



**ASCENSION  
LUTHERAN**

---

CHURCH ■ SCHOOL ■ FOUNDATION

# ANNUAL REPORT

## 2023/24



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

## **Table of Contents**

Pg 2...Table of Contents

Pg 3...Pastor Tim, Introduction

Pg 5...Minutes of Congregational Meeting of June 23, 2024

### **ONE ASCENSION CHURCH**

Pg 10...Church Staff, Council, Worship Schedule

Pg 11...Past Council President, Jeanette Ruggiero

Pg 13...Pastor Steve Herder

Pg 17...Director of Operations, Kaylee Searway

Pg 21...Summary of Insurance Policies

Pg 23...Membership Report Including Parochial Report to ELCA (Synod Form A)

Pg 25...Communication Coordinator, Stacy Smith Bosco

### **ONE ASCENSION SCHOOL**

Pg 28...Current School Board Members

Pg 29...Current School Board President, Ashley Steere

Pg 30...Ascension Lutheran School, Principal Rich Gregory

Pg 32...Ascension Early Childhood Center and Infant/Toddler Center, Director Jenni McCoy

### **ONE ASCENSION FOUNDATION**

Pg 38...Current Foundation Members

Pg 39...Letter from the Foundation

### **ONE ASCENSION MINISTRY**

Pg 41...Current Ministries

Pg 43...Adult Education

Pg 44...Be the Blessing

Pg 46...Community Concerns

Pg 52...Eucharistic Ministry

Pg 54...Fair Trade Ministry

Pg 56...Generosity Team

Pg 57...Gifts of Hope

Pg 59...Global Ministries Team

Pg 63...Library

Pg 64...Meet, Greet and Eat

Pg 65...Outreach Team

Pg 67...Prayer Tree Ministry

Pg 68...Senior Adult Ministry

Pg 70...Women's Monday Morning Bible Study

Pg 71...Worship

### **ONE ASCENSION BUDGETS**

Pg 74...Ascension Lutheran Church FYE Budget (Cash Review and Benevolences)

Pg 77...Ascension Lutheran School and Early Childhood Center FYE Budget

Pg 78...Ascension Lutheran Foundation FYE Budget

## Pastor Tim's Annual Report September 2023 to September 2024

A lot has happened in a year. As I come to another annual report, I want to begin by saying that **I feel very blessed to be your senior pastor**. Even in the midst of challenges and long days, I am thankful to be serving such an incredible church. This has been a particularly poignant year for Chamie and me as we saw our last child graduate from high school. It is those milestone moments that make you reflect. One of the things that struck me is what a blessed community Ascension has been to our family all of these years. Thank you!

So let me begin with **Children, Youth, and Family Ministries**. In this past year, both our youth director, Dianne Beck, and associate pastor, Julie McCain, resigned from their positions. In the midst of the void left and the ensuing long process of finding a new youth director and associate pastor, so many - including me - were putting in extra hours. One of the blessings, though, of the longer hours was time to be smack dab in the middle of these ministries. For instance, I got to be with the confirmation kids more often than I had been and hear their thoughts. I sat on the Search Committee for the Youth Director. Interviewing so many candidates and going through the whole process - and praying all along the way - really helped us hone in on who we are and where we want to go as a church in terms of youth ministry. I am very excited about our new Youth Director, Jen Avalos, and what she brings to the table. Our youth program needs to be rebuilt one relationship at a time and she is ready to do that work. I also want to say a huge thanks to Dianne Beck, who, after resigning from her position, came back for the interim time to help keep the High School program going. And to Jenni Klemp who came on as our interim Children's Ministry Coordinator. She supported our Sunday School program and did an incredible job of making VBS happen.

Though I did not sit on the Call Committee, I was there to support them and pray for them in the process. And just 24 hours ago (as I write this), we have, after many months, voted on our new pastor - my wife, Pastor Chamie Delkeskamp! I still am trying to get my mind around it. This is not where either of us expected to land this August, but the Holy Spirit has led us here. Here is something that I can tell you about Chamie from many years of personal experience: she's got a lot of passion and her energy for children, youth, and family ministries is what Ascension needs right now. With our thriving ECC and day school, we also want a thriving children's ministry at church. We want to help grow life-long followers of Jesus who stay connected to church communities. This is so important. Take note of this research:

*One of the most-quoted Bible verses by Christian parents and educators is "train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). A new nationwide survey provides some statistical support for that notion, showing that adults who regularly attended church as children are much more likely than their unchurched peers to be involved in church-based and personal spiritual activities. The study, conducted by the Barna Research Group of Ventura, California, found that roughly seven out of ten Americans adults (71%) had a period of time during their childhood when they regularly attended a Christian church. Apparently, old habits die hard: a majority of those who attended church as a youngster still attend regularly today (61%), while a large majority of those who were not church-goers as children are still absent from churches today (78%).*

So let me now reflect on **worship and fellowship** as a whole. Ascension is blessed with a beautiful sanctuary, great technology, and gifted musical staff. We were happy to add Melissa Berg as the leader of the 10:30 worship band. That being said, we want to continue to not only have strong worship services, but expand our creativity and reach. We have received several new members, but I believe we need to grow our outreach and hospitality and welcome even more visitors. Of course, one way for new people - and long-time members, too - to connect on Sundays is through FOOD. Our new and revamped fellowship time after our Sunday Services has been a success this past year.

To make all our ministries happen, we must have the **resources of time, talents, and treasures**. I continue to be amazed by all the faithful and gifted people who lead and serve in Ascension's many ministries. It really is incredible. I also know that we need to continue to equip and empower new leaders in every age group. We also need to teach on giving and generosity to new generations so we can continue to be financially stable and flourish as a community. Our offerings increased this past year not just by amount, but also by those who now give offerings. In addition, our "Blessed to Be a Blessing" initiative has been very exciting.

As we go forth into this next year, in a time when our culture seems very divided and divisive, I think it will be important to do some pondering and praying together about who we are called to be and what our identity is. First and foremost, our identity is rooted in Christ. I have also strived to be what I call a "big tent church" where we hold the tension with grace and make room for each other under the tent. I want us as a community to do more in clarifying our identity as a church and our values and vision of who we are called to be.

In conclusion, I want to say how grateful I am that we are in the midst of "24 in 24" because good things - and great revivals - come out of deep prayer. I believe we have an amazing year ahead of us. I am grateful for an excellent staff - which is feeling more complete with our new youth director and associate pastor, for excellent lay leadership, energetic volunteers, and a caring One Ascension community. May we go forth into this new year with joy and hold on to hope. I leave you with this verse from Hebrews 10:23: "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful."



**Ascension Lutheran Church  
Congregational Meeting Minutes  
June 23, 2024 at 12:00 p.m.**

**Call to Order and Welcome**

The meeting was called to order by Jeannette Ruggiero, Council President, at 12:02 pm.

**Opening Prayer**

Ed Klodt, Council Past President opened the meeting in prayer.

**Mission Statement of Ascension Lutheran Church**

*We are called to create opportunities for all people to become devoted followers of Christ.*

**Motto:** *Invite, Grow, Serve*

**Presentation and Approval of Agenda – Jeannette**

Move Agenda Item – Due to a time constraint for Scott Squires, the Youth Director Search Update will be presented just after the approval of the agenda.

*A motion was made (Karsten Lundring), seconded (Jim Overton), and passed unanimously to approve the agenda as amended.*

**Youth Director Search Update – Scott Squires**

The committee members bring a depth of experience with Ascension's youth activities to their search for a youth director. They met with the youth group to get their input regarding the future of the youth program. The number of participants in youth activities has been declining. The youth would like to have more activities. Dianne Beck has stepped in to lead the weekly Bible studies.

Contacts have been made with Lutheran college campuses and churches across the country, and the position has been posted on Indeed. There have been 46 applicants so far. The first round of interviews for 15 of the candidates were held via Zoom. Five moved forward to the second-round interviews which were conducted in person when possible. None of the applicants have stood out as a potential hire for this position.

The process is not being rushed so that the search will yield the dynamic, Christ-centered leader who will guide Ascension's youth into the future.

**Approval of Minutes for the September 2023 Annual Meeting - Jeanette**

*A motion was made (Shelly Snyder), seconded, and passed unanimously to approve the minutes from the September 2023 Annual meeting.*

**Election of Candidates – Pastor Tim**

The candidates for the open positions on the Church Council, the School Board, and the Foundation are listed in the packet provided to the congregation prior to this meeting. There were no questions regarding the slate of candidates or additional nominations from those in attendance at this meeting.

*A motion was made (Carrie Leonard), seconded, and passed unanimously to suspend voting by written ballots.*

*A motion was made (Ed Klodt), seconded, and passed unanimously via voice vote to approve and elect the slate of candidates as presented.*

## **Plans for Ministry – Pastor Tim**

The “24 in 24” prayer initiative is necessary at this time because God is up to something and we need to be ready for our new associate pastor and youth leader.

This is a challenging time for Ascension as we’re an aging congregation. There are younger people in worship but they’re not necessarily engaged in church life. The current culture is one where regular worship attendance and participation in church activities may not be a priority.

One challenge is to continue building a Christ-centered community for the youth in our congregation. Confirmation classes and Sr. Luther League activities will help them find their identity and purpose in Christ. There is also a focus on improving the worship experience and encouraging fellowship after the services and through small groups. The goal is to strengthen both community and our identity as good, grace-filled people.

The good news is:

- We have a clear vision of the qualifications our new associate pastor and youth leader must possess.
- Two incredible schools.
- A sound financial position.
- A generous congregation; a people of abundance.
- Good leadership.
- Great staff.
- New worshippers.

The great news is the God is on our side.

## **Presentation of One Ascension Budget – Dave Harkins, Council Treasurer**

### Church Budget

The Finance staff, Mike Marvin and Camryn Force, spent the past year reviewing and making sense of the annual budget, reviewing each line item.

The main elements that influence the FY24–25 budget include the following:

- A request to the congregation for a 5% increase in giving. Inflation has affected salary and other expenses, which necessitates increased giving. FY23-24 saw a 4% increase in giving as well as a 9.7% increase in the number of giving units. The latter is any person or household who gave an offering anytime during the year.
- The budgeted amount for Salaries & Benefits is larger than last year even though the actual expenditure this year is less than the budgeted amount. This was due to the vacancies for the associate pastor and the youth leader. The FY24-25 amount takes into account the annual salaries and benefits for the two vacant positions even though they’re not yet filled.
- The Property Maintenance line includes the church’s contribution of \$25,000 to the One Ascension long-term asset maintenance fund, contingent on ending the year with a surplus.
- Insurance costs and utility expenses have increased over the past year and the trend is expected to continue in the new fiscal year.

The percentage of benevolences as compared to total giving for the church, school, and Foundation for FY23-24 is 28%, confirming that One Ascension is a generous community.

The church’s cash position is very strong.

Questions:

Ron Cox      Where are the cash funds held? Are they earning interest?  
-    The funds are held in short-term interest-earning accounts.

Jim Overton    Is there a plan for covering potential future maintenance costs?  
-    Ascension is already working with a vendor to identify and plan for long-term capital maintenance needs.

#### ECC/School Budget

Tuition for the new school year was increased by 7%. Part of this is due to security personnel and infrastructure costs. The budgeted tuition amount is based on 170 students at the school and full enrollment of 185 students at the ECC. The student count at the school includes reinstating the 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

The budget shows a positive bottom line for FY24-25.

#### Foundation Budget

A \$228,000 gain was realized for FY23-24. Budgeted Ending Net Assets for FY24-25 is lower than the amount budgeted for the previous year based on the Foundation's intent to enhance grants and scholarships in the new fiscal year.

*A motion was made (Ron Cox) and seconded to approve budgets for the church ECC/School, and Foundation as presented.*

#### Discussion:

Why are cash funds for the church being held with a secular entity?  
-    Commitments with Pacific Western have been reduced over the years.  
-    The school holds funds with Thrivent for longer-term accounts. Thrivent's short-term rates are not as favorable as the Fidelity rate.

*The motion to approve the budgets passed unanimously.*

#### **Old Business**

##### 1. Land Sale – Bob Woodward

The land sale is still in process with the city. The buyer, Robert Younkin, is submitting his plans now. Ascension's to-do's include:

- Updating the parking study / parking spaces.
- Developing a garden study.

Both of these have been completed and will be submitted to the city.

There will be more information to share at the September Congregational meeting.

##### 2. Call Committee Update – Scott Searway and Susie Smuck

The committee is meeting weekly and reviewing the background of candidates received from the Synod. Candidates are also being sought via Instagram and LinkedIn. Questions for the committee can be submitted via email to acc.org.

##### 3. Update on Be the Blessing – Ed Klodt

Over \$10,000 in grants have been awarded so far. The projects included one-time ministries, new ministries, and adjunct ministries. Five grant requests came from the ECC and school. Five grant requests were from Ascension members. The goal of this initiative is to engage those people not currently active in ministries.

#### **New Business**

Paul Gravrock offered thanks to Pastor Tim and Pastor Steve for taking on additional pastoral duties during this time without an associate pastor.

