

### Attendance

Our six week average is still increasing: last month I reported 340; it is now 358 with the weekend of January 6/7 at 376. This is a great place to start 2024!

I would love to report some Christmas attendance numbers for you, but we are still circling back with a couple of usher teams to get numbers on two of the services. I can tell you with just three services reported we will have more attendees for Christmas 2023 than we did for Easter 2023, which totaled 885. Christmas of 2022 was 1006, so we are likely to exceed that total as well.

### Maintenance

We were able to get some trees trimmed, steam some carpets, and clean some windows over the winter break. We're also cleaning up and moving some things around! Jeff, Cam, Jude Delkeskamp, Christian Teufel, Camyrn Force, and Mike Marvin helped clean up the Sunday School Office and clear out some supplies from our last Vacation Bible School. We moved the Sunday School Cabinets over from the Elementary School space. We'll consolidate supplies and have everything children and youth related together in a single space! It will be a nice gift to a new youth director when we hire one to have a fresh and clean office with organized materials. The School will be able to re-purpose the former Sunday School storage space into back office space, and re-purpose their business office into a classroom for next year. As an added bonus, we moved extra cabinets into Bethlehem Room for the Food Pantry; they will be able to have their supplies more centrally located and better organized.

### Sonrise Room Equipment

Last October the council allocated \$1,030 of Thrivent Choice Dollars to equip the Sonrise Room as a study and conference space. Thank you! I was able to utilize some great Black Friday sales, and spent just \$577.17 on the television, mount, camera/speaker, dvd player, keyboard, and mouse. The conference table currently in the space comfortably seats eight, and moving it to the side and using rows of chairs increases the capacity. We can now view Bible Study DVD's like the Grief Share Group does, and hold Zoom or Teams conferences as many of our committees and our staff do on a regular basis. I held off on reporting our spend in December to wait and see how the camera/speaker I purchased would work. While I did purchase a 4K device like the television it is paired with, I bought a significantly cheaper one than our tech team recommended to me. The television was delivered December 22, so we have just started to set up and test the equipment. Provided that the camera/speaker works well we will be able to return \$452.83 of the Thrivent Choice dollars.

### Reserve Studies

References for both Association Reserves and Reserve Studies are included in your packet. I look forward to our discussion and next steps.

### Human Resources

I engaged with Light Gabler Law to update our employee handbooks. There are a couple of new pieces of information that I am working through with the rest of the executive leadership team. We may propose a couple of changes in February or March, but for now the main changes required are an increase to the minimum amount of sick time from 24 hours to 40 hours, five days of (unpaid) bereavement leave for the loss of an immediate family member, and some additional job protections around pregnancy loss. An expanded workplace prevention policy is required by July of this year, but

the State is expected to provide a template this spring. Our counsel is proposing some additional proactive language in light of the National Labor Relations Board being quite strict about anything that appears to abridge speech by employees. There was nothing problematic in our handbooks that needed to be removed, but they are recommending their added language to the majority of their clients.

I asked for edits on the Church Employee Handbook. As soon as I incorporate all of them in the Church Handbook I will make likewise revisions (as appropriate) to the TK-7 Employee Handbook and the ECC Employee Handbook.

#### Embracing Inclusivity: California's All Gender Restroom Laws

California adopted Senate Bill 1732 (SB 1732) in 2016, a law that requires places of public accommodation to designate single use restrooms as all gender restrooms. The bill mandates the creation of all-gender restrooms in public places, ensuring that individuals can access facilities without fear of discrimination based on gender identity. A new law effective January 1, 2024, Assembly Bill 783 (AB783), supports the All Gender Restroom Bill by requiring California cities and counties to provide written notice to all applicants for a business license or a permit of the requirement.

Many of our single use restrooms at Ascension already had All Gender signs, but we missed a couple! The new law passing was a good reminder to the Ascension team to walk the campus and make sure our common use spaces are hospitable and accommodating to people of all gender identities and expressions. Regardless of your personal views, we can all agree that Ascension is a community that values hospitality and inclusiveness.

Our church sacristy, church nursery, early childhood center, and STEM bungalow have single user bathrooms that are open to any individuals who prefer to use them. Fostering a welcoming environment is an ongoing process; thank you for your participation in making Ascension a welcoming environment to everyone.

#### Be the Blessing

I have gotten to participate in some fun and creative work with a team of staff and committee members to move this initiative forward! I met with Ed and Pastor Tim to dream about what full community and congregation involvement in this process would look like. We refined and streamlined the process previously set by Pastor Julie and Camryn Force about accepting applications, committee process, and check disbursement. I still have some "homework" to do in terms of making the process electronic and seamless for both the applicants and the committee, but we are getting there!

