension hosted the Stubbs family as they joined us for an evening of food, music, and sharing about their ministry on July 8. Randy Stubbs is from Tumaini University Makumira which is operated by the Lutheran Church of Tanzania. The entire family shared beautiful music and their work at the university. As one of their supporting congregations, Ascension was blessed by their music.



CROSS PARTNERSHIP: Ascension's relationship with Cross Lutheran Church in Milwaukee has been a blessing for more than 35 years. Ascension walks with Cross in many ways. Through Cross' Bread of Healing Empowerment Ministry, members of Ascension prepare and serve lunch side by side with Cross members. We also support their food pantry and share in worship exchanges. This year, we encouraged small groups to challenge one another in our Souper Bowl Challenge by collecting canned soup. We collected 602 cans of soup! We also did a Fill the Bag campaign and were able to fill 49 grocery bags. During October, we collected Mac and Cheese for our Mactober campaign to build Mt. Macaroni. We had two shared worship experiences and are looking to increase this participation. Ascension had a great participation in Cross's Mardi Gras, a major fundraiser, supporting their neighborhood ministries and a way for partners to celebrate the success of working together.

IN OUR OWN BACKYARD

This part of Mission Outreach (MO) has three distinctive and important aspects:

1. Mission Outreach provides information and encourages volunteering and donations to our local community programs that provide for those most needy in our community. Many individuals and small groups have participated in volunteer efforts within the community. MO helps link small groups and other members to community needs. MO can also be a resource to those in our congregation who may need to connect with community resources. During this year, small groups served meals at homeless shelters, collected personal items for the Food Pantry, provided volunteer hours at the Food Pantry and at Hope Center, donated clothing items to Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, and participated in a Habitat Build.
2. Mission Outreach has made a commitment to truly do ministry in our neighborhood. We are discussing ways to do this in the most meaningful way. Wing leaders have been a part of this discussion. We welcome others to become part of the conversation as we move forward in this new outreach effort. This will take congregational commitment.
3. Ascension works through SOPHIA on social justice issues. Through education, listening sessions, and tasks SOPHIA strives to bring about changes that provide justice and dignity to all.

Mission Outreach has developed a Facebook page to highlight MO wing activities and ELCA and Greater Milwaukee Synod mission activities.

Shirley Wehmeier, Wing Leader

Council President

We said goodbye to outgoing council members with much appreciation and respect for all their hard work and dedication to serving in this leadership role. We welcomed the incoming council members during our February meeting with a potluck and orientation. We shared much excitement and hope for the future of Ascension. There was a strong feeling of having reached a very good place after a number of years of transition.

2014's Leadership Retreat had given us a vision for our church for the coming years. We had great ideas for moving our church forward. None of us had any planning skills to tackle this elephant and I feel God saw that and blessed us with Craig Greenwood. He has the gifts necessary to be an excellent facilitator along with a passion and love for God and Ascension. This combination and his willingness to lead us taught us that we could eat the elephant one bite at a time and all the way down to the bone. We had several conversations and a well thought out plan even before our 2015 Leadership Retreat. A strategy was set up to align council members with each Wing Leader, and the majority of the retreat was spent brainstorming ideas for moving the church forward in the next ten years, thus the Vision ARISE 2025 truly kicked off.



Besides spending a significant amount of time at each of our council meetings with Craig on ARISE 2025, council members and Wing Leaders met to plan the Current and Envisioned States of each wing and the Planned Outcomes to accomplish states. At the time of this writing, we have had the first Listening Session with the congregation and will be compiling their input. The intention will be to look at this input and have a second Listening Session before the blessing by the congregation at the November meeting.

While ARISE 2025 has not formally been rolled out, pieces of Ascension's vision have already been put in place. We have seen the past year's hard work by teachers, parents, and a planning committee evolve into an exciting new education program for our children. There have been changes in our church service schedule to benefit the littlest members of Ascension along with the adults. The hour in-between services allows for adult education programs, for ministries to meet, for fellowship, and Children's Education (what had been known as Sunday School). We have only just begun to realize the possibilities for this new and exciting format!

I have come to know and work with some of our church's finest members and while these three years have come with some challenges, I feel I have really been blessed and honored to have become a small part of Ascension history.

Nada Draeger, Council President

Communications

PICTORIAL DIRECTORY

The major project of the Communications Leg Leader was to coordinate the Ascension Pictorial Directory. This project was done in-house by member volunteers. Members were encouraged to pre-register either on-line or in-person. Walk-ins were also welcomed. As of Sept. 27, we have over one-third of the entire membership families' pictures taken, which has already exceeded the previous directory percentage from 2010. Nearly one-third of the pictures taken were families whom did not pre-register but took advantage of the "walk-in" option. We have also updated nearly one-half of the members' contact information during this project. I'd like to extend my personal thank you to the following volunteers whose efforts are greatly appreciated: Jerry Kilgore (photographer), Elaine Kilgore, Maddie Goetter, Susan Koefel, Sandie Pfeiffer, Caroline Inglefield, Nickie Fuller and Cindy Finn (registration and contact record updates). Also, a huge thank you to the office staff for their help in putting the information together using our CMS software. The final publication will be done in-house at quite a savings compared to using a professional photography company.



LEADERSHIP TEAM BULLETIN BOARD

The Leadership team photo bulletin board is updated as new team members are added or positions change. This bulletin board has provided help for both current and prospective members as well as guests who may want to speak with any of the team members with questions or comments. As of October, the office staff has taken over this project and will no longer fall within the job description of the Communications Leg Leader position.

WEBSITE/E-Alert

Ascension's website and e-alerts have made a huge improvement in communications within our congregation. Website updates, including videos of recent sermons, monthly calendar, and upcoming events are available on our website. A huge thank you to Kate Mattson for maintaining our website. Check it out at <http://ascensionelca.org/>.

NAMETAG SUNDAY

In an effort to familiarize our worshipers with one another, congregational members and guests were asked to wear nametags as they entered for worship services in mid-September. Leadership team members and worship leaders are also continuing to wear nametags each Sunday which is very helpful to members and guests alike.

I would like to thank all those who've assisted in the Communications area during my tenure as Communications Leg Leader. I have been blessed and feel honored to have served in this position for the past four years. May God continue to bless our Ascension family.

Linda Elder, Leg Leader

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