**Closing Prayer** – Carrie Leonard, Council President Elect

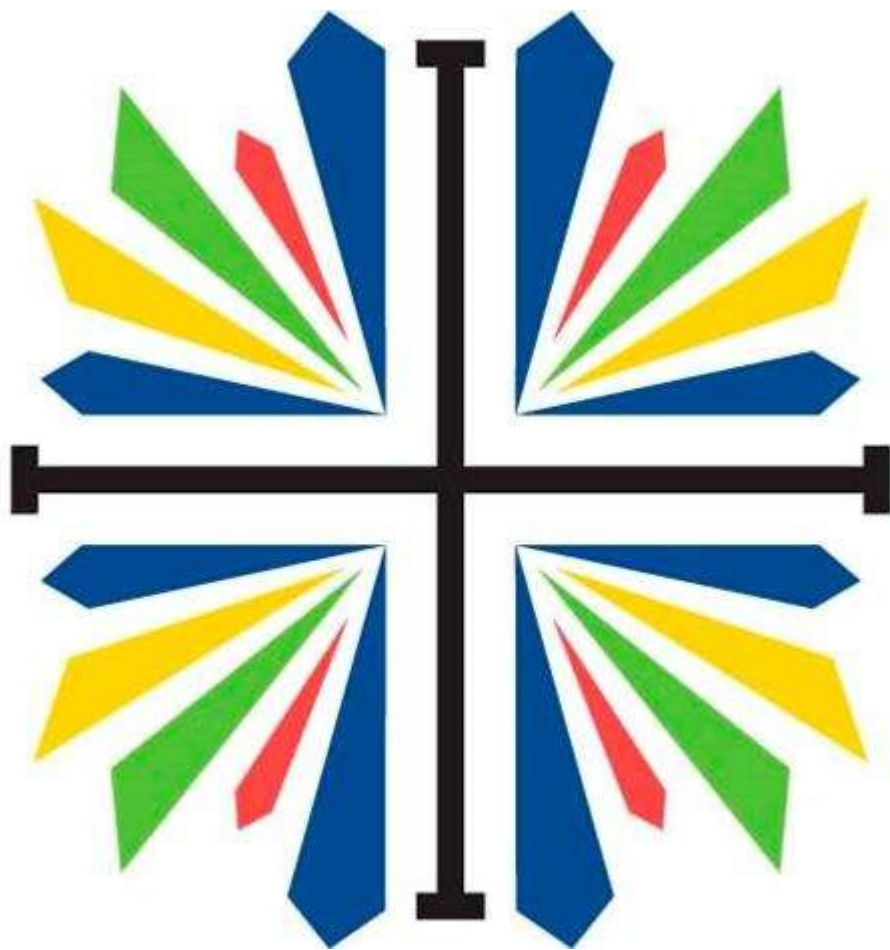
**Adjournment**

*A motion was made (Ed), seconded, and passed unanimously to adjourn the meeting.*

The meeting was adjourned at 1:20 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Rachael Bowen

# ONE ASCENSION CHURCH



**Ascension Lutheran Church**  
1600 East Hillcrest Drive  
Thousand Oaks, California 91362  
Church Phone: (805) 495-0406  
Website: [www.alcto.org](http://www.alcto.org)

Ascension Lutheran School: (805) 496-2419

Early Childhood Center: (805) 381-9081

**Church Staff**

|                                                                        |                                            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Tim Delkeskamp                                                         | Senior Pastor                              |
| Chamie Delkeskamp                                                      | Associate Pastor                           |
| Steve Herder                                                           | Associate Pastor – Senior Adult Ministries |
| Kaylee Searway                                                         | Director of Operations                     |
| Diane Kusnierek                                                        | Records and Facilities Administrator       |
| Stacy Smith Bosco                                                      | Communications Coordinator                 |
| Jenelle Smith                                                          | Worship Coordinator                        |
| Mike Marvin                                                            | Finance Manager                            |
| Camryn Force                                                           | Staff Accountant                           |
| Jennifer Avalos                                                        | Youth Director                             |
| Jeff Hengst                                                            | Maintenance Manager                        |
| Camden Lorentson                                                       | Maintenance Technician                     |
| Jude Delkeskamp                                                        | Maintenance Technician                     |
| Lan Merrill                                                            | Director of Worship Technologies           |
| Wyant Morton                                                           | Chancel Choir Director                     |
| Matt Cahill                                                            | Carillons Director                         |
| Nancy Lee                                                              | Country Spirit                             |
| Margaret Ricci                                                         | Organist                                   |
| Jeanette Ruggiero                                                      | Praise Alive                               |
| Aidan Delkeskamp, Nathan Halvorson,<br>Charles Hulse, Cameron Ruggiero | Sound, Light, Video Technicians            |

**Church Council Members 2024-2025**

|                                               |                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Carrie Leonard – President                    | Alan Baker – Foundation Representative |
| Jeannette Ruggiero – Immediate Past President | Ethan East – Member at Large           |
| John Rarick – President Elect                 | Bonny Chick – Member at Large          |
| Dave Harkins – Treasurer                      | Anna Woodward – School Representative  |
| Rachael Bowen – Secretary                     |                                        |

**Weekend Worship Schedule**

**Saturday:** 6:00 P.M.

**Sunday Services:** 9:00 and 10:30 A.M.

**Sunday School:** 9:10 A.M.

**Adult Education:** 10:30 A.M.

## Ascension Annual Report – Letter from the President

Dear One Ascension,

Grace and peace to you! I write this letter as an introduction to our Annual Report. There is a lot to share in these pages – The Holy Spirit is at work here.

Last year your Church Council and other One Ascension leaders started the Get the Blessing / Be the Blessing initiative with a focus on encouraging a return to in person worship - “Get the Blessing” - which allows us to reconnect with each other as a Christian community. This was inspired by Acts 2. *“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as they had need. Every day they continued to meet in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their numbers daily those who were being saved.”*

During this year, your Church Council contemplated their role in making Get the Blessing / Be the Blessing a lasting change. We talked about being keepers of the vision, establishing systems, seeking new ideas & diversity, telling “the story” and keeping focus. At Ascension we have begun to see increases in our in-person worship attendance and a renewed energy around hospitality, welcoming others and enjoying fellowship. This is exciting. It feels good to be together - growing in our faith, worshipping and serving our Lord. This creates momentum, engagement and supports a culture of service.

As we worship together and build community, we have already started the next step – “Being the Blessing” to others. Did you know that just being at church can make a difference to those around you, perhaps in ways you don’t even realize? Being God’s blessing also may involve reaching outside of the walls of our One Ascension church locally and/or globally. This concept was supported by implementing the Be the Blessing Grant Process so that those inspired could request / access funds set aside for service. There was an invitation to “super charge” existing ministries with new ideas / funding or to think outside of the box and create a new service project or ministry. I ask you.....What are your God-given talents? What are you passionate about? How can you share those gifts? Where do you see a need? It has been wonderful to see this embraced across One Ascension, including our Day School and ECC, with 14 grants approved overall for service projects through end of June 2024.

On another note, this year we took notice of a pattern of decline in our children and youth programs, which was magnified by COVID as we have struggled to recover from post-pandemic. We also have experienced vacancies in key positions such as Youth Director, Contemporary Service Worship Leader, and Associate Pastor. It takes a lot of prayer, an invitation for the Holy Spirit to enter in, and time to find the right people to fill these spots. I am thankful for all those who have offered help, time and energy and for those who have jumped in and remained flexible and positive while in transition. Melissa Berg took the position of Contemporary Worship Leader in January and has been a blessing in her talent, faith and gracious leadership. We very recently, July 2024, hired a new Youth Director in Jen Avalos. She has a contagious energy, spirit, and

love of Jesus. I can't wait to see her gifts at work within our congregation and in the rebuilding of our children and youth programs. This is so important. Thank you to the Youth Director Search Committee for their fruitful efforts!

And finally, we pray, search and await a new Associate Pastor for Ascension. I am grateful for Pastor Tim and Pastor Steve who have both taken on the additional and numerous programs/tasks needed to keep Ascension going. I have a great appreciation for the Call Committee that was selected and who have been faithfully and diligently working together in this one purpose. It is with great anticipation that I look forward to our Pastoral team being complete, and to see how we can stand on the foundation of One Ascension past as we look to the future – God's plan for us moving forward.

As I end my year as your president, I look back and am happy that I said "yes" to serve in this way. It was not within my comfort zone. The love, encouragement and support of my husband Michael and our three kids: Cameron, Chelsea and Chandler means the world. I thank them for that. I have learned much, have had many opportunities to trust in God, and have gotten to know amazing people within our congregation at a deeper level.

Take joy in the summaries and reports within this annual report. There are so many ways in which God is at work here and so many people that contribute to One Ascension. Thank you to our different ministry, committee and task force chairs and members. Your passions, talents, and service are evident and appreciated. We have dedicated church, school and ECC staff and teachers. Thank you for each center of excellence that you represent and for Kaylee Searway, Director of Operations, who is the grand orchestrator of it all.

Day School Principal Rich Gregory and ECC Director Jenni McCoy, you are excellent, Christ-centered and vibrant leaders. Our Day School/ECC are thriving, adding grade levels, reputable within the community with an increasingly safe campus. And our School Board, led by President Scott Bean, is strategic, intentional...and fun! The Ascension Foundation is something to be proud of with the generous grants, scholarships, and gifts that they manage and nurture. Thank you, President Stefano Borzone, for your stewardship.

Pastor Tim and Pastor Steve, thank you for being our leaders of this great place. I am humbled by the work that God does through each of you.

Thank you to my fellow Church Council members, for the time invested and the perspective that you each bring for the good of our beloved Ascension. Special thanks to Ed Klodt, Past President, for his insight, character, and the way he always leads from a loving place.

In closing, I could not think of a better person than Carrie Leonard to be your next Council President. She is experienced and thoughtful, cares deeply about Ascension, has strong relationships throughout the church, and is God's faithful servant. We are in good hands.

This is an exciting time at One Ascension. I am so glad to be a part of it.

Best,

Jeannette Ruggiero, President, Church Council

## Annual Report – July 2023 to June 2024 –

### Pastor Steve Herder

Thank you, Ascension, for giving me this blessed opportunity to lead and serve with you in the ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For the first half of this fiscal year, I was able to continue my half-time work with you. Then with Pastor Julie's finishing her ministry among us last December, I went to 3/4<sup>th</sup> time the second half (Jan-June 2024).



My focus areas are Senior Adult Ministries, pastoral care, Global Ministries Team, and Community Concerns Committee. I work with Linda Morrow and the email prayer group, lead our daily Facebook outreach, and sing with the ECC children and staff on Fridays. In the second half of the year, these responsibilities were added: more leading of liturgy in worship; being the pastoral rep to our Foundation; working with Carol Bartell on our Sunday morning adult education classes; and being with our Women's Monday Morning Bible studies. Each of you who are leaders in those ministries, I thank God for you, and your faithfulness to Christ's mission near and far.

In this annual report booklet, you'll read the excellent reports from ministries leaders that I get to work with: Prayer Ministries, Senior Adult Ministries, Eucharistic Ministries (Pastor Ron Cox and team), Community Concerns (Chris Daleiden and team), and the Global Ministries Team (led by Louise Evenson) including reports from our Fair Trade Ministries (Carol Bjelland), Lutheran World Relief (Louise Evenson), Gifts of Hope (Mary Wennes, Dave Harkins, Stacy Smith, Tamara Nowlin, and Carol Bjelland), Foundation (president Stefano Borzone), Sunday adult education (Carol Bartell), and Women's Monday Morning Bible Study (many leaders).

Along with almost 100 people participating in our email prayer team, other prayer ministry sponsored times were: Blessing of the Pets, early October; [Compassionate Friends](#) Service, the second Sunday of December (Ascension's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary with this); every year the week of January 18-25, the [Week of Prayer for Christian Unity](#); and the National Day of Prayer, the first Thursday in May (at Cal Lutheran). Often, I update our leadership prayer page. Let me know if you'd like the latest copy of that. For updates on any prayer requests, please email Linda Morrow or me. Beginning on June 16, 2024, we began "[24 in 24](#)" [prayer emphasis](#), 24 weeks of prayer in 2024, with opportunities for daily prayer, weekly prayer, and monthly large group teaching events on prayer. It's off to a great start, as we pray Ephesians 3:14-21 each day, and Carolyn Coleman-Grady's leadership and the whole team.

Each month my work priority is leading our Senior Adult Ministries, collaborating with an effective team of ministers, and making home visits, hospital visits, and phone calls with our oldest members. I have visited our seniors in the Conejo Valley, Camarillo, Simi Valley, Fillmore, Chatsworth, Encino, Culver City, and Pasadena.



If you would like a visit from one of our Eucharistic Ministers or me, let me know by either calling the church office (805-495-0406) or emailing me at [pastorsteve@alcto.org](mailto:pastorsteve@alcto.org). Did you know that you can request Communion to be brought to your home? Your pastors would ask you to let us know when you are in the hospital and when you return home. We want to be visiting you and praying for you!

Norm Guetschoff, Barbara Krum, Jeff and Jan Specks, Dennis Gray, Gene and Kathy Cocco, Thea Bukont, and Marilyn Reeve lead the Christian Life Hours (simple worship services) at Royal Oaks Inn, Atria Grand Oaks, Sunrise in Westlake and Sage Mountain. I lead a Christian Life Hour (CLH) service at University Village Oak View one Sunday each month and at Hillcrest Royale one Friday a month. If you would like to learn more about these outreach ministries, talk with any one of us. I thank Barbara Krum for her many visitation ministries, and each of our Eucharistic Ministers and our Stephen Ministers, as well as Valerie Krum for her card ministry, and all the birthday callers! To learn more about: Eucharistic Ministry, visit with Pastor Ron Cox; [Stephen Ministry](#), Norm Guetschoff; the Tuesday food ministry for the needy, led by Tanya and Barry Disselhorst; SAM's Tram, Bob Tokin; 3M, minor maintenance ministry, Chris Daleiden. Our [GriefShare](#) group meets every Thursday at 1:00pm in the prayer chapel, led by Brenda Heinrich. We appreciate this great team of leaders!

This past year you and I have experienced grief from the death of family, friends, and mentors. We thank Jim and Kim Overton who have been so faithful in serving as caring ushers at our funerals and memorial services, and for Debbie Kirsch serving as hostess for the receptions. We thank Margaret Ricci, Nancy Lee, Cathi Peterson, Edith Ott and others who have blessed us with their music ministries at these services.

