



Ascension
LUTHERAN CHURCH
ELCA
December 2015

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THE *Ascension* NEWSLETTER



Ascension
LUTHERAN CHURCH
ELCA



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MONDAY - THURSDAY

9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

FRIDAY

9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

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ALMOST THERE

Pastor Chris Marien



Advent has come to us. Anticipation, expectation, promise, fear, doubt, sorrow, and joy make their presence known in these days that lead us to the manger. I am grateful for their companionship on the journey to Bethlehem. Last year, Amy Grant and Michael W. Smith wrote the song *Almost There* for Christmas. It has stuck with me since then, and I am happy to share the words with you this day.

Mary, full of innocence	Trust the Father to provide
Carrying the Holy prince	Bread of heaven prophesied
You're almost there, you're almost there	You're almost there, you're almost there
Mother of the Living Word	You're almost where the waiting ends
Trusting in the voice you heard	Delivering the life within
You're almost there, you're almost there	The answered prayer, Emmanuel
You're almost where the angels see	You're almost there
Redemption's plan unfolding	You're almost where the journey ends
All hope is in the Son you'll bear	Where death will die and life begins
You're almost there	The answered prayer, Emmanuel
A lonely road, a willing heart	You're almost, almost there.
Pray for strength to do your part	
You're almost there, you're almost there	

I have held on to this quote as we have entered these days of Advent. I share the quote with you to remind all of us that God is not content to be contained in our self-made boxes.

God travels wonderful ways with human beings, but he does not comply with the views and opinions of people. God does not go the way that people want to prescribe for him; rather, his way is beyond all comprehension, free and self-determined beyond all proof. Where reason is indignant, where our nature rebels, where our piety anxiously keeps us away: that is precisely where God loves to be. There he confounds the reason of the reasonable; there he aggravates our nature, our piety—that is where he wants to be, and no one can keep him from it. Only the humble believe him and rejoice that God is so free and so marvelous that he does wonders where people despair, that he takes what is little and lowly and makes it marvelous. And that is the wonder of all wonders, that God loves the lowly....God is not ashamed of the lowliness of human beings. God marches right in. He chooses people as his instruments and performs his wonders where one would least expect them. God is near to lowliness; he loves the lost, the neglected, the unseemly, the excluded, the weak and broken.

These are the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book *God is in the Manger*. (Please forgive the masculine pronouns Bonhoeffer uses). These words are my reminder that the journey we travel in Advent is often a time of reflection and a bit of wandering about in the more definite journey of faith we travel to the cross and the empty tomb.

In my Advent journey, I can often find myself working to be present in the moment for fear that I forget that the waiting and the surprise of these Advent days is exactly where God will find me and share with me once again the wonder of the miracle of a baby born in Bethlehem.

Blessings on your journey in this season.



JESUS IS COMING. JESUS IS HERE!

Pastor Angela Khabebe

December is here and that means Christmas is coming. Nativity scenes are blossoming in our neighborhoods while the story of the birth of the Christ child is close to our hearts. Along with the shepherds and the wise men, we come to adore the newborn King. But, before we join our voices with the angels singing, “Glory to God in the highest,” we enter into the season of Advent. The liturgical season of Advent is about waiting for the coming of the Lord --the coming of the Lord that happened 2000 years ago on Christmas morning and the coming of the Lord that is yet to occur. As we wait, we prepare our hearts for Jesus’ coming. In Advent, we are on a journey. We are travelling to Bethlehem, to meet the Messiah in the manger. Throughout this season, the lectionary readings offer us a rich tapestry. Through God’s word we are swept together in the comforting yet challenging reality of “already” and “not yet.” Yes, Jesus has “already” come to earth to redeem humanity. But Christ’s final return is “not yet.” So we, like the original hearers of the gospel of Luke, are admonished to stay awake and be on guard. Through Luke’s gospel we enter this cycle of waiting, expecting, and preparing.

Fortunately, I have enjoyed an extremely active and vibrant faith life even as a very young girl. However, Advent was not part of my worship experience until I joined the Lutheran church. As much as I have tried to connect with the worshipful elements of Advent, I am still unable to fully appreciate this liturgical season. Please understand, I graduated from a Lutheran college and attended the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, therefore, I have been thoroughly Lutheran-ized. But even though I have preached many Advent sermons - waiting, expecting, preparing - I often feel like an Advent outsider. It’s almost as if I’m standing outside of the Advent window with my nose pressed against the glass. I have a pretty good view of what’s going on but I’m far from present.

Have you ever had the experience of someone from outside of your family noticing something that your family does that seems strange to them, but completely normal to you? Then, after the individual articulates the oddity, you begin to realize they may have a point. For example when my husband, Benhi, and I returned from Namibia, we lived with my parents. It didn’t take long for Benhi to notice things about his peculiar in-laws. I was always fairly sure that my family was unique, even a little crazy. I’m sure you’re familiar with the expression “Can’t see the forest for the trees.” Well, often I couldn’t see the craziness for the normalcy. Benhi’s favorite example is my mother’s strange dishwashing ritual. First we fill both sinks - one with soapy water and the other with clear rinse water then we completely wash the dishes. Next we load the perfectly clean dishes into the dishwasher and we run the entire cycle. This is the way we’ve always done it. But of course, as Benhi was quick to point out, this practice doesn’t make a whole lot of sense. I had no explanation to offer him and I never really thought it was weird until he mentioned it. For me, I guess the season of Advent is similar to Mom’s dishwashing routine for Benhi. I know this is a silly analogy. But perhaps since I wasn’t raised observing Advent, it is especially challenging for me to fully connect with this time-honored tradition. Certainly, I embrace our Lutheran heritage. However, I find myself questioning the significance of Advent.