Ed was wise to highlight that we have so many well-functioning ministries and opportunities for service already at Ascension. We had a wonderful conversation about spiritual gifts, and how discovering them could open doors for members to get involved with both new and existing ministries. Stacy and I have been getting some resources from the ELCA, and hoping to incorporate their spiritual gifts assessment into our website. Stacy and Jenelle are helping to work from the active ministry list that Dave Harkins recently updated to create a list of ministries with some short descriptions and a contact person. Pastor Tim and I discerned which spiritual gifts are most likely associated with participating in those ministries. Our hope is to have members participate in the spiritual gifts assessment, and then engage in service that utilizes their gifts. It could be within an existing ministry at Ascension, and it might be something brand new.

*Kaylee Searway*



## Pastor Tim's Council Report- January 24

Grace and peace to you my family in Christ. It was an intense December as December can sometimes be. For me it was especially impacted as it was marred not only by my own 2 weeks dealing with the RSV virus but also with my poor puppy's struggle with a nasty parvo virus (she's better now). Despite personal setbacks, many great things happened around here in December, especially around Christmas time, including special Wednesday evening Taizé services, Hanging of the Green, each of our school's music programs and our Christmas eve services. All went wonderfully well. I want to thank all who joined together to help make it all happen. We have a truly wonderful community of staff and volunteers who love to make important contributions.

Of greatest urgency and important right now is our transition of leadership. As I reported at December's council meeting, we are in the process of reviewing pastoral roles and reexamining our staff's organization chart so that we can produce accurate and effective job descriptions for both our Youth Director position and our Associate Pastor position. Having this done will really catalyze our ability to empower the Call Committee to do their incredibly important work.

In the meantime, I have added much of Pastor Julie's former duties to my job description. This work includes overseeing confirmation, Sunday school, and ALS Chapel. I have very much appreciated the ways volunteers such as Cameron Force, Don Weeks, Carlah Snyder, Rick Ertel, Rachael Bowen, Jenny Klemp, Chamie Delkeskamp have stepped up to the plate to help in these ministry as I go through the learning curve and figure out my role. It's been fun and life-giving to get more involved in these ministries.

If I know myself though, I will need to keep an eye on my hours. I don't want to get too burned out. In this way I appreciate that Pastor Steve has increased his halftime hours to  $\frac{3}{4}$  time, that Pastor Paul is helping with various projects including taking on the oversight of our Lenten preaching series and that Jenelle Smith (who continues to do excellent work) is adding hours to her job to help me with various projects.

Finally, I am excited to present to you an update on the transition process at our meeting. I hope to, along with Kaylee Searway and Carrie Leonard, present the job descriptions of our new Youth Director Role as well our Associate pastor role. It is my role to oversee this process and shepherd it along as smoothly and efficiently as possible.

Yours in Christ,

*Pastor Tim*

## Church Council Report – Pastor Steve Herder – January 9, 2024

Blessed New Year, friends in Christ!

On January 5<sup>th</sup>, I shared this message on our Ascension social media:

*Here on the last day of the Christmas season, we want to thank you, dear Ascension family, for all your recent expressions of love and appreciation to your pastors and our staff. We thank God for each of you and your partnership in the ministry of Jesus, as the Spirit leads us all!*

*Keep our church leadership in prayer as we seek God's guidance in finding a new full-time associate pastor and a new full-time youth director. Thank you!*



*In the meantime, Pastor Tim will be taking on more responsibilities including teaching Confirmation on Thursdays [he's looking forward to teaching the Bible with them] and Pastor Steve will do more as well in this interim time.... Our most important work weekdays are our visits with you, so don't hesitate to call, email, or ask for a visit. Pastoral care is a priority!.... Thank you for your prayers for our synod, ELCA, and all our local and global partners in ministry, for peace in our world.*

This week Pastor Tim and I had a good conversation over lunch about my moving from half-time to three-fourths time, at least in this interim time, the next three to six months, as we seek to call an associate pastor. I'll keep doing what I've been doing in my half-time role the last sixteen months: pastoral care; Senior Adult Ministries Team; Prayer Ministries; Community Concerns Team; Global Ministries Team; sing with our ECC on Fridays; and do two to six posts on social media each day. Our Facebook page now has over 2,200 followers.

What I'll add in this interim is more time helping to lead the 9:00 service, working with Carol Bartell on our Sunday morning adult education time at 10:30, and being the pastoral rep to both our Monday Morning Women's Bible Study and our Ascension Foundation. I'm very happy to add each of these ministries for this interim, and I look forward to working with the lay leaders in each of these ministries.