Both our Community Concerns Team and our Global Ministries Team do so many outstanding ministries throughout the year. The Friday Food Pantry. Serving food with [Harbor House](#). Your donations of food! Caring Ones and the Agape Fund to help those in need. Fair Trade Ministries (Thanks to Carol Bjelland we are number 1 among all Lutheran congregations in the country in FT sales!). [Lutheran World Relief Kits](#). Gifts of Hope. 177 Solar Lights Kits for Ukraine!! (Thank you Louise and team!) Global connections with Cal Lutheran University. (Thank you, Christina Sanchez!) We are one of three congregations in the country that lead "Hope for the Holidays" with our Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, now called Global Refuge! These teams' amazing reports are included in this booklet. Read them, pray for the teams and the ministries, and ask God if you are being called to serve on either our local team or our global team, or both! You'll be working with some wonderful mentors and friends.

We thank Kristine Werner for leading our Green Faith Team, a team that relates both to our local Community Concerns and our Global Ministries, as well as to our school. When you come to Ascension, bring a reusable water bottle; we have three places with filtered water! Part of my green faith practice is to occasionally ride my electric bicycle to work! Each year we observe the [Season of Creation](#) (Sept. 1 to Oct. 4), World Water Day on March 22, and on April 22 we observe Earth Day and seek to practice good care for this planet each day of the year. You notice that our second petition in the prayers of intercession are for the care of God's creation.

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 three AED machines on campus? They are in the west narthex, in the Bethlehem Room behind the church offices, and in our Early Childhood Center lobby.

Most Thursday mornings I attend the [Cal Lutheran chapel service](#) at 11:25. I highly recommend it if you can come. Rev. Scott Hamilton Adams is an inspiring worship leader and preacher. Now we welcome the new leadership of President Rev. Dr. John Nunes.

Each day I do two to six posts on our [Ascension Facebook page](#) that now has over 2,400 people connected to it. Each Monday Susanne Hopkins shares a wonderful devotion. Both our Early Childhood Center and our Elementary School have great posts that we share as well. Other favorite posts come from our [ELCA](#), the Deaconess Community, the [Lutheran World Federation](#), Olive Tree Bible, and local community groups. Our weekend worship services are always available to view on our Facebook page as well. Thanks to Stacy for her daily posts for our 24 in 24 prayer emphasis.

Some unique things to this past year's ministries included: Ascension Partners (local and global) prayer page; an expanded ministry for God's Work Our Hands Sunday in September with three ministries; in October I represented the Jubilee USA Network at the National Council of Churches; the Sunday class on "[Civic Life and Faith](#)" was an outstanding series; five of us went to Houston in February for the ELCA World Hunger Leaders' Gathering; the welcome baskets for refugees; Amanda Berg's ordination on March 16; the great updates to our Fair Trade Lane; our hosting the first Juneteenth event here; our prayers for our Call Committee and our Search Committee; and preparations for a very big event for Blessing of the Pets on Saturday, Oct. 5, 2024, noon to 3pm (led by Bonny Chick and team).

Thanks to Jeannette Ruggiero for her excellent work as our past president and now we welcome Carrie Leonard's leadership. Thanks too to our Church Council, [Foundation](#) trustees, and [School Board](#)! Outstanding leadership by each team! We are so blessed at our school with Pastor Rich Gregory, Jenni McCoy, and the whole staff!

Ascension is blessed with a wonderful staff, led by Pastor Tim and Kaylee. I enjoy working with our front office staff Diane, Jenelle, and Mike and Camryn upstairs in the finance office. Jeff and Cam work so hard for all of us. Stacy does so many excellent communication pieces for us. We appreciate all our congregational leaders, and co-workers in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, including our excellent music staff (and groups) and tech team. Thanks be to God! We are blessed to be a blessing to those around us, our community, and God's beloved world!

“Now to God who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Ephesians 3:20-21).



There has been some major change for us at Ascension in the last year! My team and I have been grateful to serve through a transition time while we have been seeking the associate pastor and youth director that God is calling to this place. Praise God our youth director is found! You will love working with Jennifer Avalos; she is a delight! I am extremely grateful for the diligence of the search committee and all the work they did to find, recruit, and bring her onto the team. I am equally grateful to the call committee, who is working hard on our behalf to find our associate pastor. Our staff has stepped up admirably to fill in the gaps and help during our transitional time. I'd like to take a moment and boast about the wonderful people I am privileged to work with at Ascension every day.

### Administration

Jenelle Smith has stepped up as our Worship Coordinator, working closely with Pastor Tim and many wonderful volunteers to ensure that our worship services remain meaningful and reverent. She's increased her hours to full time and graciously covered a variety of tasks that didn't previously fall to her. Pastor Tim has been working harder than ever producing a very high volume of transformational sermons; I am sure you would agree with me that they have been deep and meaningful. Pastor Steve has increased from half time to three quarter time, and does an amazing job on so many things, one of them being pastoral care. He visits many people in the hospital, in their homes and in retirement communities. He and the Eucharistic Ministries do an amazing job of being church in our local community.

Stacy Smith has continued to work remotely from Connecticut, connecting with our team each week to make sure she highlights the key events in our weekly newsletter, as well as working to keep our website up to date. She and Pastor Steve populate our social media platforms with engaging content each day.

Diane Kusnierek takes care of our campus calendar and records. If you would like to have a ministry meeting or event on campus, please coordinate with Diane; she will make sure it's on the right calendar and set up for you when you arrive. Diane processes more than 500 contributions each month.

Emilee Crites worked at our front desk for about the last year. She's gotten to know our daily and weekly campus visitors, and helped to welcome and organize the daily ongoing of the church office. She has recently decided to return to school, and we wish her well in all her future endeavors! We will be interviewing for a Church Relations Assistant in the coming weeks and months.

The church office is open Monday through Thursday from 8:30 to 4:00, and Friday from 8:30 to 3:00 pm. We close to join the school for chapel from 8:45 to 9:15 most Wednesday mornings during the school year. There is a box by the door of the front office. When you push the "--" button it will notify the office, and we will be able to "buzz" you in. Please be patient as the camera takes a moment to load the images.

## Finance

I am proud of the accurate and detailed budgets and financial reporting that Mike Marvin and Camryn Force turn out on a monthly basis. Their timely reports inform the Council, School Board, and school leadership about our financial position, which allows our leadership to make wise choices in the stewardship of our offerings, tuition, and savings.

The Finance Committee drafted the One Ascension Asset Preservation Fund Policy. The Church, Day School, and Early Childhood Center will continue to add funds annually as our financial results allow. A reserve study we plan to conduct in the fall will help us project future needs and steward those funds carefully. The Finance Committee teamed up with the Foundation to refine our Gift Acceptance Policy. Alan Baker and Paul Evenson were integral in that process.

Camryn and I both worked on a compensation committee as a task force of the School Board to recommend changes to the pay matrix for the teachers. Mike, Camryn and I worked with Jenni McCoy on compensation for the Early Childhood Center, amending the matrix that Jenni McCoy and I created in 2022. Pastor Tim, Dave Harkins as Treasurer and the rest of the Council helped me administer staff increases to the church team that acknowledged hard work and long tenure, even as cost of living has continued to rise.

Our budget preparation process really began in November as we worked with the School Board to plan tuition increases, and then began in earnest in February as we worked to layer in team increases and known expense increases like insurance. With Chris Poveromo's guidance on the School Board, we were able to increase our employment practices liability and directors and officer's coverage this year. We recently enhanced our cyber liability as well. A complete listing of our policies is included in the annual report, as always. I am proud that each of the three budgets prioritize our team as our greatest assets and contribute to our One Ascension Asset Preservation Fund.

## Property Management

I'm not sure anyone is more aware than I am of how blessed we are with Jeff Hengst as our maintenance manager and Cam Lorentson as our maintenance technician. This year we were fortunate to have Jude Delkeskamp join our maintenance team, part time during the school year and full time over the summer. The added help was an extra blessing when we had to cover a prolonged medical leave. As I reflect back on the year the team has developed immensely under Jeff's mentorship.

Some of our successes this year include painting the exterior of the sanctuary, church office building, and TK-8 classrooms. We got a new roof over Founders Hall, the church nursery, and the library and replaced three awnings. We converted the Sonrise Room to a usable conference space with the help of some Thrivent Choice dollars to purchase the technology. We decommissioned our T1 phone lines and upgraded the campus to dedicated fiber service. Some of our challenges included addressing some leaks in the sanctuary roof, replacing playground ground cover, and resealing large planters around the picnic tables.

You may not be aware that our amazing campus houses 58,453 square feet within five structures ranging in inception from 1968 to 2020. Each building poses its own challenges in addition to the “usual” maintenance required of changing air filters, maintaining safety systems, and supervising the custodial team. If you should notice anything that you think needs our attention while you are on campus please email us at [maintenance@alcto.org](mailto:maintenance@alcto.org).

### Human Resources

This year I obtained a credential from the Society for Human Resources as an HR Department of One. One of my reflections as I attended the training was gratitude for how we are staffed at Ascension. We have Camryn as a staff accountant, and she does yeomen’s work on biweekly payroll entries, onboarding paperwork, and terminations. The load she takes on frees Mike to work on new finance initiatives like an available cash report, and for me to work on team development and improving our recruiting and hiring experiences.

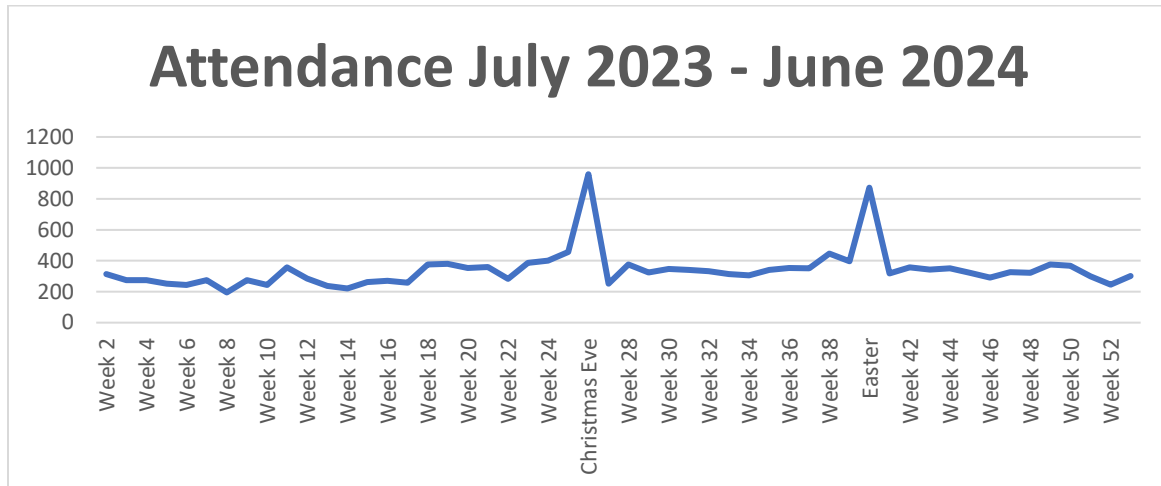
One of the concepts I started using immediately from the training was not new to me, but a great refresher: I started using a RASCI model to define more tasks and projects I work on. It can be helpful to define who is Responsible, Approver, Supporting, Consulted, and Informed on projects. Defining the roles in the beginning of projects can help to align expectations and minimize miscommunication about who the decision makers are. I have also refreshed on some key communication styles instruments. With the addition of Jennifer Avalos to our team we are revisiting the Enneagram as a staff. Pastor Tim and I have both been introduced to the Working Genius concept by Patrick Lencioni. We have both taken the instrument, and the book is one of many in my “To Be Read” pile. I am keen to prepare training on interviewing skills and have Ascension supervisors refresh on that in the coming months. I was also inspired to conduct some “stay interviews,” in addition to the exit interviews we already do, and to work on some new solutions for maintenance request workflow.

### Ministry Growth

There are so many exciting things happening at Ascension! It’s been a privilege in the last year to see the Be the Blessing grants and ideas coming forth for new ministry. One of the items I got to help with is a list of ministries we currently have at Ascension and some of the relevant spiritual gifts of each one. If you have never taken an assessment of your spiritual gifts, I encourage you to go onto our website, click Be the Blessing and follow the prompts to the ELCA’s Spiritual Gifts Assessment Tool. You can then come back to the Ascension page to click on your gift to see what ministry might be a great fit for you.

I’ve enjoyed and been deeply blessed by working with the 24 weeks of prayer in 2024 initiative with Pastor Steve, Carolyn Coleman-Grady, Fran Mork, Paul Trent, Carrie Leonard, and Pastor Tim. I was honored to be one of the guest speakers for our monthly service at 7:00 pm on the second Wednesday of each month. If you haven’t joined us yet, please come for the next one!

One of the ways we are consistently growing at Ascension is in our weekly worship attendance. Excluding Easter and Christmas, we averaged 204 people per weekend in 2021; 246 people in 2022, 297 people in 2023, and 338 in the first half of 2024. This is steady progress!



In addition to the folks that worship with us in person, there are about 130 views each weekend online. Our tech team led by Lan Merrill is amazing, and creates a great online experience for those who can't be with us in person.

It's been amazing to celebrate new members joining us and serving the community with us. I pray that your next year in ministry is blessed, and the Annual Report inspires you to get involved in a new way.