During the Holiday Season, especially the month of December, as temperatures grow colder, hearts grow warmer. As the ground begins to harden and freeze, hearts begin to awaken and rekindle. People with little to no faith commitment open their spirits to kindness and generosity. It’s as if our society is drawn toward the Messiah in the manger. Yet, in an

effort to be counter-cultural, the church chooses to wait. From my vantage point, it seems as if the church is forfeiting a prime opportunity to lead by example. We wait. And as we wait, the narrow holiday window closes. We miss a time when society celebrates humanity, loves neighbors and strangers. Yet we, the church, wait. We wait while people with no religious connections are intentional about acting in selfless sacrifice. People go to their local grocery stores to purchase hundreds of dollars of food for complete strangers. Meanwhile the church is waiting and expecting. Recently, I read about a wealthy man who gifted the purchase of an engagement ring for a military couple to the tune of \$10,000. But, for now, the church waits and prepares. Even secular news shows send journalists to stores to pay off random people's layaway accounts. They are following Christ's commandment to love the neighbor - even if it is only for a short while.



Is the church missing an opportunity to be relevant, to be kind, to be Jesus in a broken and hurting world? I'm not just talking about consumerism (although this is a capitalist economy) I'm talking about an opportunity for us to be relevant in the lives of many people who would probably not even enter a church. I wonder what would happen if a 'seeker' came to church in December looking for Christmas only to find Advent? The world around us is celebrating the newborn King. They are firmly (albeit briefly) clinging to the manger of the Christ child with both hands. And whether the secular world knows it or not, their kindness comes from the Holy Spirit moving in and through their hearts and hands. And as these individuals share the love of Christ - even if by accident - we, the church, insist on waiting. Then, finally, after we walk the Advent journey we are allowed to celebrate Christmas for 12 days. But by this time, the world is dangerously close to returning to business as usual.

Listen, I embrace our call as Christians to be countercultural. Yes, we are called to be in this world but not of it. However, I wonder if the secular world might be acting on Christ's commands, while the church is trailing four weeks behind? I remember when I worked at a homeless shelter. During the holiday season, the shelter was basically empty because people were less likely to evict someone during the holidays. The rest of the winter months were a different story. But there was a brief window where people were kinder, more generous, even to complete strangers. I'm convinced that this was the activity of the hidden hand of God. This is why I need more Merry Christmas and not less.

The good news for us today is the same good news the original hearers of Luke's gospel received. The good news for us is Jesus is coming! Jesus has come! Jesus will come! Jesus continues to come to us! Jesus came to us 2000 years ago, Jesus is coming to us in the last day. Jesus even comes to us moment by moment. Jesus is coming and Jesus is here.

Yes, Advent is an ancient tradition of the church. But is it the most relevant way to be Christ in our broken world? Of course we as Lutherans hold things in tension and perhaps this tension is a gift. But as we prepare and we wait, Jesus is already here. One thing I do know is that as believers we do not need to understand everything we are called to do as disciples. Certainly God's ways do not have to be logical to us especially as we relate to the secular world. So my heart remains open because God is always speaking and I ask that God would reveal to me the worshipful beauty of Advent. But until then, Merry Christmas! (Hopefully, the Advent authorities will not reprimand me for celebrating Christmas too early).



PASTOR CHRIS' FIVE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY

On Dec. 6, Ascension will be celebrate Pastor Chris and his five years of ministry with us. We invite everyone to join us in worship. Immediately following the 10:45 service, we will have a potluck lunch, where you will have the opportunity to share your stories and congratulate Pastor Chris. A sign-up for the potluck is in the narthex. If you wish to contribute to a gift, you may do so through the offering (please indicate *PC Gift* on the memo line or envelope) or through the church office. We are excited to begin this Advent season by celebrating the gifts God has given Ascension and for the Arise Vision 2025.



YOUR COUNCIL AT WORK

Nada Draeger, Council President

The Nov. 17 council meeting began with devotions. We welcomed and approved Patti Mueller as our new treasurer. She is finishing the current term (through Jan. 31, 2016) and then will begin her newly-appointed two year term. We also welcomed Sheri Greger as our new Spiritual Growth wing leader. The Time and Talent Survey did not receive the desired participation, but it is not too late to fill out the survey online, <http://tinyurl.com/Mission-MinistrySurvey>, or pick up one on the table outside the church office. If you haven't filled one out yet, is it because you are already involved in a ministry; or do you have questions about time commitments or details of a particular ministry? The council would like to know in order to improve the format or to help you to find an area that sparks your interest. Contact Nada Draeger with comments and questions, njdraeger@msn.com.

Council spent a lot of time reviewing church membership. Our constitution bylaws state that members who have not worshipped or communed in the past year may be considered for release. We approved the releasing of those members who have not attended Ascension since before 2013. Members who have been released may become active again by simply contacting the church office, admin@ascensionelca.org. Council discussed better ways to track attendance and decided that the easiest method is already in place, but is not used consistently - filling out the blue pew book. The pew book is particularly important if a worshiper does not use envelopes or electronic giving. It is our intention to reach out to any member who stops attending to let them know that they are being missed and to find out if we can be of any help.

On behalf of council, I would like to wish all of you a blessed and merry Christmas filled with special time with family and friends.

