

Attendance

We hosted four services for Easter including an outdoor garden service at 7:00 am in which the youth planned and led the service. We had 885 people attend our four worship services for Easter weekend. More typical weekends have been averaging 262 people, similar to averages for the first couple of months of the year.

Our online 1 minute views are averaging 139 per weekend, very similar to the 138 I reported in April and 141 I reported in March.

Maintenance

Our campus is mid-transformation, and Jeff is the project manager of it all! The new roof has been installed on Founders Hall, Music Room, and Church Nursery. The kids at the ECC were enthralled with the cranes lifting the HVAC units down and then back up onto the roof. Stucco repairs have been completed. Jeff is trying to finish power washing the sanctuary roof tiles in the midst of all the other projects being done. We have learned that the rain gutters needed some repair, which is being completed before the exterior paint begins.

We have had a bit of a bumpy start with our new cleaning company. Positive aspects I see are that the owner is truly engaged and crew is anxious to get it right. We've made a couple changes to procedure and equipment that should result in having a consistently clean campus ready to engage with students and parishioners each day.

Administration

With a heavy heart we have accepted Malia's resignation from the office admin team. She is undergoing some difficult medical treatments, and needs to focus on getting well. Our prayers for her wellbeing and health will continue, even as we miss seeing her smile and crack jokes each week. She has promised to stop by and see us when she is feeling well and able.

Jenelle has been wonderful about continuing her administrative duties, even as she has been promoted to worship coordinator. She has been patient with me in posting a position to replace her admin role. During our budgeting discernment I have trying to assess adequate office coverage and maximizing efficiencies for the office team. Given Malia's resignation, we have combined the two part time admin roles and we are looking to hire a full time office administrator. There are many times each week when Diane is left to manage the phones and all walk in traffic as the sole person available in the office. I love to help, but I am an unreliable backup given the number of meetings I need to attend. I'm excited to see the high level candidates a full time role with benefits will bring us. The full job description is available on our website. We'll advertise in our weekly email to the congregation, the Chatter, the Synod website, and CLU Nonprofit postings.

Finance

Dave will be sharing our proposed budgets with you in our May 22nd meeting, to be sure. It has been fun to put the pieces together. Camryn did a great job re-imagining how we might organize some of the worship and music categories. Jenni and Rich have been helpful and communicative about their staffing plans and needs. The pastors were helpful in discerning priorities and ministry focus. Mike has efficiently completed the revenue portions of each budget, and adeptly completed the utility, insurance, and debt portions. Dave, Mike, Camryn and I met to assess current expense projections and thoughtfully consider admin expense needs for next year. Rich, Jenni, and Staci H have been helpful partners in anticipating school and ECC expenses. I am excited for the amazing year of ministry we have ahead of us.

Human Resources

Employee Handbooks are finally reaching some turning points. I have a couple meetings set up with Jenni, Rich, and Connie to verify some policies and procedures, then School and ECC Handbooks will go to the School Board seeking approval in June. I plan to submit the Church Handbook to the Council for approval in June as well. The School Board doesn't meet in July, and my teachers will return in mid August, so I want to have a fresh Employee Handbook ready for them upon their return to start the new academic year.

Another task to complete before the end of the academic year is work agreements for each of the teachers. Last year we added the ECC, so I will have 30 agreements to prepare and distribute by May 31, and another 12 by June 16th.

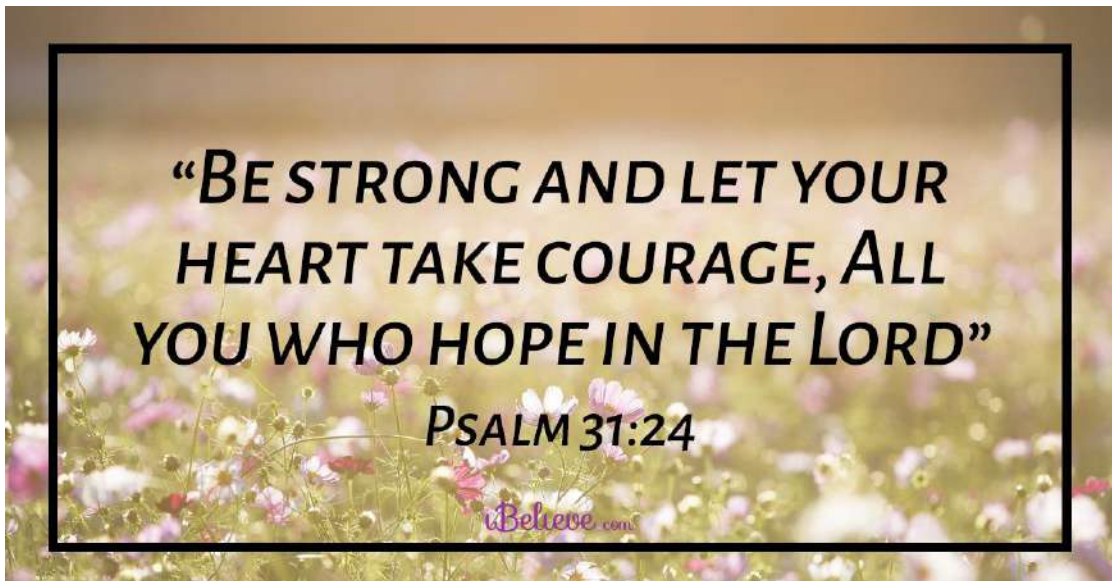
Although I wouldn't consider us a high turnover organization, there is some that is typical at this time of year. I have scheduled five of seven exit interviews to complete in the next month for the Church, School, and ECC.