Respectfully submitted,

**Kaylee Searway, Director of Operations**



## **Summary of Insurance Policies**

Properties: 1600 & 1620 East Hillcrest Drive, 271 Erbes Road  
Including Structures & Modulares

### **COMMERCIAL PACKAGE**

#### **LIABILITY:**

GENERAL LIABILITY \$1,000,000 each occurrence / \$3,000,000 aggregate – occurrence form

PROFESSIONAL LIABILITY \$1,000,000 each claim / \$3,000,000 aggregate – occurrence form

SEXUAL ABUSE LIABILITY \$1,000,000 each occurrence / \$3,000,000 aggregate – occurrence form

EMPLOYEE BENEFITS LIABILITY \$1,000,000 each claim / \$3,000,000 aggregate

\*6/1/2006 EBL RETROACTIVE DATE – claims-made form

CYBER LIABILITY \$50,000 maximum aggregate limit of liability, \$1,000 deductible

6/1/2017 CYBER RETROACTIVE DATE – claims-made form

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE COUNSELING \$50,000 (formerly named Emergency Event Management)

#### **PROPERTY:**

BLANKET BUILDING LIMIT \$16,310,925

BLANKET CONTENTS LIMIT \$1,407,942

BUSINESS INCOME & EXTRA EXPENSE – per limits stated on policy

DEDUCTIBLE: \$5,000

CRIME INSURANCE/EMPLOYEE DISHONESTY: \$100,000 with a \$5,000 deductible

#### **AUTO:**

COMBINED SINGLE LIMIT OF LIABILITY \$1,000,000

HIRED AND NON-OWNED AUTO LIABILITY \$1,000,000

UNINSURED MOTORIST LIABILITY \$1,000,000

MEDICAL PAYMENTS TO OTHERS \$5,000

COMPREHENSIVE DEDUCTIBLE \$1,000 / COLLISION DEDUCTIBLE \$1,000

2015 THOMAS BUILT BUS / VIN: 1T7YU4E21F1289016 \*Extras include Hired Auto Physical Damage, Towing, Rental Car Reimbursement

#### **UMBRELLA**

UMBRELLA POLICY: \$5,000,000 LIMIT COVERS OVER: GENERAL LIABILITY, PROFESSIONAL LIABILITY, AUTO LIABILITY, EMPLOYEE BENEFITS LIABILITY

#### **DIRECTORS & OFFICERS – primary limits**

DIRECTORS & OFFICERS LIABILITY \$1,000,000 each claim / \$5,000 retention

\*6/1/2013 D&O RETROACTIVE DATE – claims-made form

EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES LIABILITY \$1,000,000 each claim / \$25,000 retention

\*6/1/2013 EPL RETROACTIVE DATE – claims-made form / Third Party Coverage included

D&O and EPL COMBINED AGGREGATE \$2,000,000

**DIRECTORS & OFFICERS – 1<sup>st</sup> excess layer of additional limits**

\$2,000,000 each claim / \$2,000,000 aggregate over both D&O and EPL

\*11/17/2023 Prior or Pending Date

**DIRECTORS & OFFICERS – 2<sup>nd</sup> excess layer of additional limits**

\$2,000,000 each claim over D&O only, EPL is excluded

\*11/17/2023 Prior or Pending Date

**STUDENT ACCIDENT POLICY (TK-7)**

\$1,000,000 MAXIMUM BENEFIT LIMIT FOR MEDICAL & DENTAL PAYMENTS, NO DEDUCTIBLE

**CHURCH ACCIDENT POLICY (also covers ECC)**

\$250,000 MAXIMUM BENEFIT LIMIT FOR MEDICAL & DENTAL PAYMENTS, NO DEDUCTIBLE

**CRIME POLICY**

\$750,000 EMPLOYEE/VOLUNTEER/OFFICER THEFT, FORGERY/ALTERATION, FRAUD

\$100,000 DEDUCTIBLE (UNDERLYING LIMIT OF \$100,000 IS COVERED IN THE PACKAGE POLICY)

**EARTHQUAKE & FLOOD POLICY – does not include modulars**

Earthquake Limit: \$14,796,988

Flood Limit: \$5,000,000

Total Insurable Value \$14,796,988

\*Includes \$500,000 for Business Income & Extra Expense

\*Replacement Cost, NO CO-INSURANCE PENALTY

Sub-Limit:

Demolition & Increased Cost of Construction Combined Single Limit \$500,000

Stained Glass \$100,000

Peril Deductibles:

5% with a \$50k minimum of total values at risk per Unit (including time element if applicable) at the time of loss

**CYBER LIABILITY:**

\$1,000,000 Cyber Incident Aggregate Limit of Liability, \$5,000 Deductible

**WORKERS' COMPENSATION POLICY:**

INCLUDES EMPLOYER'S LIABILITY AT STATE MINIMUM:

BODILY INJURY BY ACCIDENT \$1,000,000 each accident

BODILY INJURY BY DISEASE \$1,000,000 policy limit

BODILY INJURY BY DISEASE \$1,000,000 each employee

# CONGREGATION REPORT

## FOR THE YEAR ENDING DECEMBER 31, 2023

# FORM A

This report should be filed online. Connect to the website ([ELCA.org/congregationreport](http://ELCA.org/congregationreport)) and enter your congregation's ID and password (printed below). If you are unable to file electronically, complete this paper form and return it to your synod office by March 1, 2024.

Latest report on file: 2022

**1. Baptized membership at end of 2022**

**2. Baptized members received during 2023**

- a. By baptism: children (15 yrs. and younger) .....
- b. By baptism: adults (16 yrs. and older) .....
- c. By affirmation of faith .....
- d. By transfer .....
- e. From other sources and statistical adjustment .....
- f. Total members received this year .....

|    |      |
|----|------|
|    | 1262 |
| 15 |      |
| 2  |      |
| 0  |      |
| 0  |      |
| 0  |      |
| +  | 17   |
| 13 |      |
| 1  |      |
| 0  |      |
| -  | 14   |
| =  | 1265 |

**3. Baptized members removed during 2023**

- a. By death .....
- b. By transfer .....
- c. For other reasons and statistical adjustment .....
- d. Total members removed this year .....

**4. Baptized membership, end of 2023**

**5. Total confirmed membership, end of 2023** 1015

**6. Number of baptized youth who were confirmed in 2023** 6

**7. In 2023, the number of weeks this congregation worshipped:**

- a. On-site (in person) 52
- b. Online (via streaming) 52

**8. Average weekly worship attendance in 2023:**

- a. On-site (in person) 301
- b. Online (via streaming) 136

**9. Total number of people (including children) actively participating in the life of the congregation in 2023** 1606

**10. Race/ethnic origin of ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS. Must equal active participants on line 9:**

| African American/Black | African National/African Caribbean | American Indian/Alaska Native | Arab/Middle Eastern | Asian/Pacific Islander | Latino/Hispanic | Multiracial | White | TOTAL |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|-----------------|-------------|-------|-------|
| 22                     | 0                                  | 15                            | 32                  | 85                     | 65              | 82          | 1,305 | 1,606 |

Verify the following congregation information (items 11-15 and the congregation's mailing address). Corrections can be made below or online at [ELCA.org/tools/updatecongregation](http://ELCA.org/tools/updatecongregation).

**11. Phone:** (805) 495-0406

**12. Fax:** (805) 374-8447

**13. Email:** [info@alcto.org](mailto:info@alcto.org)

**14. Website:** <http://www.alcto.org>

**15. Location address describes where the church or place of worship is physically located.** This may differ from the mailing address, but must identify a street name.

Ascension Lutheran Church  
1600 E Hillcrest Dr  
Thousand Oaks, California 91362-2612

Congregation's mailing address  
Ascension Lutheran Church  
1600 E Hillcrest Dr  
Thousand Oaks, CA 91362-2612

If you do not file electronically, return Form A to the synod office at:  
Southwest California Synod, ELCA  
1300 E Colorado St  
Glendale, CA 91205-1406

16. Languages in which this congregation regularly conducts liturgies (make 1 the most-used language, 2 the next most-used language, etc.). Do not include languages used for special services or by others using the building.

1) English 3) \_\_\_\_\_  
2) \_\_\_\_\_ 4) \_\_\_\_\_

17. What assistance does this congregation provide to people with disabilities? (check all that apply)

- |                                                                                  |                                                                                                            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Wheelchair access throughout the building(s) | <input type="checkbox"/> Sign language interpreters                                                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Braille worship materials and signage                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Mental health ministries                                                          |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Large print worship materials                | <input type="checkbox"/> Ministry with people with developmental/intellectual disabilities                 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Assistive devices for the hard of hearing    | <input type="checkbox"/> Specialized faith formation for children or adults (ADHD, autism, dyslexia, etc.) |

**INFORMATION ABOUT THIS CONGREGATION'S FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP** (Please round all figures to nearest dollar. Omit cents. The Financial Stewardship Worksheet included in the packet provides specific descriptions of each line item.)

**18. Receipts during 2023**

|                               |              |
|-------------------------------|--------------|
| a. Regular giving             | \$ 1,292,011 |
| b. Designated giving          | \$ 500,951   |
| c. Earned income (any source) | \$ 36,869    |
| d. Grants (any source)        | \$ 0         |
| e. All other receipts         | \$ 12,368    |
| f. <b>TOTAL RECEIPTS</b>      | \$ 1,842,199 |

**19. Assets as of December 31, 2023**

|                                 |               |
|---------------------------------|---------------|
| a. Church real estate           | \$ 11,211,658 |
| b. Endowment and memorial funds | \$ 0          |
| c. Cash, savings, bonds, etc.   | \$ 902,572    |
| d. All other assets             | \$ 263,448    |
| e. <b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>          | \$ 12,377,678 |

**20. Total Indebtedness as of Dec. 31, 2023**

\$ 4,535,250

**21. Budgeted/projected 2024 Mission Support**

\$ 47,000

**22. Gifts from the estates of deceased individuals received during 2023**

|                                         |      |
|-----------------------------------------|------|
| a. Number of gifts received             | 0    |
| b. <b>TOTAL VALUE</b> of gifts received | \$ 0 |

**23. Disbursements during 2023**

|                                                                                                                                                                            |              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| a. Current operating expenses                                                                                                                                              | \$ 1,810,923 |
| b. Capital improvements                                                                                                                                                    | \$ 143,000   |
| c. Payments on debts                                                                                                                                                       | \$ 272,387   |
| d. Mission Support (regular synod benevolence)                                                                                                                             | \$ 47,000    |
| e. Other benevolence sent directly to the synod (for any synod or churchwide appeal including ELCA World Hunger, Lutheran Disaster Response, Missionary Sponsorship, etc.) | \$ 17,280    |
| f. Other benevolence sent directly to the churchwide organization (for any churchwide appeal including ELCA World Hunger, Disaster Response, Missionary Sponsorship, etc.) | \$ 0         |
| g. Benevolence sent directly to any of the following:                                                                                                                      |              |
| 1. An activity in another country including a missionary, a congregation, a companion synod, a hunger program, disaster response, etc.                                     | \$ 96,381    |
| 2. Camps                                                                                                                                                                   | \$ 0         |
| 3. Campus ministry                                                                                                                                                         | \$ 0         |
| 4. Colleges                                                                                                                                                                | \$ 0         |
| 5. Seminaries                                                                                                                                                              | \$ 0         |
| 6. Social service group, agency, or institution                                                                                                                            | \$ 17,962    |
| h. All other benevolence sent directly to the recipient                                                                                                                    | \$ 23,157    |
| i. Other expenses and realized losses                                                                                                                                      | \$ 0         |
| j. <b>TOTAL DISBURSEMENTS</b>                                                                                                                                              | \$ 2,428,090 |

What a year – so many beautiful worship services, outstanding sermons, flourishing ministries... It's especially impressive considering we have been running short-handed. Kudos to Pastor Tim, Pastor Steve, Kaylee Searway, our exceptional church leadership and the rest of the team for that. And a standing ovation for members who have not only filled the gap but led terrific ministries – Louise Evenson and the Ray of Life drive and Global Ministry Team, Ed Klodt and Be the Blessing, Carol Bjelland and Fair Trade, Chris Daleiden and Community Concerns...and others whose work is cited elsewhere in this report. It is my great honor to support such heroes in the Lord's service!

We've gotten down to nuts and bolts work in some areas this year. In preparation for the Be the Blessing campaign, Dave Harkins did a full inventory of our ministries – which ones are active, which have concluded or changed. It was the first step in an updating and organizing effort in which Kaylee Searway, Jenelle Smith, Pastor Tim and I were also involved in February. This was key in sorting of the spiritual gifts undergirding our ministries, matching those in the Bible-based Spiritual Gifts Assessment from the ELCA, and the creation of an online tool for matching one's spiritual giftsto Ascension ministries. This also involved updating of ministry pages on the ALCTO.org website.

The renovation of that website continues. It's been slow going with some delays due to other work priorities, but changes will become more evident soon. Our new Youth Director, Jen Avalos, and I had a first meeting encompassing ways I hope to support her ministry, including reactivating and utilizing the Youth area of the site, with some fun and exciting thoughts. I expect to eventually get input from the new associate pastor as well.

The site currently has 130 average daily pageviews and 160 pages. My husband, Dominick, and I eliminated more than 20 obsolete pages in our most recent purge. Another set of pages – the work-in-progress pictorial of the Early Childhood Center, the sanctuary renovation – are being moved. Dominick, who helps with ALCTO.org and TWAA at the builder/functionality level, found there is space enough in our current website plan to create an archive, which he is doing, allowing us to lighten up the website without having to do away with items that have historic value.

Our July-August top 20 web pages list has Church Livestream, 24in24 Prayer, Sunday School, Career Opportunities, Calendar, Meet the Pastors, Staff Directory, Contact Us, Signups/Announcements, Find Help, Welcome, Links to Past Livestream Worship Services, Be the Blessing Grants, Ministries, About Our Worship Services, Fair Trade, Map and Directions, Give, GriefShare, Seasonal Worship.

I am looking for new opportunities for advertising and promotion, as my interaction with the local papers continues to disappoint. I have had no response at all to several recent attempts to interesteditors in news items. We will widen our direct mail use and add Conejo Valley Guide and other online outlets to our marketing lists, as well as using social media tools.

Speaking of social media, Pastor Steve's Facebook had 2.1 K followers as of May 2023 – and is now up to 2.4 K followers. The Church Instagram went from 399 followers to 472. AL School Instagram had 600 – now 736 (Wow!); Ascension Lutheran ECC 198 – now 261 (Wow again!); Gifts that Give had 195 – now 192; Life Groups at Ascension had 71 – now 72; Senior Luther League 216 – now 202.