PASTORAL ACTS

Baptisms

November 1 Nora Lois Pfahler
November 8 Lacey Lyn Bushman
November 22 Aiden Daniel Cull

Funerals

November 5 Sandra Hausen

*For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.
~1 Corinthians 12:13~*

FINANCIAL REPORT

GENERAL FUND OCTOBER 31 YEAR-TO-DATE

Doug Bue, Acting Treasurer

Item	2015 Actual	2015 Plan	Variance to 2015 Plan	2014 Actual	Variance to 2014 Actual
Income					
Contributions	\$490,473	\$540,750	\$(50,277)	\$532,858	\$(42,385)
Rent, Interest, & Other Income	\$51,197	\$49,133	\$2,064	\$54,276	\$(3,079)
From Restricted Funds	\$57,999	\$57,857	\$142	\$8,173	\$49,826
Total Income	\$599,669	\$647,740	\$(48,071)	\$595,307	\$4,362
Expenses					
Communications	\$23,106	\$20,083	\$(3,023)	\$23,508	\$402
Facilities	\$122,449	\$119,164	\$(3,285)	\$131,577	\$9,128
Financial Development	\$80,913	\$80,995	\$82	\$80,965	\$52
Leadership Development	\$1,099	\$1,533	\$434	\$20,206	\$19,107
Administration	\$216,144	\$217,198	\$1,054	\$173,339	\$(42,805)
Caring Relationships	\$21,408	\$21,744	\$336	\$22,228	\$820
Joyful Worship	\$81,936	\$81,189	\$(747)	\$56,717	\$(25,219)
Mission Outreach	\$46,739	\$50,248	\$3,509	\$59,440	\$12,701
Spiritual Growth	\$68,493	\$80,010	\$11,517	\$73,336	\$4,843
Total Expenses	\$662,287	\$672,164	\$9,877	\$641,316	\$(20,971)
Surplus/(Deficit)	\$(62,618)	\$(24,424)	\$(38,194)	\$(46,009)	\$(16,609)
Mortgage Balance	\$781,171				
Restricted Funds Balance	\$156,729				
General Fund Balance	\$(54,988)				
Restricted Contributions	\$66,872				

WHAT THE NUMBERS MEAN

- Our general contributions are 9.3% behind plan for 2015, and they are 8% behind 2014 actual.
- Our bottom line is \$38,194 behind plan.
- Our general fund balance is currently at a loss of \$54,988.

ASCENSION 2016 MINISTRY SPENDING PLAN

The following plan was approved at our Nov. 8 congregational meeting.

- This plan requires a 3% to 4% increase in contributions over our current level of actual giving.
- Our mortgage will renew in April of 2016. The success of our debt reduction capital campaigns and new loan terms will combine to reduce our required mortgage payments.
- Our current staffing structure will continue to remain in place.

Item	2015 Plan	2016 Plan
Income		
Contributions	\$670,000	\$630,000
Rent, Interest, & Other Income	\$60,000	\$59,850
From Restricted Funds	\$69,428	\$58,000
Total Income	\$799,428	\$747,850
Expenses		
Communications	\$24,100	\$24,375
Facilities	\$135,016	\$130,100
Financial Development	\$97,162	\$62,541
Leadership Development	\$1,600	\$1,600
Administration	\$260,637	\$267,371
Caring Relationships	\$26,093	\$28,143
Joyful Worship	\$97,738	\$97,404
Mission Outreach	\$67,000	\$50,400
Spiritual Growth	\$96,382	\$85,463
Total Expenses	\$805,728	\$747,397
Surplus/(Deficit)	\$(6,300)	\$453

ASCENSION ARISE CAPITAL CAMPAIGN SUMMARY

- A October 31, 2015 we completed half of our 36 month campaign.
- Your contributions have helped to reduce our mortgage by \$131,840 to date in 2015.

Item	2014	2015	Total
Contributions	255,398	94,759	350,157
Campaign Costs	(44,730)	-	(44,730)
To General Fund for Principal	-	(22,119)	(22,119)
Principal Payments	(186,000)	(73,000)	(259,000)
Balance			24,308
Amount Pledged			573,332
Percent of Pledges Collected (18 months = 50% complete)			61.07%



ADVENT CHRISTMAS CONCERT/WORSHIP

Vicki Taylor, Director of Music Ministries

All creation join in praising God, the Father, Spirit, Son.
Evermore your voices raising to the eternal Three in One!

Come and worship, come and worship,

Worship Christ the newborn King!

~*Angels From the Realms of Glory*, words by James Montgomery

The term *advent* is defined as the arrival of a person, thing or event, and is derived from the Latin word meaning *coming*. Advent, then, is a season of waiting for the coming of Emmanuel, *God with us*. Advent is actually the start of a new church, or liturgical, year - another year filled with the hope and expectation that God will once again do wondrous things in our midst. We look back and celebrate Jesus' coming to a manger in Bethlehem long ago, and at the same time, look forward with anticipation to the day when Christ will come again.

Hope and Expectation is the theme for our annual Advent/Christmas concert worship services to be presented by the musicians of Ascension on Saturday, Dec. 12, at 6 p.m. and Sunday, Dec. 13, at 8:30 and 10:45 a.m. The Ascension Choir, Handbell Choir, Folk Choir, Praise Band, children's choirs, and instrumentalists invite you, your families, and your friends to *come and worship* on Dec. 12/13 as we approach this Christmas and a new year with *Hope and Expectation*.

