

Attendance

Our six week average attendance per weekend is up from 300 to 340. Apparently, people like to celebrate Hula, as 88 people attended the Country Spirit Hula service on December 17<sup>th</sup>, bringing our weekend total for that weekend to 400 people in church! Thank you, Nance Lee, for coordinating a fun and inviting service!

| <b>Date:</b> |                        | <b>Sat.</b> | <b>9:00</b> | <b>10:30</b> | <b>Repo<br/>rted<br/>Total</b> |
|--------------|------------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------------------------------|
| 11/5/2023    |                        | 33          | 296         | 52           | 381                            |
| 11/12/2023   |                        | 47          | 265         | 41           | 353                            |
| 11/19/2023   |                        | 41          | 261         | 57           | 359                            |
| 11/26/2023   |                        | 31          | 197         | 47*          | 228                            |
| 12/3/2023    |                        | 32          | 289         | 50*          | 321                            |
| 12/10/2023   | Hula on Saturday Night | 88          | 270         | 42           | 400                            |

Our six week average for online views of one minute or longer is up from 114 to 133 views per weekend.

Maintenance

Camden, Jude, and I are excited for Jeff’s return on Monday, December 17<sup>th</sup>. We’ve got a long list of projects to discuss and issues to resolve with Jeff. In the meantime, Cam and Jude have changed ECC filters, put up the Christmas tree, set up for many holiday small group and school celebrations, and much more. A team from EPI Construction came out during the Thanksgiving break to help us finish a short brick retaining wall along the middle school side of the campus.

Lower Lot Sale

Last month I reported good progress in this area; less so at the moment, but still moving forward. The Church has proceeded with the advice given to us at our October 25, 2023 meeting with the City: Associated Traffic Engineers is completing our traffic study with operational information from me and a count of parking spots from Emilee. Our civil engineer has redrawn the parcel lines on the map in light of the City’s request for more right angles and “regular” shapes. The garden landscape architects will use that map to create a new use map to use. Creighton, Bob and I will then submit a Special Use Permit, administrative modification to the City of Thousand Oaks. While we have been working toward those goals in good faith that the City would honor what they stated in the meeting, they are now not recalling that they told us we could make a covenant agreeing to a later lot line adjustment after the sale. We continue to dialogue with them regarding that, and we have a good partner in Robert Younkin on that front. Bob, Creighton, and I will meet soon to discuss engaging Tom Cohen to be involved in clarifying the path forward with the City.

### Insurance

I appreciated our efficient joint Council and School Board meeting last month on November 15th. I immediately spoke with our broker and started filling out applications for the additional Employment Practices Liability and Directors and Officers coverages that were approved. We now have a 2 million dollar excess policy for Employment Practices Liability and Directors and Officers with Atlantic, and an additional 2 million dollar excess policy for Directors and Officers with Starstone. I completed applications to begin the policies effective Friday, 11/17/2023.

Additionally, I completed the application to renew our Crime Policy effective December 11, 2023. I'll be glad to work on some projects other than insurance coverage for a while!

### Reserve Studies

I obtained points of view from Bob Woodward and Wes Meyers on our options for reserve studies. Jeannette helped me formulate some questions to ask references from both the potential companies. I hope to share those results with you at the council meeting.

### Human Resources

Camryn and I attended a very informative webinar hosted by Karen Gabler of Light Gabler Law. I have attended many educational sessions put on by their firm over the years, and this one did not disappoint: Karen spoke for 3.5 hours on new laws and updates that need to be made for January of 2024. The firm also provides an 89 page employment law update handout. Camryn and I took a great deal of notes, immediately following up on a couple of new unpaid leave laws and a change to sick leave minimums in California increasing from 24 hours to 40 hours. I made initial drafts of the needed changes and will seek legal review before we distribute new Handbooks in January. I spoke with Jon Light about having their firm review our Handbooks. I sent one of our Handbooks to them, and expect a proposal back to have an understanding of how much it would cost for them to review at least one of our Handbooks and advise. (I would then apply those changes to the other two Handbooks.) I also have a backup plan of having our current attorney review the changes made if the work with the new firm cannot happen by January 1<sup>st</sup>. We also learned of a helpful form we can implement into our hiring practices in the new year, and I was reminded to check on some signage needed for the campus.