It has been a pleasure to support the work of the 24-in-24 Prayer team with social media posts. This also keeps me close to this lovely effort, day by day to monthly prayer gatherings.

This Week at Ascension emails are consistent with a year ago, with an average open rate hovering at 60 per cent. Mail Chimp currently shows a 47.5 per cent open rate average for the Religion category. There are occasional surges; the *Special Congregational Meeting – Pastor Search* email from Carrie Leonard and Rachael Bowen got a 64 per cent open rate. We have 900 subscribers, pretty much unchanged since last year despite the fact I've added new email addresses to our list all year long. Evidently others fell away.

Looking over reports from throughout the year, I realize it's a good time to remind folks to be on guard for phishing attempts and other online mal actors – which we have had to deal with several times in social media and email. I can't emphasize this too much: don't open any email that has the slightest whiff of strangeness about it.

What also emerges, going over all these reports, is just how faith energizing and sustaining our church continues to be, through changing times, challenging times and beautiful times, and how blessed we all are with our outstanding pastors, leaders and members.

Thank you for your generous sharing of time, effort, and wisdom,

*Stacy Smith Bosco*

Communication Coordinator

# ONE ASCENSION SCHOOL



**Ascension Lutheran School**  
Board Members 2024-2025



Scott Bean, Immediate Past President  
Ashley Steere, President  
Anna Woodward, Treasurer and Council Rep.  
Jocelyn Myers, Secretary  
Kyle Jones, Member At Large  
Nelly Nassar-Trumbo, Member At Large  
Chris Poveromo, Member At Large  
Jeanette McNulty, Member at Large  
Kathy Saneinia, Member at Large

*Non-Voting Members:*

Rich Gregory, Principal  
Jenni McCoy, ECC Director

## **Ascension Lutheran School Board Annual Report**

### **Mission Statement/Focus Area(s):**

***ECC:** In a loving Christian community that is rooted in nature, our young learners have large amounts of time to investigate, explore, and have hands-on learning experiences. Our teachers facilitate problem solving, encourage collaboration, and foster independent thinkers through play-based opportunities.*

***Elementary/Middle School:** Ascension Lutheran School is dedicated to nurturing each student, providing academic excellence and creating bold, compassionate leaders who inspire and serve others in their walk with Jesus Christ.*

### **School Board President: Ashley Steere**

Greetings! It is with great joy and excitement that I write to you today at our first board meeting of the school year! We are getting ready to welcome our first class of 8<sup>th</sup> graders back to campus in almost 5 years, along with several new staff members and a new board member. This year, some of the School Board's top goals include supporting our Principal and ECC Director in measures that promote staff/student retention, the growth of our middle school program, and more in-depth applications of our nature explorer curriculum. We are so blessed to have Jenni McCoy leading our ECC program and Rich Gregory as our schools' Principal. They embody everything we could want as leaders for our children to grow in a Christ-centered community, that considers the growth of the whole child; focusing not only on academics, but emotional, physical, and spiritual development as well.

### **Highlights of the 2024-2025 School Year:**

- 168 Students enrolled in the Elementary and Middle School
- 176 Students enrolled in the Early Childhood Center

### **Information about Meeting Dates/Times/Locations & Means of Communication**

- Ascension Lutheran School Board Meets the last Monday of the Month on Campus. If you would like to be added to the open forum, please contact Connie Angress at [cangress@alschool.org](mailto:cangress@alschool.org)

**Pictured left to right:** Chris Poveromo, Nelly Nassar, Ashley Steere (President), Kathy Saneinia, Kyle Jones, Jocelyn Myers (Secretary), Scott Bean (Immediate Past President), Jeanette McNulty, Anna Woodward (Treasurer)





## **Ascension Lutheran School Annual Report 2023-24**

Ascension Family,

2024 saw the school grow to 158 students, and we opened this school year growing to 165, which will likely grow to 168 in the coming weeks as parents look for private school options after the start of the school year.

Both the school and the ECC finished the school year with significant budget surpluses, which were largely invested into salaries for our teachers in the 2024-25 budgets. Our budget this year will be much tighter than the previous few years, but we still anticipate finishing the year in the black at both sites. I am currently planning an additional fundraiser or two for the year at the day school in order to ensure that we are meeting our financial goals.

We are continuing to see impressive continuity from the ECC into the day school, with many ECC families in TK and Kindergarten this year.

We have several requests for tours for the 2025-26 school year already as word is spreading that it is difficult to find openings in our lower grades.

We inaugurated the 7th grade Service Academy this last school year and just launched our 8th grade Innovation Academy yesterday.

Parent surveys indicate that over 92% of our families who responded would recommend our school to their friends and family.

100% of respondents reported that our school is a school community that exemplifies the teachings of Christ and respect and love for others.

Our school developed our 5 strategic initiatives: Christ-centered, lifelong learners, whole child, service-minded, and wise stewards of God's creation. Jenni and I have crafted goals, objectives, strategies, and tactics for each of the initiatives and shared them with our staff.

Staff retention and morale are both high and there is a palpable sense of Holy Spirit on campus. I've been collaborating with Pastoral staff, church office staff, the Foundation, and Jen Avalos to grow One Ascension culture.

Partnership with the ECC is healthy, positive, and essential. We love each other and mutually benefit from this relationship. Campus upgrades include the new outdoor instructional area, new Spanish classroom and new office space.

God's Peace,  
Rich Gregory, *Principal of the TK-8 School*





Jenni McCoy, Director

Annual Report

September 2024

Ascension Lutheran Early Childhood Center continues to proudly welcome the children of our program each day; they are loved deeply, respected as individual learners, and given the opportunity to thrive in the beauty of God's world in our outdoor classroom spaces. Our extraordinary staff provide hands-on, play-based opportunities that are rooted in nature and developmentally appropriate in an environment that nurtures their young hearts and minds. Our ECC is made better each day by the contributions of our families and our thriving One Ascension community!

### **Enrollment**

We had 187 students enrolled at ALECC during the 2023/24 school year: 13 Caterpillar 1's, 15 Caterpillar 2's, 15 Butterflies, 17 Honeybees, 14 Ladybugs, 19 Bumblebees, 21 Hummingbirds, 19 Dragonflies, 23 Fireflies, 20 Praying Mantises, and 11 Parent & Me students.

### **Staff**

We were blessed with 29 teachers and staff members, 3 administrators, and 5 substitute teachers.

### **Highlights from the 2023/24 School Year**

#### **Identified our 5 Strategic Goals**

Along with the nine members of our school board, Rich and I helped to identify five strategic goals that we will use to guide both our sites over the next seven years. We established that we will "foster a welcoming Christ-centered community", "create wise stewards of God's Creation", "develop a heart of service in every student", "inspire lifelong learners", and "nurture the whole child". We have since clearly defined objectives, strategies, and tactics as to how we will meet these goals that place God at the center of all we do, provide authentic experiences in nature, serve others, create bold, compassionate leaders, and nurture students as individual learners. We are seeking input from our teachers, we are prioritizing these areas in our budgeting processes, and we are being intentional in "walking the walk" we have defined as who we are.

## **ALECC 2023/24 Service Opportunities**

In the spirit of our goal to “develop a heart of service in every student” we were very excited about creating opportunities for all students to serve during this school year. In the fall we were enthusiastic participants in the church’s food drive, at Christmas time, we participated in the church’s Gifts of Hope campaign and raised approximately \$1,440 on behalf of Nkoaranga Lutheran Hospital in Tanzania and the Friends of Fieldworkers organization, and at Easter time we worked with Pastor Steve to deliver potted plants (beautifully decorated by our talented students) to senior members of our church. In addition, we applied for and received two “Be the Blessing” grants this year; in October, our 4-year-olds put together care packages for the 85 staff members at Westlake High School (after the tragic loss of a student) and our 3-year-olds assembled 48 lunches for Harbor House.

### **Spanish Class**

We introduced a Spanish enrichment class to our ECC families, and it was a tremendous success! Arely Kendall and Esperanza Flores taught 22 children Spanish once a week for 30 minutes after school. Their lessons included basic vocabulary words, stories, songs, cooking, and hands-on learning experiences that made learning the Spanish language fun and engaging. Our young learners loved it, our parents praised the opportunity and the teachers made this experience so fantastic! In addition, it had a positive impact on our budget.

### **Parent & Me Class**

This was another beautiful addition to our ALECC community! In September of 2024, Tiffany Chivaroli began a Parent & Me program that welcomed 12 children and a parent/caregiver each Wednesday from 8:45-10:45. In addition, to providing the young learners a center time, an outdoor classroom experience, and a snack time, this program also included a parent ed component. During each week’s class, Tiffany hosted a parent conversation that focused on relevant topics that are typical for the age of the children (for example, picky eaters, establishing healthy boundaries, bedtime challenges). Tiffany led an extraordinary program; she provided the children with a positive, age-appropriate preschool experience while establishing a safe place for parents to share the triumphs and challenges of parenting. Again, our parents’ feedback was extremely positive and it, too, made a positive contribution to our budget.

### **Expanded our Two’s Outdoor Classroom Space**

We made our two-year-old outdoor classroom space bigger simply by having the existing fence inverted to gain an area that had previously been an area of our parking lot! It was a quick one-day job for our awesome fencing guy who charged us very little to move the fence. The space included bushes, a tree, and a dirt floor that made it ideal for a mud kitchen and a garden box. As a certified Nature Explore site, we must continue to demonstrate how our site is growing to meet the needs of our young learners, and this project is a perfect example of just that!

## **Nature Explore Recertification**

In November, we successfully applied for and received our Nature Explore Classroom Recertification. Each year we must show consistent usage, continued growth, and family participation within our outdoor classrooms. Sharing our experiences, some of our favorite outdoor stories, and several fantastic pictures, we demonstrate the excellence of our outdoor classroom environments that our children experience each day at ALECC!

## **Family Workday**

My staff hosted our families on a Saturday morning in February for our annual Family Workday! Our morning started with a prayer of thanksgiving for our beloved little community, we ate a delicious breakfast, and then we worked hard ... together! Moms, dads, grandmas, grandpas, older and younger siblings work alongside of teachers and students to replant gardens, add new flowers, mulch flowerbeds, add fresh dirt to our mud kitchens, add loads of sand to our sandboxes, and put a fresh coat of sealant on our benches. We also added new planters and a playhouse to our infant outdoor classroom space. Over 100 people attended this event; it is truly the greatest day of our school year!

## **Infant Outdoor Classroom**

A couple of years ago we expanded our infant outdoor classroom and have been slowly adding to the quality of this space. This past spring, Jeff and Cam built a small patio/stage area that is perfect for dramatic play and mud/kitchen play as it is located next to our new infant playhouse. We also added several planters that are 11" high for our smallest gardeners! This new space has a truly magical feel!

## **Ongoing Campus Improvements**

Most of our outdoor classroom storage spaces were plastic units that had been moved from the old preschool site and several of them were beginning to split and fall apart. This spring we invested in an additional large Tough Shed allowing us to safely store and appropriately protect our outdoor classroom materials; it is located behind our school next to the teachers parking lot.

This past spring we received a monetary gift from a generous church member who asked that we do something special for the teachers. We purchased an outdoor table, umbrella, and chairs for an outdoor teacher break space; Jeff and Cam are going to clear a space behind our school that will give our teachers a quiet, outdoor option for their breaks and lunches.

We recently completed the empty circle space in front of the ECC. With the support of our school board and in listening to the needs of our teachers (both at the ECC and the elementary school), we created an outdoor classroom. We purchased 3 cantilever umbrellas and 8 benches that convert to tables that can easily be moved as needed giving everyone on our campus an outdoor option. It is our hope that this space will host many classes, lunches, meetings, snacks, and social gatherings!

## **ALECC Budget**

Kaylee, Mike, and Camryn continue to make our ALECC budget process a successful one; our ECC is operating with an extremely thorough budget that continues to align our spending to the priorities of our program. Our ECC is exceptional because of our teachers, and we are committed to making our school's culture and our work environment a positive place that deeply values the time and talents of our teachers. The school board approved a 4% raise for the teachers and staff of the ECC as was reflected in our budget.

## **Parent Workshop Series**

During the 2024/2025 school year we host two parent workshops; in the fall we invited parents to learn more about what TK is, provide them with information about TK dates, and share how the 4/5-year-old classrooms here at ALECC meet the needs of TK aged children. In May, Ashley Steere led a parent workshop that taught first aid, CPR, and water safety.

## **Nature Explore Leadership Institute National Conference**

In July, I traveled with my three outdoor classroom leads, Jess Bunting, Esperanza Flores, Jessica Placas, and Zach Martino and Charlotte Miranda (from the elementary school) to Nebraska City, Nebraska to attend the Nature Explore Leadership Institute. We are all very grateful for the opportunity to have participated in this extraordinary event that aligns so perfectly with our schools' commitment to "creating wise stewards of God's world." These days were packed with workshops, quality time outdoors, bug spray, conversations with educators from all over the country, good food, a positive community of people who practice what we do each day, and most importantly reassurances that this philosophy is truly what is best for the overall growth and development of all our students ... our youngest infants to our graduating eighth graders!

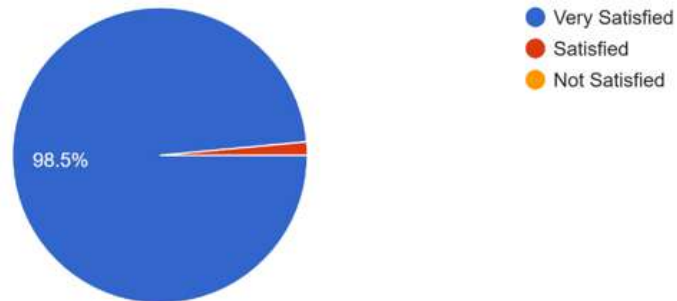
One of my biggest takeaways were the quality conversations that our group of six were able to have about our sites; the challenges we face, opportunities to support one another, and how to grow our sites' belief and practice in this philosophy. All six of our educators who made this trip presented our key takeaways on Monday, August 12th to our One Ascension community during one of our professional development workshops.