DECEMBER WORSHIP TIMES

Dec. 2, 7 p.m. - Advent service

Dec. 12, 6 p.m. - Advent Concert Worship

Dec. 13, 8:30 & 10:45 a.m. - Advent Concert Worship

**Dec. 20, 8:30 & 10:45 a.m. - Children's Christmas
Pageant Worship**

Dec. 24, 2:30 p.m. - Children's Christmas Eve Worship

Dec. 24, 4, 5:30, & 11 p.m. - Christmas Eve Worship

Dec. 25, 10:30 a.m. - Christmas Day Worship

Dec. 27, 8:30 & 10:45 a.m. - Worship Services



PERUVIAN CHOIR VISIT

Coro Arpeggio Musical will sing during worship on Sunday, Jan. 31, followed by a concert at Ascension in the afternoon. The greater Waukesha community is invited to attend, and we are hoping to fill the sanctuary to capacity for this rare and exciting cultural opportunity.

Mission Outreach and Joyful Worship are co-sponsoring this event and are looking for support and assistance in the following ways:

- Consider opening your home to host members of the choir for two nights (Jan. 30/31). Please contact Vicki Taylor, vicki@ascensionelca.org, to sign up as a host family for two or more choir members.
- Spread the word! Plan to attend the concert and invite friends and neighbors to join you. Concert tickets go on sale in January.

Ascension looks forward to working together to welcome our guests from Peru!

THE LONGEST NIGHT

Pastor Angela Khabele

Singing cheerful songs to a person whose heart is heavy is as bad as stealing someone's jacket in cold weather or rubbing salt in a wound. ~Proverbs 25:20 NLT



The holiday season is quickly approaching and for many, the holidays are a festive time marked with joy and cheer. It is a time to spend with family and friends – a time to enjoy great food and spirited fellowship. For most people, this is their favorite part of the year and they have anticipated its arrival for months. For them, Christmas really will be merry. Unfortunately, this is not the case for everyone.

On the opposite end of the celebration spectrum, there are those who have been dreading the holidays. This time of year, they are confronted with challenging situations, painful memories, or heavy hearts. The reasons abound. Perhaps some have experienced the loss of a loved one and this will be the first holiday season without that person. Or, perhaps the loss occurred years ago, yet the holidays still hold a certain sadness...never quite the same since their loved one(s) died. Some families may be enduring the heartache of miscarriage or infertility. Others may be battling an illness or attempting to fathom a recent diagnosis. Some individuals may be dealing with empty nest syndrome or otherwise separated from family and friends by great distance. Some families are weathering a stormy divorce. Others may be overcome with financial worry or dealing with unemployment. Other families may be suffering through foreclosure. Some are lonely or depressed. And still others may simply be overwhelmed by the stress of the season. Although the factors may vary widely, there is one constant: our burdens can seem magnified during the holidays.

I remember when our daughter, Joy was stillborn on Dec. 2, 2005. We buried her on Dec. 7. Consequently, a Merry Christmas was certainly beyond our reach. The very thought of seeing baby Jesus in the manger did not bring comfort. In fact, it was quite the contrary. Going to church during the Holidays was more like torture than worship. It was almost as if I felt mocked by the merriment. So I didn't go....for weeks...and weeks. We should have had another option for worship, at least at Christmas. But sadly, there wasn't one.

As the body of Christ, it is vital that we provide an alternative for worship during the Holidays. Remember Paul's mandate to believers in his letter to the Romans? *We are to rejoice with them that rejoice and to weep with them that weep.* This year we will do just that. In addition to our usual Christmas celebratory services, we will also have a Longest Night Service on Sunday, Dec. 20, at 7 p.m. The service is called *The Longest Night* because in the northern Hemisphere, the Winter Solstice is the longest night of the year and falls on or near December 22.

During this service, worshipers are invited to enter God's presence and feel safe. Their emotions are welcome as well. Anxiety, grief, tears, and even anger are wholly acceptable. This service of prayers, readings, and thoughtful music is not an all-night vigil. Rather, it is 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. Oddly enough, in our shared discontent, God reminds us that we are never alone.

Please know that the Longest Night service is open to the entire community. Therefore, feel free to extend an invitation to someone you know who may be hurting this time of year. This is what it means to be the body of Christ.



CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

Tony Acompañado, Director of Faith Formation

DECEMBER SCHEDULE

Dec. 6	9:45–10:35 a.m.	Road to Bethlehem
Dec. 13	9:45–10:35 a.m.	John the Baptist (Luke 34:1-18)
Dec. 19	9–11 a.m.	Christmas program, final rehearsal
Dec. 20	8:30 a.m. & 10:45 a.m.	Christmas program
Dec. 27		No Children's Ministry - Christmas break

ROAD TO BETHLEHEM

On Sunday, Dec. 6, from 9:45-10:35 a.m., Children's Ministry's Road to Bethlehem returns with a focus on connecting children and parents to the season of Advent and the celebration of our Savior's birth. Together, children and parents will rotate through interactive stations in East Hall. Fellowship tables will also be set up so the rest of the congregation may come and watch the excitement unfold. Please mark your calendar to join us.

CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS PROGRAM

Be sure not to miss the Children's Christmas Program taking place at both services on Sunday Dec. 20. Led by Vicki Taylor, our three-year-olds–5th graders will celebrate the story of our Savior's birth through Scripture and a variety of Christmas hymns. The final rehearsal is in the sanctuary on Saturday, Dec. 19, from 9–11 a.m.



JOLT

Thursday evening JOLT sessions take a break in the month of December. Instead, students are to be working independently on the Advent project they were assigned. All Advent projects are due on, or before, JOLT resumes on Jan. 7, 2016. JOLT students are still expected to worship regularly throughout the month of December.