This morning I asked Diane in our office for an updated list of our members, from our oldest, Irene Sansam, at 100 years young, down to those who are now 65! The total number in this group is 423. As I look to connect with you through the year, don't hesitate to reach out to me for any updates from you and your family. Here are the other numbers. We have one who is 100! There are 23 people in their 90s, 110 in their 80s, 199 in their 70s, and 90 people in that half-decade time, between 65 and 69. That's a lot of friends for you to get to know. Everyone, please wear your name tag when you come to worship!

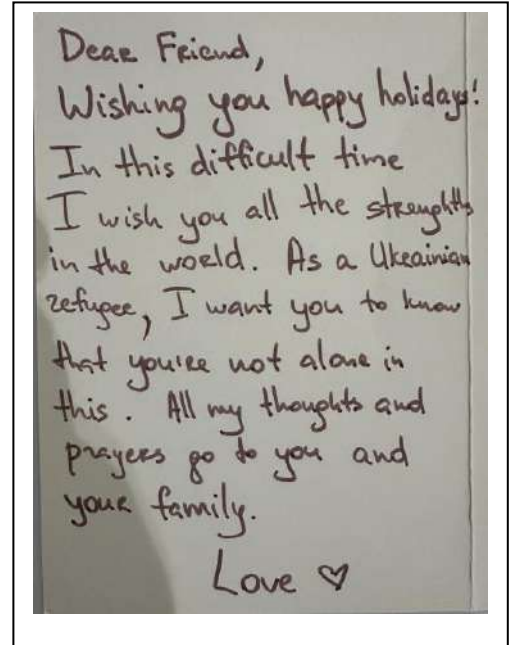
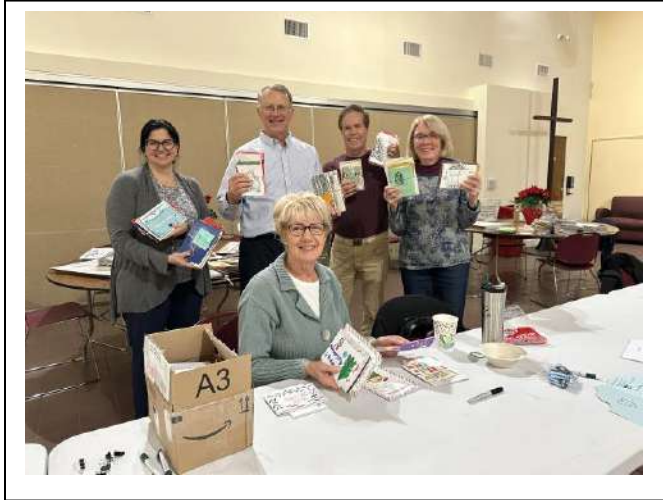
Below are some highlights of ministries since my last Council report. The Global Ministries Team hosted a dinner celebration for Nina Dube, Cal Lutheran student, from Zimbabwe, who is now doing a “semester at sea,” traveling and studying in a dozen countries this semester. (Photo by Christian Teufel.) Our GMT Gifts of Hope update is at the end of this report! Thanks to so many for your generosity!



For the 10<sup>th</sup> year we have led, with interfaith leaders, the Compassionate Friends ceremony on the second Sunday of December. This is an event for all of Ventura County for families who have lost a child to death. This is a caring outreach ministry that Ascension hosts for our community and I have helped lead it each of these past ten years.



Also, for several years we have been one of three national hubs to receive Christmas cards that are then distributed to refugees and immigrants across the country. This ministry is coordinated by our Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service. The card on the right was written by Olga, from Ukraine, and a graduate student at Cal Lutheran. We sent 2,002 cards!



Each month we lead "Christian Life Hours" in six senior living facilities in our area. This photo is from Sunrise in Westlake. The friend in the green on the right is Vi Peterson, mother of Deb Papageorge! This month I started a new worship service at Hillcrest Royale. We thank Norm, Barbara, Dennis, Jeff, Jan, and Marilyn, for helping to lead these CLHs. The residents love it when we come!