## **End of the Year Parent Survey**

Parents are valuable stakeholders within our ALECC community, and we will always hold a place for their voices; our end of the year parent survey is their opportunity to anonymously provide feedback regarding our facilities, teachers, curriculum, administrators, and program details. I am deeply proud to say that our results were extremely positive; please see examples below.

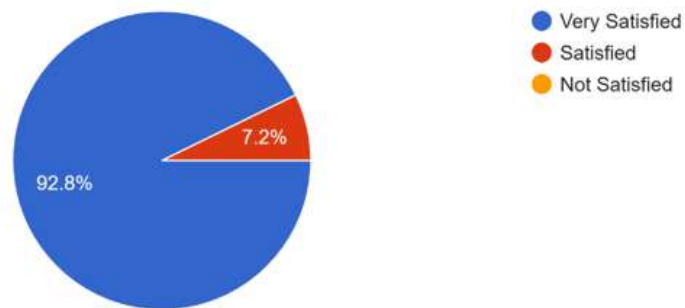
Please indicate your level of satisfaction with ALECC's preschool program based on our school's philosophy & values.

68 responses



Please indicate your level of satisfaction with ALECC's preschool program based on the quality of our teachers & staff.

69 responses

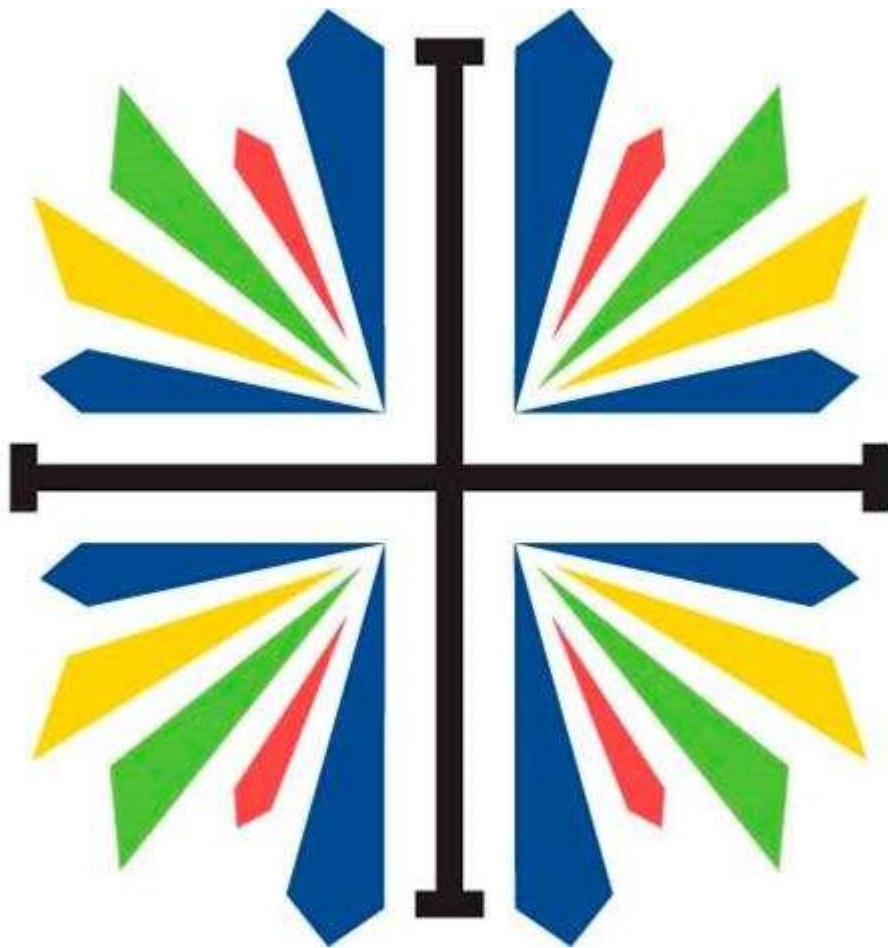


Respectfully submitted,

Jenni McCoy

ALECC Director

# ONE ASCENSION FOUNDATION





**Ascension Lutheran Church Foundation  
Members 2024-2025**

Stefano Borzone  
Anita Cohen  
Sandra Howe  
Greg Korshavn  
Roy Sanchez  
Paul Evenson  
Doug Morrow  
Alan Baker  
Don Weeks  
Lori Hillman  
Susanne Hopkins  
Jim Thompson

President  
President-Elect  
Immediate Past President  
Member at Large  
Member at Large  
Member at Large  
Secretary  
Member at Large  
Member at Large  
Member at Large  
Member at Large

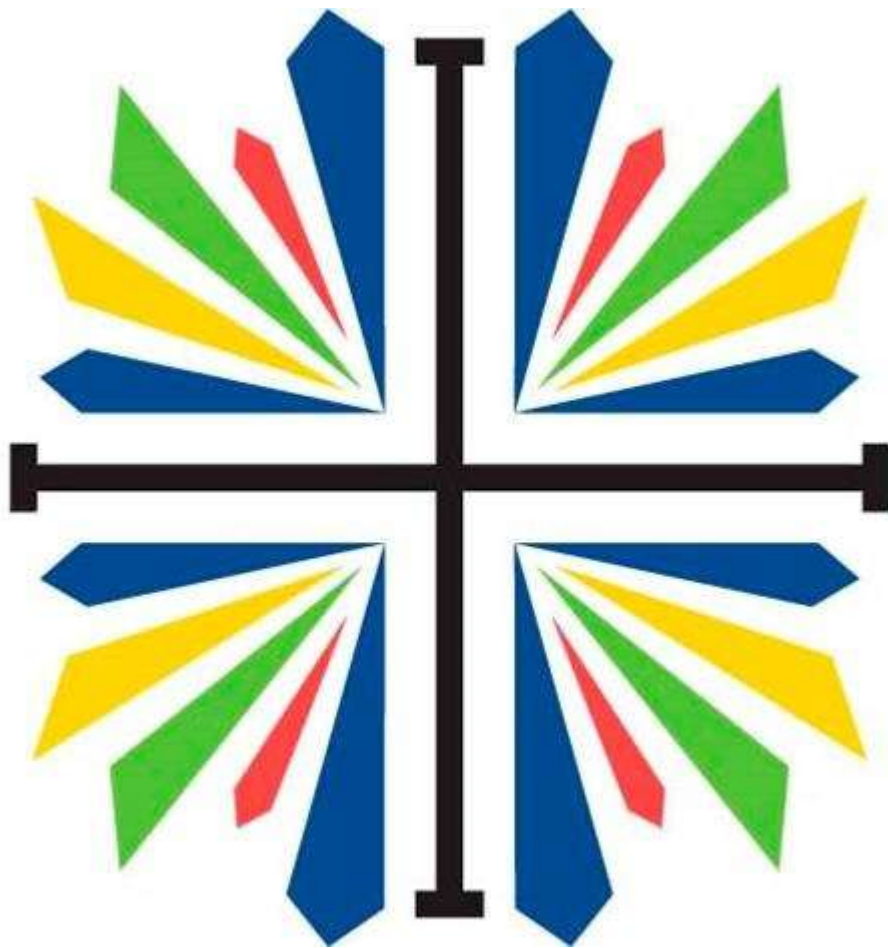
## **ASCENSION LUTHERAN CHURCH FOUNDATION ANNUAL REPORT**

The Foundation has been active over the past year in awarding scholarships and making grants consistent with its mission to provide financial support for One Ascension. This includes the congregational, school, community and global/synodical needs in a manner that is separate and apart from those expenditures normally funded by the annual operating budgets of One Ascension entities. Scholarships totaling \$25,830 were awarded to 18 students, and grants totaling \$28,402 were awarded for One Ascension and outside community needs by the Foundation.

Several initiatives were also undertaken under the auspices of the Foundation. A matching grant was established with the church and school to help the school develop an endowment fund. In September 2023 the Foundation sponsored a presentation on planned giving. Additional presentations on legacy planning and stewardship are scheduled for the second half of 2024.

The Foundation investment portfolio increased significantly in the fiscal year 2023-24 due to very strong financial markets and some additional contributions during the year. The total value of the investments as of June 30 was \$1,777,677, up from \$1,529,732 on June 30, 2023. The equity portion of the investment portfolio remains near the upper end of the allowable range of 75% of the total, reflecting our belief that equities currently are more attractive than fixed income investments.

# ONE ASCENSION MINISTRY





| Ministry                           | Purpose                                                                                  | Related Spiritual Gifts                       |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| <b>Adult Education</b>             | Coordinate, lead classes of church and community interest for Sunday mornings            | Administration, Knowledge, Teaching           |
| <b>Blessing of Our Pets</b>        | Annual event, open to community, fosters fellowship, creation care                       | Administration, Hospitality, Mercy            |
| <b>Community Concerns</b>          |                                                                                          | Mercy, Service                                |
| Food Pantry                        | On campus pantry serves community, open 10 AM-noon Fridays                               | Mercy, Service                                |
| Hot Meals Ministry                 | Preparing, transporting meals to central location for community                          | Mercy, Service                                |
| Blood Drives                       | Schedule, support, promote blood drives through Vitalant                                 | Administration, Mercy, Service                |
| Project Response                   | Food drives supply our pantry and others                                                 | Administration, Evangelism, Service           |
| <b>Evangelism/Inreach/Outreach</b> |                                                                                          | Evangelism                                    |
| Birthday callers                   | A team member is assigned a day of the week and contact members with birthdays that day  | Exhortation, Hospitality                      |
| Outreach Task Force                | Greeters; special training                                                               | Evangelism                                    |
| <b>Family Life Ministries</b>      | Baptism, receiving a Bible, First Communion, Confirmation, Faith Quilts                  | Faith                                         |
| <b>Fellowship</b>                  |                                                                                          | Hospitality                                   |
| Meet and Eat Team 9:00 AM          | Provide treats following the 9:00 AM service                                             | Hospitality                                   |
| Meet and Eat Team 10:30 AM         | Provide treats following the 10:30 AM service                                            | Hospitality                                   |
| <b>Garden Ministry</b>             | Help tend and keep to the Ascension Garden<br>Participate in Garden Ministry meetings    | Leadership, Service, Skilled Craft            |
| <b>Generosity</b>                  | Stewardship, Joy of Giving                                                               | Generosity                                    |
| <b>Global Ministries Team</b>      |                                                                                          | Knowledge, Leadership, Mercy, Service         |
| Fair Trade Products                | Supporting Fair Trade for farmers and artisans                                           | Giving, Knowledge, Leadership, Mercy, Service |
| Gifts of Hope                      | Annual drive supports selected local and global ministries                               | Giving, Mercy                                 |
| Bread for the World                | Food advocacy                                                                            | Giving, Knowledge, Mercy, Writing             |
| LWR Kits/Quilts                    | Supplying basic personal/school needs and quilts for people displaced by war or disaster | Skilled Craft                                 |
| Global Refuge (LIRS)               | Assists immigrant families                                                               | Mercy, Service                                |
| Matthew 25:35 Outreach             | Interfaith refugee team                                                                  | Giving, Knowledge, Leadership, Mercy, Service |
| CLU Center for Global Engagement   | Works with international students                                                        | Knowledge                                     |
| <b>Jubilee USA</b>                 | Debt forgiveness advocacy                                                                | Knowledge, Writing                            |
| <b>Green Ministry</b>              | Advocacy toward sustainability, recycling, caring for creation                           | Mercy, Service                                |
| <b>Grief Share</b>                 | Weekly support group for those grieving                                                  | Mercy, Pastoring, Teaching, Wisdom            |
| <b>Leadership</b>                  |                                                                                          | Mercy, Pastoring, Teaching, Wisdom            |
| Council                            | Elected leaders meet monthly to govern the leadership of the Church                      | Discernment, Leadership, Wisdom               |
| School Board                       | Elected leaders meet monthly to govern the leadership of the Schools                     | Discernment, Leadership, Wisdom               |
| Foundation                         | Elected leaders meet quarterly to govern the leadership of the Foundation                | Discernment, Leadership, Wisdom               |
| <b>Library</b>                     | Participate in the organization, managing and ordering of books for the library          | Administration, Service, Writing              |
| <b>Life Group Ministry</b>         | Small groups for fellowship, study                                                       | Administration, Discernment, Leadership       |