*Kaylee Searway*



Grace and peace to you my family in Christ. I write this last ministry report of 23 amid yet more change for One Ascension. By now you are aware of Pastor Julie's resignation. I have appreciated working with her these past 5 years and will continue to pray for her discernment as she takes her sabbatical time to "listen deeply" to the movement of the Spirit in her life. As for One Ascension, we enter a time of transition. The great tension of transitional times is that there is both *urgency* to fill the void that was left by the person leaving but also a great need to *wisely assess* what is the best way to fill that void. We need to work with urgency because real ministry (especially with Children, Youth and Family) needs to happen. We need to be thorough and wise because our children, youth and family ministry as Ascension has been in decline over the years and we need to figure out how to turn that decline around. It is for this reason that the first thing we must do is invite the Holy Spirit into our whole transition process. Come Holy Spirit! A verse that comes to my mind is Jeremiah 29:11: *"For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope."*

At our executive session I will be presenting the initial plan for transition which I hope we can continue to develop, work together on and communicate with the rest of the congregation. This transition plan includes a check list about Pastor Julie's initial announcement and the church's response, a review of pastoral roles and a look at our executive staff's organizational chart so that we can proceed to put together not only the job description of the Associate Pastor role but also revise the description of the still vacant Youth Director position. Finally, the presentation will include what I believe will be the next steps that we need to take as we get through this transition, praying and communicating to the congregation all the way.

It is an important conversation. In fact, I will say if we do it with diligence and holy cooperation, we will begin to get glimpses of those plans that the Lord has for us. Ascension is a healthy church with amazing resources. The way the congregation loves its pastors, the way we have incorporated our school community into the life of the church, the way we worship, the impulse we have not just to get the blessing but to be the blessing are signs that we are a healthy and vibrant church. I am excited to see who our next Youth Director and Associate Pastor will be.

Yours in Christ,



## Church Council Report - Pastor Steve Herder Nov. 30, 2023, for the Dec. 20 meeting

Thank you, Church Council, for your leadership this past year and for the many hours of discussions, prayer, decisions, and actions, on how we as Ascension (church, school and foundation) can "be the blessing." I'm thankful for how that will continue into 2024 as we seek to grow new ministries, both for here and for our community and world.

I'm thankful too for [our staff](#) and lay leaders, and what the Spirit motivates us to do for God's mission, and the ministry Christ calls us all to. The office staff has been particularly helpful for several ministries, some that I oversee. Communication and finance work related to Gifts of Hope: thanks to Stacy, Diane, Camryn, and Mike, and of course to Dave as our treasurer. For worship planning and for powerful prayers, thanks Jenelle. For creatively doing projects such as the new chart for our six Christian Life Hours, thanks Emilee. Stacy and I work well together on social media ministries. (We are approaching 2,300 followers on our Facebook page.) And Kaylee keeps on top of so many administrative ministry priorities, it's mind boggling. We have been praying for Jeff Hengst after his surgery, looking forward to his return, and thanking Cam for his hard work and long hours. Rich and Jenni and our staff are doing super work with our school and ECC. I appreciate the support and friendship of my pastoral colleagues.