CRASH

CRASH DECEMBER SCHEDULE

Dec. 6	4:30–5 p.m.	Mime orientation – student & parent meeting
Dec. 6	5–9 p.m.	Progressive dinner
Dec. 12	8 a.m.–12 p.m.	Milwaukee Rescue Mission
Dec. 13	12–4 p.m.	Mime lunch, tryouts and Life of Jesus event

MIME ORIENTATION – STUDENT & PARENT MEETING

On Sunday, Dec. 6, from 4–5 p.m., senior high students and parents are invited to join us for a brief, yet informative, orientation regarding the upcoming mime season. A time of fellowship will take place from 4–4:30 p.m. so new-to-mime students and parents can get to know past participants. All students who will be participating in mime, along with their parents, are strongly encouraged to attend.

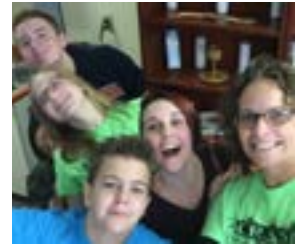
PROGRESSIVE DINNER

On Dec. 6, from 5-9 p.m., join us for a fun evening spent together celebrating the faith and friendships built in CRASH. We'll indulge in appetizers, entrees, and desserts...each one hosted at a different location, and there's even a possibility of some Christmas caroling along the way. A hilarious and exciting gift exchange wraps up this beautiful evening.

MORE CRASH EVENTS

MILWAUKEE RESCUE MISSION

Join us the morning of Saturday, Dec. 12, from 8 a.m.–noon, as we serve the poor and homeless at the Milwaukee Rescue Mission on their Saturday Service Day. The service projects are determined upon arrival and based on the most pressing needs for the Mission. Come and help us make the holidays a little brighter for our sisters and brothers in Milwaukee.



MIME LUNCH, TRYOUTS, AND LIFE OF JESUS EVENT

9th–12th grade mime 2016 participants, please join us for lunch, tryouts, and an in-depth look at the life of Jesus, on Dec. 13, 12–4 p.m.

ENDOWMENT FUND

Ev Stone, Endowment Committee Member

The purpose of the Ascension Endowment Fund is to enhance the ministries, missions, and physical premises of Ascension apart from the annual budget. The Endowment Fund recently completed the 2015 income distributions and funding for missions, ministries, and facilities. Based on the fund balance of \$57,886 at the start of the year, the income distribution amount for 2015 was \$2,850. This amount was divided equally between the three aforementioned areas. The Mission Outreach donation went to Ascension's People to People Fund to help subsidize delegates for future mission trips. The ministries donation was used to purchase workbooks for people enrolling in Ascension's Care Ministries programs: GriefShare, DivorceCare, and DivorceCare 4 Kids. The facilities donation went toward the purchase of new directional signs for the interior of the church following repainting.



We are now taking funding requests for 2016, which should be turned in by March 31, 2016. A Funding Request form is available on Ascension's website, <http://ascensionelca.org/what-we-believe/spiritual-growth/ascension-endowment-fund/>, or in the church office. Approximately \$900 of funding is available for each of the three categories in 2016. You can also discuss your request with the pastors or a member of the Endowment Committee: Rick James (rickjameuw72@gmail.com), Ric Simon (ricsimon@yahoo.com), or Ev Stone (evstone@s-hwealth.com).

As we approach the time for making New Year's resolutions, consider what you would like to leave as a legacy in your spiritual life. Your legacy says a great deal to future generations about what was important in your life. Making a legacy gift to the Ascension Endowment Fund through your estate insures that the Ascension ministries and missions you have supported during your lifetime will continue long after you are gone.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ~Matthew 6:21



STEWARDSHIP MINISTRY

Doug Bue, Stewardship Chair

MANAGING GOD'S BLESSINGS, GOD'S WAYS, FOR GOD'S GLORY

God's Ways - *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.* ~Isaiah 55:8. If we truly want to understand God's ways, we need to look to his word first. There are many stories and proverbs in the Bible that give us insight into how God would have us be better stewards of His blessings. Please reflect on the following.

Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine ~ Proverbs 3:9-10. As with most proverbs, we find wisdom and guidance, not ironclad rules. We can count on God's blessings when we honor Him with our offerings. Be aware that blessings do not always come in form of material possessions; many times God's blessings come in much richer forms. Stewardship is not an attempt to bribe God to get what we want. It is a committed response to our God who first loved us and never forgets the needs of His people.

Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

2 Corinthians 9:10-11.

God supplies all we need, from the food for our sustenance to the seeds for our planting and harvesting. This supply is not intended to be only for our benefit or even mostly for our benefit. When we are generous with what we have, we model what our Father in heaven has already done for us. When we help others they see God's generosity reflected through us and give thanksgiving back to God and not us. Also note that our harvest is one of righteousness and not of more possessions.

Thank you for the blessing you are to our family at Ascension. If you have not turned in your 2016 ministry support commitment card, there is still time. Just drop it in the offering plate or send it to the church office. As we enter the season of Advent, may God bless you so that you will be a blessing to others.



GRATITUDE

FROM THE VOSS FAMILY

To Ascension's New Life Ministries. Thank you for the beautiful basket. What an amazing way to reach out to families with young children! Thank you for all you do! ~ Katie Voss

FROM THE LYTLE FAMILY

Thank you to the Prayer Shawl Ministry for the precious lamb and prayer for our Lexi. She is on the road to recovery and we appreciate all of the prayers and gifts from our church family! ~ Brenda and Jack Lytle

FROM THE ELCA MALARIA CAMPAIGN

Dear Ascension, Thank you for being among the *Top 200* congregational supporters of the ELCA Malaria Campaign! Thank you for helping to make malaria history!