| <b>Ministry</b>                | <b>Purpose</b>                                                                          | <b>Related Spiritual Gifts</b>                |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| <b>Men's Ministries</b>        | Group Bible studies that meet weekly at various days and times                          | Administration, Faith, Leadership, Service    |
| <b>Music</b>                   |                                                                                         | Artistry, Music (Vocal), Music (Instrumental) |
| Chancel Choir                  | Sings at traditional services and on special occasions, rehearsals Thursday evenings    | Artistry, Music (Vocal)                       |
| Carillons                      | Bell choir during 2 services a month and special occasions, rehearsals Tuesday evenings | Artistry, Music (Instrumental)                |
| Great Music at Ascension       | Arrange and host concerts of great music                                                | Administration, Artistry, Leadership, Music   |
| <b>Prayer Ministry</b>         | Receive emails of prayer requests from the Ascension community to pray and meditate on  | Administration, Intercession, Pastoring       |
| <b>Prayer Shawl Ministry</b>   | Knit or crochet shawls for members/ friends of Ascension needing comfort                | Artistry, Intercession                        |
| <b>Property Management</b>     | Guides plans to maintain and upgrade our physical campus                                | Discernment, Skilled Craft, Wisdom            |
| <b>Quilting</b>                | Work year round on quilts to be sent through Lutheran World Relief                      | Artistry, Skilled Craft                       |
| <b>Senior Adult Ministry</b>   |                                                                                         | Knowledge, Leadership, Teaching               |
| Eucharistic Ministry           | Bring Communion to those unable to travel                                               | Mercy, Pastoring                              |
| SAM's Tram                     | Local transportation for members in need                                                | Service, Skilled Craft                        |
| 3M: Minor Maintenance Ministry | Home repairs for shut-ins (members only)                                                | Service, Skilled Craft                        |
| Christian Life Hours           | Brings worship services to six senior living places                                     | Mercy, Pastoring, Music                       |
| In-Home Visitation             | For home-bound seniors                                                                  | Intercession, Mercy, Pastoring                |
| <b>Stephen Ministry</b>        | Trained volunteers provide 1-on-1 social, spiritual, emotional support                  | Intercession, Mercy, Pastoring                |
| <b>Transportation/Bus</b>      | Bring Ascension members to off campus events with our bus; requires a bus license       | Service, Skilled Craft                        |
| <b>Youth</b>                   |                                                                                         | Exhortation, Faith, Leadership, Wisdom        |
| Sunday School                  | Lead Sunday School for 4year olds to 6th graders during Sunday 9:00 AM services         | Exhortation, Leadership, Teaching             |
| Kids in Christ                 | Activities for children in grades 4 through 6                                           | Exhortation, Leadership, Teaching             |
| Confirmation                   | Activities/study for middle schoolers                                                   | Exhortation, Leadership, Teaching             |
| Senior Luther League           | Activities/study for high school students                                               | Exhortation, Leadership, Teaching             |
| <b>Women's Leadership Team</b> | Help to oversee the planning of events and teachings in the women's ministry            | Administration, Faith, Leadership, Service    |
| <b>Ascension Book Club</b>     | Meet monthly in person or on zoom and discuss a current novel                           | Leadership, Wisdom                            |
| <b>Women's Bible Study</b>     | Several groups for Bible Study                                                          | Knowledge, Leadership, Wisdom                 |
| <b>Woodworking</b>             | Create faith chests for children to store treasures collected on their faith journey    | Faith, Skilled Craft                          |
| <b>Worship</b>                 |                                                                                         | Faith, Music, Wisdom                          |
| Altar Guild                    | Prepare the space for worship by changing paraments, and preparing communion            | Artistry, Hospitality, Service                |
| Ushers                         | Greet members and guests, pass the offering plates, be a welcoming presence             | Evangelism, Hospitality, Service              |

## Annual Report Adult Education, 2023-24

The purpose of Adult Education at Ascension is to further understand how we live out our Ascension motto to “Invite, Grow, and Serve.” More specifically, it’s about putting our faith into action. Adult Education classes are held in the library, from 10:30 to 11:30 on Sunday mornings.

Topics for the past year included discussions of Vocation and the Christian Life, Martin Luther King’s Legacy, remembering the saints who have gone before us, reflections on specific service opportunities and living a purposeful life. A special 6-week series was a study of **CIVIC LIFE AND FAITH** developed by the ELCA. This study was developed to help congregation members study and provide input into a social statement. ELCA social statements are teaching and policy documents that provide broad frameworks to assist us in thinking about and discussing social issues in the context of faith and life.

Presenters/Discussion Leaders from Ascension this year included: Pastor Paul Gravrock, Pastor Steve Herder, Paul and Louise Evenson, Pastor Ron Cox, Karsten Lundring, Andy Binsley, Jack Ledbetter, and Carol Bartell. Carol Bjelland introduced some of our Fair Trade partners/providers as well, providing some special tasting opportunities.

In addition, we heard from some of our California Lutheran University (CLU) friends, including:

Dr. Leisa Buono, Dean of the School for Professional and Continuing Studies, introduced us to online learning opportunities through CLU. Lectures and short courses cover a range of topics and issues at a very reasonable cost to participants.

See <https://www.callutheran.edu/centers/lifelong-learning/fifty-better/>

Dr. Colleen Windham-Hughes, Associate Vice President for Mission and Identity, spoke about leading students to vocation and purpose at CLU. She emphasized that CLU prompts students to consider not just what they want to do with their lives, but the meaning and impact of what they will do.

See <https://www.callutheran.edu/vocation/>

Dr. Christina Sanchez, Associate Provost for Global Engagement, introduced us to CLU’s Center for Global Engagement, bringing with her several international students to discuss their experiences.

<https://www.callutheran.edu/global-engagement/staff.html>

At the final session in June, participants engaged in a planning session for the coming 2024-25 season, which will begin in September.

Contacts:

Carol Bartell, [bartell@callutheran.edu](mailto:bartell@callutheran.edu)

Pastor Steve Herder [pastorsteve@alcto.org](mailto:pastorsteve@alcto.org)



# WORSHIP AT ASCENSION

**GET THE BLESSING**  
**BE THE BLESSING**

| Invite                                                                                            |                                                        |                                                                                                        | Grow                                                  |                                                                                                |                                                                                           | Serve                                                |                                                                 |                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Invitation and Hospitality                                                                        |                                                        |                                                                                                        | Understanding our Motto                               |                                                                                                |                                                                                           | Community Engagement                                 |                                                                 |                                                                           |
| Invitation Support                                                                                | Welcome Visitors                                       | Strategic Invite Events                                                                                | Education                                             | Sermon Series                                                                                  | Life Together                                                                             | Enhance Existing Ministries                          | Encourage Ministry Start-ups                                    | SuperCharge Ministries                                                    |
| Provide tools to easily invite friends, family, and community to worship and other campus events. | Create a welcoming environment for Ascension visitors. | Create and implement a strategy for intentional "invite" events (existing and potential) at Ascension. | Together, discover what it means to "Be the Blessing" | Incorporate intentional sermon series throughout the year to encourage living in to our motto. | Leverage and embrace how ministry groups and life groups are central to "Be the Blessing" | Support the growth of our great outreach ministries. | Allow for creativity to explore new areas of ministry outreach. | Set aside resources and establish process to encourage ministry outreach. |





### **Ascension Lutheran Church – *Be the Blessing* Team**

As an important component of One Ascension’s “Get the Blessing / Be the Blessing” endeavor, this outreach is intended to activate members of One Ascension into ministry, especially those who have been on the sidelines and not engaged in the life of the church. We do that by helping members identify areas of ministry that interest them and then providing grant funds for new ministries or augmentations of existing ministries that align with Ascension’s mission and *Be the Blessing*’s criteria for funding.

The *Be the Blessing* Team consists of: Dave Harkins, Tim Hillman, Ed Klodt (team lead), Stephanie Pagano and Kathleen Rudrud.

Highlights of the *Be the Blessing* Team this year include:

- More than 15 new financial grants approved since January 2024.
- Almost \$10,000 in grant funds distributed, most for new events and ministries.
- Greater membership participation in One Ascension ministries.
- Considerable involvement by students and families engaged with Ascension’s day school and Early Childhood Center.

The *Be the Blessing* Team meets on the first Monday of each month to review grant requests and to explore new ways in which to engage One Ascension members in ministry.



This committee is comprised of a large group of ministries that serve various aspects of the Conejo Valley and in some cases beyond. The committee includes one leader, the leaders of each ministry group, with guidance from Pastor Steve Herder.

The mission is to stay connected and support the different church ministries and community nonprofit organizations in the community.

Our ministries fuel the body, like Project Response, The Food Pantry, Blood Drives, and Hot Meals Ministry. Others fuel the soul like Prison Ministries and SAM. Still others provide opportunities to help our environment like the Green Team, serve families in need like the Angel, ultimately fueling our community.

Community Concerns Committee makes itself available to support organizations that service members of our community such as Harbor House, Lutheran Social Services and Senior Concerns and participate in meetings and projects in the Women's Inter-Faith Network, WIN.

**Caring Ones** - One very important part of our Community Concerns ministry is the financial help that we can offer to our neighbors who come to us asking for help with money for gas, a utility bill, or with food, etc. We have two avenues of help in this way, and your pastors oversee both of them. "Caring Ones" are the loose one dollar bills in every offering plate. Those accumulate to over \$600 a month and we use \$20 bills to give to people in need, often in the amounts of \$20, \$40, or \$60.

**Agape Fund** - We help in larger ways with our "Agape Fund" checking account. The pastors are able to write checks from this account for people in need and these gifts are usually larger than our Caring Ones gifts. These checks help people with overdue rent or unexpected car repairs, etc.

We have received very generous help for our Agape Fund from the Gene Haas Foundation in Oxnard (\$50,000 this year). We receive their gifts in a spirit of humble gratitude and profound responsibility to use their gifts - and your gifts - in the best ways possible, always asking the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us. Thank you, Ascension, for all your gifts to Caring Ones and the Agape Fund! You are making a huge difference in the lives of many vulnerable people in our community each year. With each gift we also share a letter with them that encourages their faith in God, tells about the love of Jesus for them, and invites them to worship with us.

**Blood Drives** are held Vitalant. Sherie De Villers coordinates with ALCTO. Our December 10, 2023 drive collected 22 pints of blood that helped up to 58 patients at the hospitals we serve. This was down from December 2022 collection. July 21, 2023, we held another blood drive with Vitalant. We collected 23 pints of blood, helping over 58 patients, which was up from the July, 2023 collection. Next year's blood drives have been scheduled.

**Project Response:** Since Covid, we held three Food Drives under the name Project Response at ALCTO and invited the ALCTO schools to participate. This past year we decided to go back to two food drives a year in February and September, discontinuing the May food drive. In 2023/2024, our Project Response in September was held in conjunction with ELCA's Gods Work, Our Hands Sunday. Flyers were stapled onto paper bags donated by Trader Joes and were handed out during services and returned with food items by the members. Food Pantry and Hot Meals Ministry Volunteers Bob, Alice and Trish, Linda, Callie, Deena, Janice, Dianne, Chris, Tania and Barry help receive, sort and check best used by dates. This past year, we assume due to inflation we did not receive quite as much food at either Project Response Food Drive while we have more clients in need. A side note, one of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade teachers at Oaks Christian heard about our Project Response Food Drive in Feb and got the 6<sup>th</sup> graders to participate.



Gods Work, Our Hands Sunday, September 8, 2024, will once again find Project Response involving ALCTO members and ALCTO schools and their families to participate in a Food Drive. Our February Project Response Food Drive date will come in March this coming year during National Nutrition Month.

**ALCTO Food Pantry:** The Food Pantry ministry has maintained some of the protocols implemented during Covid, while yet others have been discontinued. The check-in process still requires a name, contact number, and family size. Everyone is welcome, there are not any eligibility requirements. Masks are no longer mandated in the pantry. But one person at a time inside the pantry itself continues. Hand sanitizer is always available as you enter the pantry. The pantry is open Fridays 10:00am-12:00pm but available to those in need through Pastor Steve and office staff at other times during the week. At the present time our clients may utilize the pantry every week. It is Benevolence recipient each January.



**Food Pantry Volunteers:** The ALCTO Food Pantry Ministry is very grateful to share that our volunteers, who are the heart of this pantry keep it running: including Bob Tokin, Alice and Trish, Linda, Callie, Deena, Janice, Dianne, Ann, Gail, Gene and Kathryn, Chris, Tania, Barry and our newest volunteer Lisa Burns but we certainly could use some more, there are two people per shift. Stacy Bosco, generates an online volunteer [sign up form](#) located on ALCTO's website and is sent out every couple of months to potential volunteers. Stacy also places helpful information about the pantry and its needs in the bulletin and social media, which we are so thankful for.



**Food Received:** The Food Pantry has been blessed with many gifts this year including: food dropped off during the week from our very giving church members especially the Women's Bible Study groups. Project response food drive, twice a year. Food Drives are a critical component to the success of the pantry. A volunteer shops for the pantry weekly for the necessary items that we consistently run out of. We are spending more of our budget than usual but continue to be noticeably short of many items. Kaylee Searway, continues to donate Birthday bags (cake supplies, decorations) when she can. Most Fridays you will see volunteers trying to help



with the deficit of food in the pantry and bring in several bags of groceries, personal items and paper items themselves. Jenni and VBS group made 36 summer snack bags for our kids that participate in our Food Pantry, it was so much fun.

**Food Distribution:** With inflation, the Food Pantry has been in full swing this year: distributing 2,836 bags of groceries that includes a paper goods bag with bottled water on Fridays. We do not track unique clients that come into the pantry but total family members benefiting was 3,010 people. The average family size participating is 3.6 people. Any pantry items distributed during the week to people in need are not tracked. The numbers reported are an increase from 2021/2022 and 2023/2024 with more seniors than in the past utilizing the pantry.

This year we accomplished a goal to develop a chart of food distribution sites, days and times and contact numbers for our food pantry participants and distributed the chart to participants on a regular basis.

**Food Pantry Expenses:** Beginning Balance - \$5,303.21, Money donated to the pantry this year - \$4,447.30, Money spent on food \$4,337.99, and \$500 to Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church Donation. Office expenses \$26.67, all of which was color copies allocations. Our Ending Balance - \$4,885.85 In 2022/2023 we spent \$3,817.00 for food and paper goods to supplement donated items. The Food Pantry has been blessed to receive monetary donations that really have supplemented the food donated. We are all just so grateful to all of the members who donate to this powerful ministry. Trader Joes and Ralphs also donated the paper bags that we used this past year.

**Food Pantry Client demographics:** Our clients all have different situations, some with families, some alone, some are seniors, some a widow/widower, a few developmentally disabled, some out of work for a variety of reasons, some homeless, some use the pantry to just supplement their check.

**Other items:** Our Community Concerns leader was invited to speak to each 6<sup>th</sup> grade class at Oaks Christian in May about service and math. Math? Using the Food Pantry and Hot Meals Ministry and other Community Concerns as examples of service and how the different ways of data research, data collection and numbers can assist us in serving the community. We spent the entire day with these 6<sup>th</sup> graders and besides sharing our ministries with them and data, we learned many things from the students. It was one of our most fulfilling, collaborative days in our community. We also received a very thoughtful thank you card and flowers from the students for our efforts.