We have begun the process of annual performance reviews for the church staff. We have refined the process this year, streamlining away from time consuming self-reviews and arbitrary ratings. The reviews will be short, narrative based documents designed to facilitate conversation reflecting on each employee's performance and guiding toward meaningful goals. A goal worksheet will be a later piece to complete, hopefully based on prayerful consideration of the feedback received in the review. We would like to implement a much shorter quarterly review check in, giving more timely and consistent feedback as well as supervisors more consistently focused on employee development throughout the year.

As I skim over what I have highlighted in this report it looks a bit overwhelming! Although there are certainly days that seem crazy, the overall feeling I experience on campus is one of joyfully working in the same direction with the best team I can imagine. It's truly been fun to collaborate with Jenni, Rich, and the pastors on hard problems; Mike and Camryn are the finance dream team; Dianne, Stacy, and Jenelle are consummate professionals; and Jeff and Cam are the glue holding the campus together. Thanks for trusting me and this awesome crew to serve.

Kaylee Searway

Director of Administrative Ministries





Pastor Tim's Council Report- May 2023

Grace and peace to you my family in Christ. May is a transitional month. We go from the busy-ness of Easter to the year-end activities of June. There is a bit of a pause when it comes to extra events and it also means being able to work on make-up work such as building the slate of officers for June's congregational meeting, counseling with couples who are planning weddings for the summer, cuing up end of the year activities for our one Ascension staff, etc. So with this month's report, I will comment on some of that transitional work.

I am very appreciative of the structure that Carrie Leonard has provided for our Nominating Committee work. She started in November with a steady drumbeat of meetings and reminders of which positions were going to be open which prompted those of us to begin asking worthy candidates to prayerfully consider the position. As of this date we have only 2 more positions that we need to fill and I am confident that we will have a full slate of wonderfully qualified leaders for our meeting in June.

Our worship planning process is becoming more and more stabilized. We are even now to the point were we are, at the 9am service beginning to expand and try new liturgy. On the unstable side, we still need to find a worship leader for our 11am worship. I have increased the scope and salary of the position in the hopes that can make it a more attractive position. As this area becomes steadier, it will be time to work on our visitor welcoming process. We need greeters. We need more frequent new-member classes. I have not had time to get to that, but I am getting there.

Our staffing conversation has led to some very fruitful outcomes. For example, thanks to our new approach to our financial staffing, we are currently going through one of the most energizing budgeting processes that I have been a part of in my 20 years here. We are also reconfiguring and reinforcing our administrative team at the church office. We accepted Malia's resignation and were sad to see her go due to a need to focus on her health and healing. With Jenelle moving into the worship coordinator role these moves have given us the opportunity to create a much-needed full-time administrative person. I pray that we soon find someone effective so that that we can give relief to our amazing office team.

I don't know if it is the season, post-covid or something else but I have a slew of weddings coming up! I love doing weddings though the counseling load increases my pastoral function. I have had wedding counseling meetings every Saturday for the last few months and will continue these through June with a total of 6 couples. Love is in the air!!!

Finally, I am hoping that you have read the reports and witnessed all the work going on at Ascension. That work will continue throughout the summer. We have a big campus, and the cost of maintenance is high but the cost of *deferred* maintenance is much higher so I am grateful that the campus has been renewed in so many great ways.