CARE MINISTRIES UPDATES

Brenda Lytle, RN, Director of Care Ministries

'Tis the season...to give and volunteer! Volunteering does wonders for those on the receiving end, but did you know that there are real health benefits to being a volunteer? A 2014 Health and Volunteering Study reveals that 76% of U.S. adults who volunteer report that volunteering made them feel physically healthier, and 78% report that volunteering lowered stress levels. The study reveals four key benefits of volunteering that make a positive impact on people's health.



- **Health:** volunteers say that they feel better - physically, mentally, and emotionally.
- **Stress:** volunteering helps people manage and lower their stress levels.
- **Purpose:** volunteers feel a deeper connection to communities and to others.
- **Engagement:** volunteers are more informed healthcare consumers and are more engaged and involved in managing their health.

"So where can I volunteer?" you ask. Care Ministries is a great place to start. We are searching for volunteers to help with the following Touch-A-Heart ministries:

- **Meal Ministry:** Enjoy cooking for those in need? Contact Iva Richards, 262-542-5840.
- **Home Visitation Ministry:** Interested in visiting one of our homebound members? Plan to visit around your own schedule and make a difference in the lives of others! Contact Beth Hoffmann, 262-542-7447.
- **Transportation Ministry:** Do you have room in your car on Sunday mornings to bring someone who is unable to drive to church? Do you have time to drive someone during the week to an appointment? Contact Judy Franke, 262-547-3921.
- **Helping Hands Ministry:** Would you like to offer volunteer services to do laundry, dishes, yard work, errands, small tasks, or give caregivers a break in a respite situation? Contact Nada Draeger, 262-548-0351.

Welcome to our ministries: Arlene Davis as a pastoral assistant alternate, and Nada Draeger as our Helping Hands ministry leader!

GRIEF SHARE AFTER THE HOLIDAYS

We will again provide a grief support group, GriefShare, on Tuesdays, starting Jan. 5, from 6-8 p.m., in our Youth Room. GriefShare runs for 12 weeks. This program is for people who have suffered significant loss and features biblical concepts for healing from grief through a DVD series, workbook, and support group. People are welcome to attend at any time, so if you are aware of someone that can use this group, please invite them to attend.

MEALS FOR WINTER GRIEF SHARE

Care Ministries is looking for groups to provide meals for the winter Grief Share Program beginning Jan. 5. Sign up on the bulletin board or contact Brenda Lytle, brenda@ascensionelca.org, if you are interested.

BLOOD DRIVE

Blood is the essence of life and to give it selflessly can make you feel connected to your community and the world around you. It is a fulfilling, powerful, and enriching experience to know that your donation could save lives. Unfortunately, fewer than 5 percent of people who are eligible to donate actually do. Imagine the lives that could be touched by your gift. Donate on Saturday, Jan. 16, from 8 a.m.-12 p.m., in West Hall. Set up an appointment at www.bcw.edu/Ascension or walk in.

THE HEALTHY AND AGING BRAIN

Join Care Ministries, on Sunday, Jan. 17, between services, in East Hall for a free health program to learn about the different types of dementia/Alzheimer's, what you can do to adopt a "brain healthy" lifestyle, and resources that are available to you. The presenter is Ascension's own Brenda Lytle, RN, Director of Care Ministries, and Grapevine Project Speaker (WI Woman's Health Organization).



HOMEBOUND MINISTRY: FORGET ME NOT

Bonnie Thiesenbusen, Pastoral Assistant

Due to changes in mobility, 93 year old Dorothy Heale has been unable to attend Sunday services at her beloved Ascension Church for a number of years. So when one visits with her at Linden Grove she always asks: "What's new at Ascension?" The church is important to her and, though she is not there physically, the influence of this special woman is ever present by the Good Samaritan outreach ministry. She and her late husband 'Hoopie' (he disliked his given name of Hubert) started the Good Samaritan ministry a number of years ago when they decided it was time to give back. The two of them – later after Hoopie's death, Dorothy alone - would decorate their beautiful home, invite people over for a delightful evening of song and fellowship, and encourage people to join the Good Samaritan Club. Through the years, this ministry has grown with contributions from church members and others and has been able to assist those in need with paying bills and rent when economic hardships have occurred. This has truly been a wonderful blessing to many.

Dorothy has also been a patron of the Waukesha Civic Theatre and a helping angel to Children's Hospital in thanks for their excellent care of her children when they were young. Her daughter spent 11 months at the hospital being treated for polio and, just before his first birthday, her son spent five months being cared for at Children's. She was honored by the hospital last year.

Dorothy had an interesting upbringing. Her parents, both born in the USA, decided to try farming in Canada when there were economic challenges in the states. While they were there, Dorothy was born. When farming didn't work out, they returned to the states and settled in Wisconsin. Dorothy found out while in high school that since she was born in Canada, she was considered a Canadian citizen and had to go through naturalization to become a US citizen!

She graduated from Wauwatosa High School, after which, she graduated from business college. She then worked for International Harvester in Waukesha, where she met her husband. The two of them started their own company - Heale Manufacturing, which was located on the Strand for 45 years. Within a few years, the company employed 50 people!

A visit with Dorothy is delightful! She has a wonderful sense of humor. She is also very grateful for the blessings that she has experienced in her life and is happy that she was able to give back.

Well done, good and faithful servant!



KNIT WITS

Thanks to all the Knit Wits for their dedicated work this summer and fall. Ascension blessed 500 hats at the 4th annual hat blessing in November. The hats have been distributed to the Waukesha Christmas Clearing Council, the Salvation Army, Cross Lutheran Church, and Hope Center. We also delivered more lapghans (lap afghans) to the Clement Zablocki VA Medical Center in West Allis and baby blankets and other baby items to the Wisconsin USO for new military moms.