### Christian Life Hours

*Celebrate and pray each month*

Sun/Day	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1:30pm Atira Grand Oaks					
3:30pm University Village Oak View	10am Royal Oaks Inn		2pm Sunrise Senior Living - Westlake		10am Hillcrest Royale	
	1:50pm Atira Grand Oaks					
	10am Royal Oaks Inn				1:50 and 3:30 pm 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**  
3033 Tecoma Rd.  
Westlake Village, CA 91381

**ROYAL OAKS INN**  
41 N. Tabor Rd.  
Thousand Oaks, CA 91320

**SAGE MOUNTAIN SENIOR LIVING**  
3450 Avenida Vista De  
Thousand Oaks, CA 91320

**HILLCREST ROYALE**  
1209 E Hillcrest Dr  
Thousand Oaks, CA 91320

**ATIRA GRAND OAKS**  
1177 E Thousand Oaks Blvd  
Thousand Oaks, CA 91320

**UNIVERSITY VILLAGE OAK VIEW**  
5507 Campus Dr  
Thousand Oaks, CA 91320

For more information, please contact:  
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We thank all our music leaders, worship leaders, staff, and tech team, for all the wonderful Advent and Christmas worship services this past month, including our choir's cantata, and our handbell choir's special music. Nancy Lee and Country Spirit led a beautiful Christmas Cowboy service. Our 10:30 service with Praise Alive is growing with more young families. We thank Margaret Ricci for playing the pipe organ at all five Christmas Eve services and Cathi Peterson for playing Christmas morning. In mid-December, I surprised you and preached on Psalm 85 and Jesus' baptism, the two art pieces by John August Swanson in our east and west entrances! Christmas caroling to some of our oldest members is a special tradition and blessing. We thank Elijah Lomeli for driving the bus and Yvonne Zoetewey for leading the singing with her flute! Photos at the bottom of the page are of Donna Corra and Dr. Al Leland. Blessed to be a blessing!



In next month's report I'll share more updates from our prayer ministries, Community Concerns, Stephen Ministry, Eucharistic Ministry, and the new ministries that I get to work with you, the leaders of them, in this interim time. Thanks for your prayers.

as of 1/8/24

<b>GIFTS OF HOPE 2023 CAMPAIGN</b>				<b>\$87,071.00</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>After Allocation</b>	<b>\$87,071.00</b>
<b>Meru, Tanzania</b>				<b>\$32,586.00</b>	<b>47</b>		<b>\$33,403.00</b>
Bibles for Evangelists	\$12	\$456.00	5				\$456.00
Goats for widows	\$50	\$2,600.00	26				\$2,600.00
Field school: farming	\$75	\$675.00	6				\$675.00
Build a House for widow	\$2,500	\$16,905.00	11				\$16,905.00
ECC Offering (below)		\$1,000.00	16				\$1,000.00
General Gift		\$10,950.00	15				\$11,767.00
<b>ELCA World Hunger Appeal</b>				<b>\$13,710.00</b>	<b>56</b>		<b>\$14,526.00</b>
10 Chicks	\$10	\$870.00	31				\$870.00
Honey Bee Hive	\$20	\$840.00	23				\$840.00
<b>Piglet</b>	<b>\$30</b>	<b>\$1,170.00</b>	<b>25</b>				<b>\$1,170.00</b>
Fish community	\$250	\$750.00	2				\$750.00
Cow	\$500	\$500.00	1				\$500.00
Family Farm	\$715	\$5,720.00	6				\$5,720.00
General World Hunger		\$3,860.00	11				\$4,676.00
<b>Friends of Fieldworkers</b>				<b>\$23,350.00</b>	<b>43</b>		<b>\$24,166.00</b>
Bag of Groceries	\$25	\$3,025.00	20				\$3,025.00
Laundry Love Program	\$50	\$1,050.00	12				\$1,050.00
Angel Love (unplanned)	\$100	\$2,225.00	9				\$2,225.00
ECC Offering (below)		\$415.00	10				\$415.00
General Gift		\$16,635.00	19				\$17,451.00
<b>Harbor House</b>				<b>\$14,160.00</b>	<b>46</b>		<b>\$14,976.00</b>
Bag of Groceries/Family	\$25	\$1,475.00	19				\$1,475.00
Tank of Gas/Family	\$75	\$750.00	6				\$750.00
Rental Assistance	\$100	\$1,725.00	9				\$1,725.00
<b>General Food Gifts</b>		<b>\$10,210.00</b>	<b>23</b>				<b>\$11,026.00</b>
<b>ECC</b>				<b>\$1,415.00</b>	<b>18</b>		<b>\$1,415.00</b>
Friends of Fieldworkers	\$25	\$415.00	10				\$415.00
Vaccinations Tanzania	\$25	\$675.00	14				\$675.00
Clinic visits Tanzania	\$25	\$325.00	9				\$325.00
<b>Other Gift</b>				<b>\$3,265.00</b>	<b>7</b>		
							<b>Residual</b>
<b>Checks ordered for distribution 12/21/23:</b>							
Milwaukee Synod (Tanzania Project)		\$28,000					\$5,403.00
ELCA World Hunger		\$8,600					\$5,926.00
Friends of Fieldworkers		\$20,200					\$3,966.00
Harbor House		\$12,700					\$2,276.00