Yours in Christ,

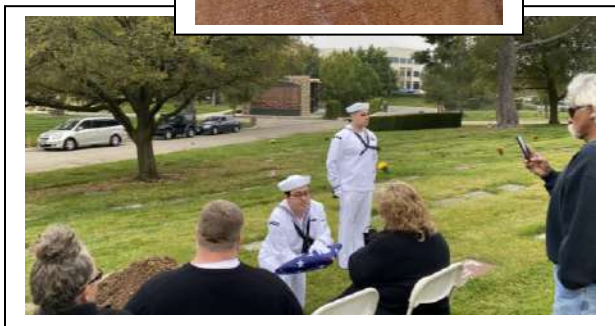
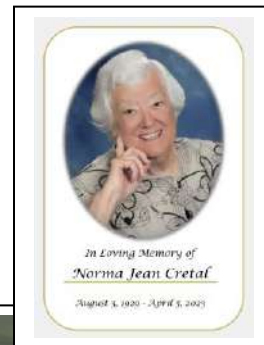
Church Council Report – Pastor Steve Herder May 1, 2023



Again, we thank our school and our ECC for the gifts of plants and cards that we delivered to some of our seniors at Easter time, to share the joy of our risen Savior with them! The first photo is of Donna Corra and the third is from a visit at Los Robles Hospital. The photo in the middle is from our Christian Life Hour at Sage Mountain Senior Living on April 14th.



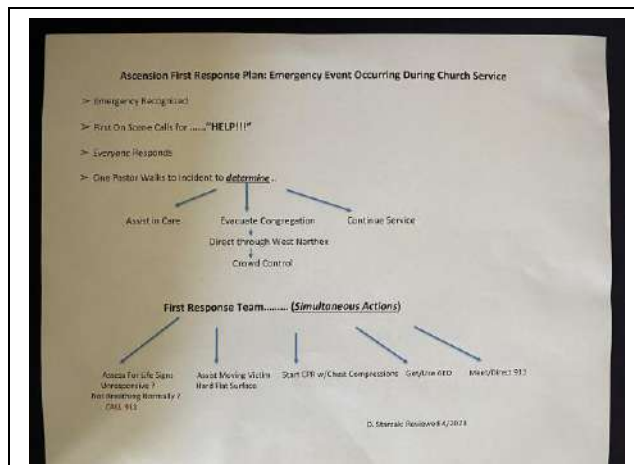
In the month of April, I led the services for Don Johnson and for Norma Cretal. Both had a long history at Ascension, and both were military veterans. The graveside services had military honors. Thank you for your prayers for their children and each family. May Jesus, our Good Shepherd, comfort them all. We will miss these dear friends.



Norm Guetschoff, Barbara Krum, Jeff and Jan Specks, and Marilyn Reeve lead the Christian Life Hours (simple worship services) at Royal Oaks Inn, Atria Grand Oaks, Sage Mountain, and at a future date, Varenita in Westlake. This month we welcomed new member Beverly Selle! I lead the CLH at University Village Oak View. If you'd like to learn more about this excellent outreach ministry, talk with anyone of us. To learn more about: Eucharistic Ministry, visit with Pastor Ron Cox, GriefShare (every Thursdays at 1:00pm) with Brenda Heinrich; or Stephen Ministry, Norm Guetschoff.

If you would like a visit from me or from one of our Eucharistic Ministers, let me know by either calling the church office (805-495-0406) or emailing me at pastorsteve@alcto.org. Your pastors would ask you to let us know when you are in the hospital and when you return home. For updates on any prayer requests, please email me or our email prayer group coordinator, Linda Morrow.

We thank Di Starzak for coordinating our CPR and AED training, twice a year, for the staff and for our ushers. Did you know that we have a plan in place in case of an emergency during a worship service? If the congregation needs to exit quickly, we will ask you to go out the west narthex doors and wait there. Ambulance drivers would park at our east entrance door. Did you know that we have three AED machines on campus? They are in the west narthex (as pictured below), in the Bethlehem Room behind the church offices, and in our Early Childhood Center lobby. The phone seen below is a direct line to 9-1-1.



On April 30 twenty-five people came to the adult education class that Eloise Cohen and I led. It was our annual Bread for the World Offering of Letters. We learned about the 2023 Farm Bill and wrote letters to our Congress regarding Bread’s key points for this very important once-every-five-years bill. www.bread.org Through this website we invite you to do the same.



OFFERING of LETTERS

Today, we're working to inspire our leaders in Washington, D.C. to pass legislative victories that **reduce hunger** in the U.S. and around the world.