New members are always welcome to join Knit Wits. If you can't join, but still want to knit or crochet for charity, we encourage you to make hats or lapghans and we'll distribute them for you. For more information, contact Maddie Goetter, 262-527-4013.

Happy holidays to everyone, and remember to help keep the community warm!

YOUNG AT HEART

Please join Young at Heart on Wednesday, Dec. 16, at noon to enjoy a potluck luncheon. We will meet in Ascension's East Hall. We are blessed to have Alice Bissett entertain us with Christmas music this month. Bring your voices, as we will be able to join Alice in Christmas carols. As always, we will have a great afternoon of socializing. Come when you can, leave when you must. Have a blessed Christmas and New Year! If you have questions, contact Celeste Defenbaugh, 262-370-4522; Beth Hoffmann, 262-542-7445; or Arlene Davis, 262-542-9119.



SPECIAL FRIENDS

Special Friends joined the Puppets of Praise in Waukesha's Annual Christmas Parade on Sun. Nov. 22. Our float won 2nd place in the non-profit category. After the parade, everyone met at church for food, fellowship, and fun.

Our next service project is for the Salvation Army Red Kettle. We will ring the bell at Brookfield Square (J.C. Penneys) on Saturday, Dec. 12, from 4-6pm. Stop by and say "Hi" to us if you are shopping and, as usual, we will have a treat to share with you! If you or anyone you know is interested in joining our group, please call Marge Schroeder, 262-695-2384.



There is still time to join the Annual Cookie Swap sponsored by Supermoms:

Tuesday, Dec. 8, 6-8 p.m., at Martha Merrell's Books, 231 West Main St., Waukesha
If you want to participate, please notify Jessica Jahner ASAP at jessicajahner@gmail.com or 414-213-3679 with the type of cookie you will bring.

Here is the general concept of the swap. Bake 3-5 dozen of one kind of cookie. Come to the party, have a cup of coffee/beverage, enjoy good company, complete some holiday shopping, and leave with an assortment of 3-5 dozen delicious cookies!

Supermoms hopes everyone can bring a different kind of cookie. Once we know the number of attendees, we will notify bakers with the confirmed quantity of cookies each person needs to bring. If you want to be entered into the Best Tasting Cookie contest, please plan on bringing an extra dozen cookies for group sampling.

Back by popular demand! Norm, the owner of Martha Merrell's, will be giving his book talk on great new books for kids and adults. This has been a favorite of past years' swaps. See you there!



BLOOD PRESSURE SCREENINGS

Between 9-10:45 services in the Hearth Room. If you can help with any of these dates, please contact Brenda Lytle, Brenda@ascensionelca.org

Dec. 6	March 13
Jan. 3	April 3
Feb. 21	May 1



A TASTE OF THE DANIEL PLAN

Steve and Carol Spieker

Coffee: To drink or not to drink. That is the question! Much has been said about the pros and cons of drinking the world's favorite beverage. I know this dynamic duo has had our share of "discussions" over the years. Not to worry! Harmony has been restored in this relationship, after we attended a workshop that spoke to the matter of coffee consumption.

With 160 powerful disease fighting antioxidants, coffee can be enjoyed under certain criteria. Coffee should be organic and shade grown. Non-organic coffee is one of the most highly chemically sprayed crops on the planet. The chemical residues are released when the coffee brews. When coffee is shade grown, it requires only a fraction of chemical fertilizers and pesticides that are required for coffee that is sun cultivated. Coffee that is shade grown also reduces the high amounts of acidity typically found in it.

Always buy whole bean coffee and grind it yourself. Oxidation starts immediately upon grinding which degrades all of the antioxidant qualities. The best option is to purchase a coffee grinder to grind as you go. A second option is to buy small amounts of coffee beans from the bulk area and grind it at the store. In addition to oxidation, mycotoxins (created by mold) increase the longer coffee has been ground. Additionally, commercially ground coffee contains all sorts of foreign contaminants including worms and bugs, as well as cheap fillers which raise profits.

If you choose to drink decaf, always choose varieties that are decaffeinated through water processing. Generally, decaffeinated coffee uses bleach, which is a known cancer-causing agent.

Just like for drinking, you should only use filtered water for brewing. Many paper coffee filters are also bleached so you should look for varieties that do not use bleach.

Coffee should only be enjoyed in moderation. The Daniel Plan supports the consumption of coffee as a means to increase focus, concentration, and sports performance. Coffee consumption is known to reduce risk of prostate cancer, dementia, stroke, heart failure, and diabetes. Nonetheless, too much can make something that is healthy unhealthy. You should not need coffee in order to wake up. That is a sign of an underlying issue that needs to be addressed.

Finally, we suggest, you don't add artificial creamers and sweeteners, sugar, or skim milk. Rather consider grass fed cream, Kerry Gold butter, or coconut oil. Healthy fats will actually help control your cravings for sugar throughout the day. (You should know that the very popular Coffee Mate creamer actually contains NO cream. Rather, it contains processed sugar, trans fats, and many other chemicals. So drink up, but keep it shade grown organic!

RAW CRANAPPLE RELISH

Ingredients

- 1 C Fresh Cranberries
- 1 Medium Granny Smith Apple (peeling optional)
- 1 Small Orange (peel and seeds removed)
- 1 T Raw Honey
- 5 Drops Clear Liquid Stevia (or equivalent)

Preparation:

Chop first three ingredients separately in a food processor. Place in small mixing bowl. Add honey and stevia. Mix ingredients and chill for at least one hour.