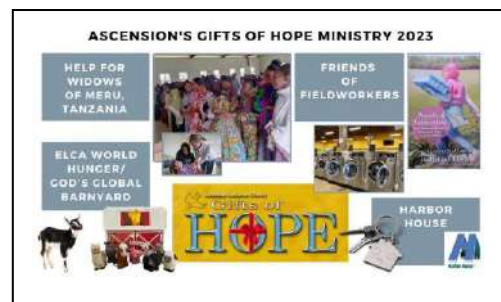


We thank our Community Concerns Team and their ministries, led by Chris Daleiden. Each Friday our food pantry serves a growing number of people, and our volunteers know them by name and care for them in amazing ways. One of our guests, Susan, just experienced the death of her husband Peter, and I appreciate how well our team cared for her. Each month we appreciate Tania and Barry and team for the food ministry that we bring to help Harbor House. Your pastors and

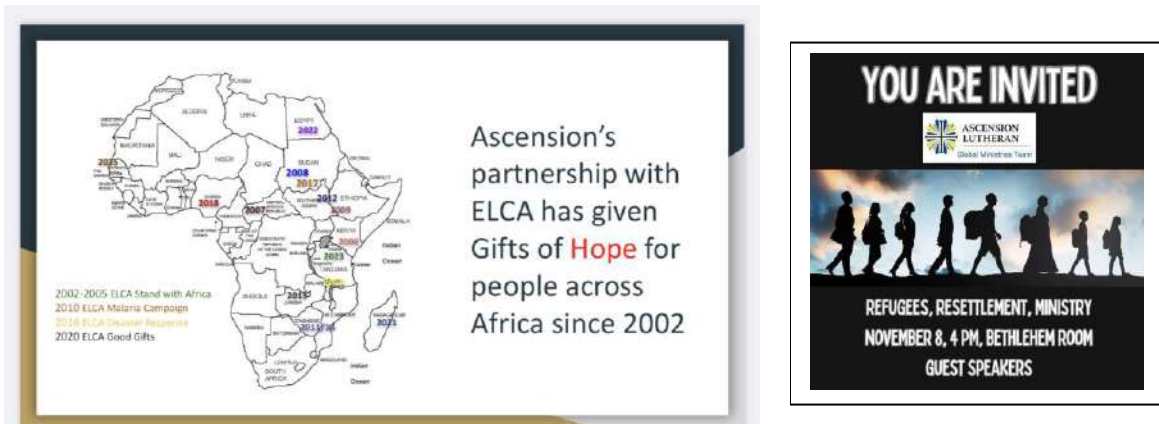
Chris were invited to tour the Conejo Free Clinic on Nov. 15. Deborah Kahn, the Medical Clinic Operations Manager, and an active Ascension member, gave us a great tour. [Learn about their work with this link.](#)



November each year is a focus on our Global Ministries Team's Gifts of Hope. The congregation has been amazingly generous to the four projects, and we are now over \$70,000 in total gifts. We had outstanding adult education classes for the local ministries with [Harbor House](#) and [Friends of Fieldworkers](#), with Denise and Martita. The following week I was pleased that the zoom technology worked with Naomi in NYC and with her



mother, Blessed, in [Arusha, Tanzania](#). Through GOH we are being the blessing in powerful and life-changing ways. Did you know that our Gifts of Hope started in 2002 and since then we have raised over \$1.6 million for local and global ministries? Here's a list of gifts over the years, and where we have partnered with the Lutheran congregations in various countries in Africa. Let's thank this year's Gift of Hope Team: Carol Bjelland, Mary Wennes, Stacy Bosco, Tamara Nowlin, and Dave Harkins! Let us know if you'd like to help with next year's; we'll begin planning that this spring.



Other significant events in November for our GMT included our monthly meeting, this time on Nov. 8 with a focus on refugees and immigrants, with guest speakers from Simi Valley, Pastor Susan, and from [LIRS](#), Karla Leitzman. Louise Evenson, our chairperson, brilliantly has planned each GMT meeting to have a special focus with an invitation to the congregation to come. Julie, Natalie, and I had the pleasure of attending the "World Fair" at Cal Lutheran, sponsored by their [Center for Global Engagement](#), and led so well by Dr. Christina Sanchez, who is also on our GMT. We enjoyed interacting with the international students and the displays that they had for each of their countries. Each month Carol Bjelland does so much good work for our Fair Trade ministries and we are pleased with the new folk who are volunteering with us.