We ordered and received our new banner for our Fair Trade ministries from Ascension members, the Trumbos, at Signarama in Camarillo. Our Fair Trade adult education class on April 2 was a wonderful Zoom event with the Red Barn Family Farms in Appleton, WI. We learned about their award-winning cheese. When I was in Appleton recently, I bought some Cupola cheese and it will be shared at two F.T. events on May 21, the 10:10am class time (with chocolates too!) and then the F.T. Tea at 2:00pm in Newbury Park. At that morning event all are invited to the launch of an inspiring and inviting place - a new little place purposely located “at the corner of Faith and Fair” – where justice for people and our planet will be celebrated. Come, learn about this place on campus on May 21st, 10:10am! The photo below is from an April 21st event at Cal Lutheran where we shared our Fair Trade products! Naomi and Nina join Carol at Cal Lu.



ASCENSION LUTHERAN

Fair Trade Ministry

Justice for People & Planet

alcto.org/fair-trade/
fairtrade@alcto.org

ASCENSION LUTHERAN CHURCH
 INVITE • GROW • SERVE



Each year on April 22 we observe Earth Day and seek to practice good care for this planet each day of the year. This prayer was one of our social media posts on Earth Day. Other Facebook pages that we share in are “Lutherans Restoring Creation – California,” “Water Is Sacred,” and “Creation Justice Ministries.”

As a congregation we participated in our Community Concerns Team’s Food Pantry food drive in early March. We thank our Monday morning Women’s Bible Study for donating food each week.

The week of May 17 – 24 both our Ascension School and our Early Childhood Center will be holding a food drive to help replenish our pantry shelves. Did you know that our volunteers oversee this ministry that gives away over 60 bags of groceries every Friday, 10am to noon!

We see the needs of our community growing. Last Friday we had seven people/families asking us for financial support (from our Caring Ones or the Agape Fund). Thank you, Ascension, for loving our neighbors, near and far!

**Project Response
FOOD DRIVE**

May 17-24, 2023

Help us collect non-perishable foods for ALCTO's Food Pantry to distribute to families in our community during the summer. Bring your donations to class and drop off in the provided bins.

PANTRY Wish List

- Boxed Breakfast Cereal
- Hearty Soups- boxed and or canned
- Packaged Hot cereals
- Canned Meats: Chicken, Tuna, Salmon, Sloppy Joes, Oven Roasted Turkey Spam (all varieties)
- Paper Towels, Kleenex, Toilet Paper
- Breakfast Items: Pop Tarts, Cereal Bars, Pancake mix and syrup
- Beverages: water, shelf stable milk
- Packaged meals: instant potatoes, rice, scalloped potatoes, Rice a Roni
- Ready to eat items i.e. Spaghetti's, Ravioli's, Stew, Manwich
- Masa Flour, All Purpose Enriched Flour
- Jam/jellies
- Pasta (any type)
- Rice: canned, dried or packaged
- Dried Beans: all types
- Individual serving items
- Granola Bars- any type
- Peanut butter
- Pasta sauces
- Snack items: crackers, peanuts, cookies and crackers
- All types of dried pasta
- Cup of Noodles/ Top Ramen
- Mac and Cheese
- Cup of Noodle soups
- Top Ramen
- Cooking Oil

Ascension Lutheran School
1600 E Hillcrest Dr, Thousand Oaks, CA 91362

Please check expiration dates

The following two pages have the wonderful newsletter from one of our ELCA missionaries, Pastor Kristin Engstrom in Zambia. As you read it, you’ll be amazed at how many languages are spoken in Zambia. The ELCZA Church Center that she talks about is almost complete and this was a past Gifts of Hope project for us. Remember “Bricks of Hope for Zambia!”

Thank you, Ascension, for giving me a flexible schedule in my half-time work with you. I was able to spend a week with my parents and sister/family in Wisconsin. And now Natalie is here, from her home in NYC, for three weeks, working remotely as an editor.





Meeting the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zambia

Since arriving in Zambia a little over a year ago, I have focused on meeting the people of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zambia (ELCZa), understanding the ministry of the church, and learning about and living into the diversity of cultures in Zambia. (There are 73 languages spoken here!) One of my



During Holy Week, ELCZa congregations gather to worship and participate in workshops. In the Lusaka district, five congregations gathered together. These women are from the Kamwala congregation in Lusaka, which is a Swahili speaking congregation of people from Tanzania.

favorite parts of being a missionary is listening and learning how culture and faith are put together and lived out in different ways in different places.

My work in Zambia has three foci: supporting the administrative leadership, connecting ELCZa students studying on scholarships from the ELCA or Lutheran World Federation with the needs of the church, and partnering with ELCZa pastors to increase ministry capacity in congregations. In 2023, I will also begin working with Youth League leaders to develop their leadership capacity and long-term planning.