SOPHIA NEEDS YOUR HELP

SOPHIA is a Christian, faith-based organization, which unites congregations throughout southeastern Wisconsin to build better communities through education, advocacy, and action. If you would like to have a voice in our local community, promote skills and attitudes that help us know each other better, and support justice with a Christian perspective, then please join us! You can make a difference in bringing healing and restoration for all those who are caught up in the criminal justice system and their families! Call Bob Grady, 414-628-0291, to get involved.



ELCA GOOD GIFTS

The ELCA's approach to ministry starts with listening. As a long-standing, unwavering presence in nearly 90 countries, including the United States, the ELCA steers clear of "one-size-fits-all" answers and has enormous respect for local context, local expertise, and local ingenuity. The ELCA is a good steward of your resources, holding administrative costs to less than 10% – among the lowest of other organizations doing similar work. With your donation, you can help Christians all over the world with a variety of life changing gifts from farm animals to small business loans. For more information: www.ELCA.org/goodgifts or 800-638-3522.



*THE ASCENSION STAFF WISHES YOU ADVENT
BLESSINGS AND A MERRY CHRISTMAS!*

Pastor Chris Marien

Pastor Angela Khabeib

Amy Gilgenbach

Brenda Lytle

Tony Acompanado

Vicki Taylor

Amy Stryker

Kate Mattson

Ben Janzow

Ray Kinney

DECEMBER 2015

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
Room Key EH = East Hall HR = Hearth Room K = Kitchen N = Narthex NR = Nursery PL = Parking Lot PR = Prayer Room S = Sanctuary WH = West Hall YR = Youth Room		1 6:30am AMEN 107 9:30am TGIT 107 9:30am Women's Bible Study HR 6:30pm Mission Outreach 107	2 8am Privated Group PR 9am Young at Heart, Denny's 9:30am Cross Meal 12:30pm Women's Nurture PR 12:30pm Private NR 2pm Staff meeting 6pm Handbells S 6pm Private Group 106 7pm Advent Worship S 7pm Wisdom AA WH 7:45pm Choir S	3 10am Al Anon WH 1pm Quilting, Bissett's House 5:15pm Angel Choir S 5:45pm Joyful Sounds S 7pm Ballantyne 107 7pm Care Ministries 106	4	5 All Day Set-up RTB
6 8:30am Worship 9:45am Road to Bethlehem EH 9:45am Puppets visits WH, K 10am Blood Pressure Screening 10:45am Worship 4:30pm Mime orientation S, EH, YR 5pm CRASH Progressive Dinner 6pm The Daniel Plan 107 6pm AA mtg WH 7pm AA closed mtg WH	7 9:45am Al Anon WH 11:30am Knit Wits Offsite 5:30pm Prayer Group PR 6:30pm AMEN 107	8 6:30am AMEN 107 9:30am Women's Bible Study HR	9 8am Privated Group PR 11:45am Men's Nurture 106 12:30pm Private Group NR 6pm Handbells S 6pm Private Group 106 7pm Wisdom AA WH 7:30pm Choir S	10 10am Al Anon WH 1pm TGBG PR 1pm Quilting, Bissett's House 5:15pm Angel Choir S 5:45pm Joyful Sounds S 7pm Ballantyne 107 7pm Military Ministry 106	11	12 8am CRASH, MKE Rescue Mission 9am Advent Concert Rehearsal S 10:30am Folk Choir S 6pm Advent Concert Worship S 8pm Musician Party EH
13 8:30am Advent Concert Worship 9:45am Children's Ministry 10am Blood Pressure Check HR 10:45am Advent Concert Worship 12pm Mime tryouts & Life of Jesus S, YR, EH 6pm The Daniel Plan 107 6pm AA mtg WH 7pm AA closed mtg WH	14 9:45am Al Anon WH 1pm Living Letters 106 6pm Knit Wits, Offsite 6:30pm AMEN 107	15 Newsletter Deadline 6:30am AMEN 107 9:30am TGIT 107 9:30am Women's Bible Study HR	16 8am Private Group PR 12pm Young at Heart Potluck EH, K 12:30pm Women's Nurture PR 12:30pm Private Group NR 6pm Handbells S 6pm Private Group 106 7pm Wisdom AA WH 7:30pm Choir S	17 10am Al Anon WH 1pm Quilting, Bissett's House 7pm Ballantyne 107	18	19 9am Children's Pageant Rehearsal S
20 8:30am Worship 9:45am Children's Ministry 10:45am Worship 6pm AA mtg WH 7pm The Longest Night Worship 7pm AA closed mtg WH	21 9:45am Al Anon WH 5:30pm Prayer Group PR 6:30pm AMEN 107	22 6:30am AMEN 107 9:30am Women's Bible Study HR	23 8am Private Group PR 12:30pm Private Group NR 6pm Private Group 106 7pm Wisdom AA WH	24 Christmas Eve 10am Al Anon WH 2:30pm Worship (Children's Service) 4pm Worship 5:30pm Worship 11pm Worship Office Closed	25 Christmas Day 10:30am Worship Office Closed	26
27 8:30am Worship 10:45am Worship 6pm AA mtg WH 7pm AA closed mtg WH	28 9:45am Al Anon WH 6:30pm AMEN 107	29 6:30am AMEN 107 9:30am Women's Bible Study HR	30 8am Private Group PR 12:30pm Private Group NR 6pm Private Group 106 7pm Wisdom AA WH	31 New Year's Eve Office Closed 10am Al Anon WH		