In November I was able to connect with two-thirds of our members who are our oldest whom we visit. Our Christian Life Hour ministry at senior living places is growing. See the helpful calendar, at the end of this report, a calendar that Emilee designed. We invite you to come to anyone of these CLHs and see the joy that these seniors have in singing the old hymns and having their faith encouraged. Thanks to Norm and our team! The photo is of Barbara Krum at one of our Christian Life Hours and giving a resident a Thanksgiving card from our Ascension Lutheran School children. In the middle is Viola Peterson, the mom of Deb Papageorge! Later in the month, I was glad to have lunch with Chuck Cohen and learn about his attitude of gratitude, in the midst of the loss of his dear Eloise. Ascension seniors – if any of you would like a home visit, please tell me, and I would love to visit you in your home or share a lunch together.



Our synod's Senior Adult Advisory Committee met on Nov. 13. I participated online and we had an excellent discussion on the vision and mission of our team.

Two other leaders that I get to work with every week are Linda Morrow (for our Email Prayer Group) and Susanne Hopkins (with the Monday morning devotion on Facebook). And two that bless us each week with their work for the food pantry, Ann Welp and Bob Tokin. Thanks to Brenda Heinrich for leading GriefShare each Thursday! This month I missed a few Fridays singing with our ECC but will get back to it in December. On Nov. 19 I enjoyed the Great Music at Ascension concert with the UCLA Brass led so enthusiastically by [Jens Lindemann](#). Thanks to Edith and the team!

Pastor Julie announced her resignation, so we want to thank her for her five plus years of so many ministries, wonderful preaching, fascinating children's sermons, and powerful prayers. We pray all the best for her and Brannon (with his new job as a pilot, based here) and as she has some sabbath time while being open to her next pastoral call. Pastor Julie, thank you for your prayers for us and we will be praying for you.

On a personal note, my family and I hosted Thanksgiving Dinner in our backyard for twelve people and it was a beautiful day. We plan to fly to see family in the Midwest after Christmas Eve and look forward to that time together. May you each have a good 12 days of Christmas with family and friends.

God's blessings to each of you, as you experience the joy of being a blessing in serving God, one another, and God's beloved world, in Jesus' name and with His love and grace! Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year!



# Christian Life Hours

Calendar reflects each month



| Sunday                                   | Monday                     | Tuesday | Wednesday                                  | Thursday | Friday                                                       | Saturday |
|------------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------|--------------------------------------------|----------|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
|                                          | 1:30pm<br>Atria Grand Oaks |         |                                            |          |                                                              |          |
| 3:30pm<br>University Village<br>Oak View | 10am<br>Royal Oaks Inn     |         | 2pm<br>Sunrise Senior<br>Living - Westlake |          | 10am<br>Hillcrest Royale<br>1:30 and 2:00pm<br>Sage Mountain |          |
|                                          | 1:30pm<br>Atria Grand Oaks |         |                                            |          |                                                              |          |
|                                          | 10am<br>Royal Oaks Inn     |         |                                            |          | 1:30 and 2:00pm<br>Sage Mountain                             |          |

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” *Colossians 3:16-17*

### SUNRISE SENIOR LIVING - WESTLAKE VILLAGE

3101 Townsgate Rd,  
Westlake Village, CA 91361

### ROYAL OAKS INN

45 N Erbes Rd  
Thousand Oaks, CA 91362

### SAGE MOUNTAIN SENIOR LIVING

3499 Grande Vista Dr,  
Thousand Oaks, CA 91320

### HILLCREST ROYALE

190 E Hillcrest Dr  
Thousand Oaks, CA 91360

### ATRIA GRAND OAKS

2177 E Thousand Oaks Blvd  
Thousand Oaks, CA 91362

### UNIVERSITY VILLAGE OAK VIEW

3557 Campus Dr  
Thousand Oaks, CA 91360

For more information, please contact:  
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