In this work, I often need to remind myself that progress is made up of many small steps. Please join me in celebrating both the small and big steps made in ELCZa this past year: the Church Council met for the first time since COVID began, we created the first ELCZa lectionary calendar, construction of the new ELCZa Church Center is 50% complete, and a recently ordained pastor revived and led Ash Wednesday worship in their congregation for the first time in 10 years.



The ELCZa Church Council during Sunday morning worship following their first meeting since COVID began. ELCZa Senior Pastor is on the far right.

Accompanying Pastor Kristin

My work as an ELCA Global Missionary is possible thanks to the generosity of many congregations and individuals in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Thank you! You can contact me at kristin.engstrom@elca.org and follow my blog at <https://alongwithpastorkristin.blogspot.com>. You are also invited to support me as an ELCA Global Missionary [here](#).



Pastor Kristin Engstrom

I serve as the Facilitator for Leadership Development and Capacity Building with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zambia. From 2016–2020, I served as the Senegal Country Coordinator of the ELCA Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) program.

I'm originally from the mid-western United States, and served as a parish pastor in northern New Jersey for six years prior to serving with ELCA Global Mission.





Ministry in Action

Often a photo helps tell the story of ministry and gives a glimpse into ministry in action, especially in different contexts. Here are some glimpses into ministry with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zambia from the past couple months.



The three congregations of the Masuku parish gathered for workshops and worship in November 2022. Pastor Moonga (2nd from left) walks four hours every Sunday to reach these very rural congregations.



Youth of Chongwe parish discerning and sharing their gifts for leadership during Lusaka Easter gathering.



Youth of the Matero congregation confirmed their faith in March. Eight baptisms also took place in the same worship service. Rev. Mathilda Banda of the Matero congregation and ELCZa General Secretary (right), confirmation youth in purple.



Leading Bible Study on Intersectional Justice at the Lutheran Communion of Southern Africa (LUCSA) Christian Education Consultation.

Pastor Julie Council Report May 2023

Youth Director Dianne Beck resigned, effective June 11, so that she can spend more time with her new grandchild. We told the youth last week at a special gathering. Please pray for our youth—that they are able to persevere through so much turnover, and for Dianne.

My plan is to change the role into one full time, children, youth, and family director role. I didn't do this previously (but maintained two separate part-time roles), thinking that the skill sets were different, but I have now seen examples of this work in other churches. We already have a job description almost ready to go, and will be poised to post it after the news about Dianne goes public.

I was grateful to be able to head off on 10 days of vacation in Germany and Austria. I held down the proverbial fort while Pastor Tim was away the week after Easter, and then when he returned, left on my trip. We had a fantastic time, especially enjoying exploring the Alps and the castles! However, I returned from the trip with covid, and then had to recuperate for a bit with that.

We just had our Synod Conference Assembly over zoom, with 9 from Ascension attending, out of a total of about 70 people which included 6 conferences. (Personally, it is a source of pride when we can get more people to come to something from our one congregation than we can get from some other entire conferences.) It was on "Fundraising in Challenging Times", and we learned some really helpful things from Regina Biddings-Muro, who works at CLU and has even offered herself as an additional resource for Ascension, because she loves many of the things we are committed to as a church. One learning was that the first year CLU did Giving Tuesday, they only wrote three emails about it and raised something like \$54k. Her encouragement to us was since Giving Tuesday is a known entity with advertising already out there, people are poised to give, and churches can and should capitalize on that with likely a pretty small investment on our parts. Would we want to try it this year?

The Confirmation students are now ready to lead their Confirmation service on the 21st; I invite you to attend to be a part of this special day for them, and to pray for them and show your support for them in their faith journeys. They have almost all completed their Confirmation interviews with me now—this is something I do to get them into a conversation about why their faith and their Confirmation matters to them, and it is a fun and energizing thing for me. This year we have only 6 students getting Confirmed, and I not satisfied with that number and am brainstorming alongside others around how to focus in on 7th and 8th grade (and perhaps 6th) in order to build energy there. Next year and even this summer we will add some fun and faith-building events that are open to those beyond those who have committed to Confirmation. I have already opened conversations with youth directors in the area to see if they would want to do a fall retreat with us.

Work on VBS continues, and we have made some good headway and have an exciting week planned, with about 45 currently registered to attend. I'm expecting that to land around 65. Currently we have some good traction around volunteers but still need more to sign up.