Throughout the year we shared extra food in our pantry with Harbor House, Manna, LSS and Cal Lutheran Cupboard. We also share our bags with Harbor House TO as they need them for the meals served to the homeless community. We also donated to Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church pantry.

**Hot Meals Ministry** leaders Tania and Barry Disselhorst organize the Hot Meals Ministry. The third Tuesday of the month, these two leaders collect donated meal components at the church office, volunteers package them up and then the leaders deliver the meals to the Harbor House TO's Meals Program, located at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Thousand Oaks. Typically, at least 15 volunteers cook and deliver approximately 10 servings each of either, some type of meat, vegetable, a starch like potatoes, pasta. Total of a minimum of 50-complete dinners on the third Tuesday of every month. Barry and Tania



deliver the food (sample menu: Meat loaf, potatoes, vegetables) to ALCTO church office by 3:30. Then Tania and Barry and a few volunteers package the food components into 50 individual hot meal containers with a prayer note taped on the container. The prayer note is generally supplied by Pastor Ken Caudill. Once packaged the 50+ meals are delivered to Harbor House for distribution to those in need. Some of our ALCTO members also make lunches for Harbor House TO.



How can you help? The hot meals ministry could really use more volunteers, so that the same people are not purchasing, cooking and packaging every month. The Hot Meals Ministry delivered more than 600 hot meals this past year to Harbor House TO. Thank you to Tania and Barry and Volunteer chefs and meal packagers, we can't do this important ministry without our wonderful volunteers. We are grateful, contact Tania for more info. New this year, a [Sign Up link on the ALCTO website](#).

**Harbor House** support continues in different ways. Harbor House TO representative Denise Cortes speaks at our Adult Education classes and Sunday Services, explaining the needs of the community. It is a recipient of Gifts of Hope and other donations. We also supported Harbor House TO unhoused and other clients this year by attending their fundraisers, hot meals ministry the third Tuesday of the month and sharing their programs and needs via social media. The closing of LSS has also put a strain on Harbor House's Resources as they are trying to meet the needs of the LSS clients due to the shut down.



**Gifts of Hope**, in the fall, our community came together to participate in Gifts of Hope. During that time the Angel Tree is present with requests for gift cards. Our church members sure love this opportunity to support the local non-profits, as do the nonprofits.

**Adult Ed Class:** Looking forward to another Adult Ed Class covering the ministries at ALCTO and their touchpoints. Each year this class is very well attended by our members; the class is informative and engaging.

**Many Mansions and Lutheran Social Services:** In June, Lutheran Social Services in Thousand Oaks discontinued service in Thousand Oaks and closed their doors. This situation was devastating to some 400 people that received mail including their checks at the LSS PO Box. Unfortunately, their checks and other mail had no forwarding addresses, so they were returned. This obviously has put a strain on the other non-profits serving the community in this manner. The situation is very complex and ALCTO members and Pastors are looking at ways to help.

Another way that ALCTO supports the community is spreading the word to our ALCTO community about supporting community non-profits in many ways. One of them is Many Mansion's main fundraiser, Bowls of Hope. With some members volunteering, painting bowls and some attending the fundraiser [Bowls of Hope](#). LSS and Many Mansions send their clients in need over to ALCTO's pantry and sometimes send staff for new clients to pick up food for their clients. Although, LSS will no longer be doing that, since they have closed in TO.

**Jail Ministry:** We continue to try to find a member that would help us host church or bible study at the jails. This is an important ministry, reaching out to those who are incredibly vulnerable to share the Word

of God. The participants often come to the meetings with wonderful questions and open to spiritual dialogue.

To serve in the Jail Ministry program it does require an application and approval process which is managed by the county. For more information, contact Pastor Steve.

**Habitat for Humanity** – Designated Benevolence recipient this year, such a blessing to support this organization each August.

**Conejo Free Clinic** was visited by Pastor Tim, Pastor Steve and Community Concerns this past fall. It was a very productive tour that helped us understand the variety of ways they are serving the community and the need in our community for such a service. We also learned just how many doctors, dentists, nurses and administrative people volunteer at the facility. We also print and distribute Conejo Free Clinic information at our Food Pantry. Also, a Designated Benevolence recipient this year in April.

**Manna** we supported in a few ways this year, one of them being that we shared alot of the food collected during Project Response.

**Senior Concerns** contacted Community Concerns team and was helped out this year when they contacted Community Concerns with a need for a 72 year old woman who was being evicted that week. In July, ALCTO Community Concerns donated \$500.00 to assist in the moving costs, also volunteered to pack up her belongings as she had not been well since her husband and mother had passed. She was to be moved on that Wednesday to a Camarillo apartment, one that Senior Concerns located for her.

**Women's Interfaith Network CV** – try to attend meetings one Thursday a month, sometimes we can participate in helping with the projects for the community or passing on information and needs to Pastor Steve and Stacy who send it on to the ALCTO community.

**Plans and goals for 2023-2024:** While this overview by no means reflects the entirety of ministries under the community concerns umbrella, this brief snapshot demonstrates some of the work being done by ALCTO and the members of the Ascension community.

Various ministries and community non-profits have consistently found creative ways to meet the needs of others. With guidance from Pastor Steve, we will continue to develop creative and stronger community connections, along with partnering relationships which will benefit our community. Keeping in mind, to better connect the various ministries to find ways of lifting each other up and bringing more volunteers to each ministry. In addition to our ministry plans, we are working on ways to educate our main church body regarding the variety of ways these ministries are helping our community.

With the help of our Ascension Community, we look forward to accomplishing even more in our community this year. One of our goals this year is to see how to assist the former participants of Lutheran Social Services. With their recent closing there is more need than ever in our community. Thank you Chris Daleiden!



“We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses to help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action” (1 John 3:16-18).

This is not an exhaustive list. We are joyfully aware of many other community (and beyond) ministries that the members of Ascension are involved in. We are truly thankful for how our members are living out your vocational call to be Salt and Light in God's world! If you are interested in working on any one of these ministries, contact [pastorsteve@alcto.org](mailto:pastorsteve@alcto.org) or Community Concerns, Chris Daleiden.

[ACTION](#), Uniting Churches and Community, meeting needs of the vulnerable



3M - Minor Maintenance Ministries – Chris Daleiden

ALCTO Green Faith Team - Kristine Werner

Angel Tree –ministry, receiving gifts cards for families in need. Sandra Bean



Ascension's Food Pantry/Friday 10:00am -12:00pm

ACLTO Food Pantry Volunteers/ Project Response – (Food Drive- Schools and Church) (Volunteers needed) Chris Daleiden



Blood Drives –[Vitalant Blood Donations](#) Sherie Devilliers (877) 25VITAL

Caring Ones – loose dollar bills in the offering to help those in need. Pastor Steve

CASA of Ventura County (Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children). Rick Ertel

[Conejo Free Clinic](#) – Debbie Kahn



Conejo Elementary Tutoring – on pause

CPR/AED Training – for our church leaders, worship leaders – Di Starzak

Guardian Angels and also the Matthew 25:35 . Mary Wennes



Outreach Ministry Advocacy, helping immigrant children & teens Pastor Steve

[Habitat for Humanity](#) - Scott Squires



[Harbor House](#) - Denise Cortes , Sheri Groenveld 805-464-3533

[James Storehouse](#) Stacy DeWitte

Jail Ministry in Ventura and Santa Paula - on pause



[Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service](#) – Andrew G. Steele



[Manna](#) – Conejo Valley Food Bank



[Many Mansions](#) – Hannah Blitstein

[Senior Concerns](#), Meals on Wheels- Andrea Gallagher and Martha Shapiro

Senior Adult Ministries (SAM) Hillcrest Royale, [Sunrise Westlake](#), [Atria Grand Oaks](#) , [T.O.Royale](#),

[University Village](#), [Sage Mountain](#) “Christian Life Hour” meets each month (Senior Adult Ministries Team) Norm Guetschoff, Barbara Krum, Marilyn Reeve, Jan Specks, Dennis Gray, Jeff Specks, Pastor Steve, Gene and Kathy

Women's Interfaith Network CV – Meet once a month



Winter Shelter /Hot Meals Ministry. Volunteers needed Tania and Barry [Disselhorst](#)



## **Eucharistic Ministry Annual Report**

Maybe you, or someone you know, has been unable to come to worship for a while. Maybe they have had an injury, surgery, or are living in an assisted living situation and simply can't make it to one of the services. I know from personal experience how easy it is to feel isolated following complex surgery, and that there is a deep hunger for the sacrament of Holy Communion. There is a great group of people who will visit them, or you, bringing the love of the congregation and the love of Christ - the sacrament of Holy Communion. These visits by our Eucharistic Ministers are much more than a "visit by someone from the church." These visits are a continuation of the congregation's worship. These visits are our way of including them in the congregation's worship and showing them our congregation's love and concern.

The Augsburg confession states, "It is taught among us that the true body and blood of Christ are really present in the Supper of the Lord under the form of bread and wine and are there distributed and received." Luther wrote, "The bread and wine received by the assembly within worship are still the sacrament beyond worship. Sending of Holy Communion is a continuation of the action begun in the worshipping assembly, the receiving of God's gift of Christ's presence in holy communion for our forgiveness and new life."

This ministry supplements the ministry of our pastors. Your trained and commissioned Eucharistic Ministers make calls in homes, nursing homes and board and care facilities. There are some people we visit on a regular basis, and others we may only visit a few times before they can come back to worship on a regular basis. The ministers report back to the office that a visit has been made so that the congregation's communion records can be updated. They also report back to Pastor Ron for the visit scheduling records and to Pastor Steve and Pastor Tim if there are any special needs or concerns for pastoral follow-up.

Your Eucharistic ministers are Barbara Krum, Jeff Specks, Karsten Lundring, Delores Ledbetter, Kathleen and Ron Rudrud, Ron and Lucy Peterson, Beverly Selle, Ruth Rarick and Ann Lane. These ministers have made 211 visits this past year.

If God has placed the name of someone from our congregation on your heart that you think we should be visiting, or if you yourself would like a visit, please contact Pastor Steve Herder, or the ministry coordinator, Pastor Ron Cox (805-807-5257). All visits and information are confidential.

Maybe the Holy Spirit is nudging you to become part of this ministry. Our ministers have shared not only how much this has meant to the fellow members they have visited, but how powerful it has been for them. The visits are prearranged, so you know who you will be visiting – and then the unexpected happens:

- a care giver shares that they have not had communion in a long time, and asks if they may have some too
- a family member who is there, but not been to church in a long time, realizes that they have missed this mystery, and asks if there is enough for them
- someone else who is living in the care facility overhears the conversation, and they, too, realize how much this has meant to them but nobody visits them. They ask for forgiveness that they were eaves dropping – and is there any extra?
- and then the miracle happens as they share in the love of Christ and know that the Holy Spirit has been there with them and will always be with them

Are you being called to join us? + Blessings, Pastor Ron



### *Ascension's Fair Trade Ministry*

With continued support from the Ascension Community, this Ministry "grows" forward in its 22<sup>nd</sup> year!

Everyone is invited to join us! Contact us at [fairtrade@alcto.org](mailto:fairtrade@alcto.org)

Here are highlights for the year July 2023 to June 2024

- Fair Trade Lane celebrated its wonderful transformation Sunday, June 9, 2024, one year from its initial opening in June 2023. Generous gifts from the Overton's and Ascension's Foundation gave Fair Trade Lane a new outside awning, a new "easy to open" door and new gallery bars to display art on the art wall. Baskets line the top shelf of Fair Trade Lane to use for shopping fun. Fair Trade Lane was open monthly, on a Thursday afternoon and a Sunday morning. Fair Traders of all ages enjoyed the special art table this spring – beautiful pictures and colorful kites made by creative hands decorated Fair Trade each month. Everyone is invited to Fair Trade Lane!
- Monthly in advance of Fair Trade Lane Thursdays, we shared a Fair Trade message at Wednesday Morning Chapel. Each month, our message focused on one of the Fair Trade Principles.
- We became Ambassadors of the Mt Meru Coffee Project. MMCP is a very special partnership of the ELCA's Greater Milwaukee Synod and the Mt Meru Specialty Coffee Growers in Tanzania producing and selling Fair Trade certified coffee. We added MMCP coffee to Fair Trade Lane. MMCP coffee is served during Sunday morning hospitality time on the patio. With the "Be the Blessing" grant that launched our relationship with MMCP, we also gave a scholarship for training for a coffee farmer in the Meru region of Tanzania.
- Dr. Christina Sanchez and the Center for Global Engagement at CLU again invited Ascension's Fair Trade Ministry to join them and other student groups on campus for the Earth Day Sustainability Fair, this year on April 19<sup>th</sup>. We were also invited to participate in monthly Global Café events – we shared Fair Trade chocolate in October and November and Fair Trade Tea in February. Students played our "Where in the World" game, guessing the countries supplying ingredients in our Fair Trade products. We provided a colorful and delicious assortment of Fair Trade Tea for the International Womens Recognition Gathering and Dinner in March. We were delighted to participate in these campus events celebrating justice, fairness, respect, sustainability and good stewardship.
- In May, we tasted and learned about Organic Fair Trade wine from one of Argentina's largest organic wine producers. We also tasted and learned about Fair Trade distilled beverages produced with Fair Trade ingredients and made in Cognac, France. We enjoyed Fair Trade cheese and other snacks. Our host prepared a delicious pecan pie using EE Fair Trade pecans...a great end to a fun afternoon.
- Ascension Fair Trade hosted classes throughout the year:



*In October, our Fair Trade Month Adult Ed Class featured Chef Ben from Mama Ganache artisan chocolates in San Luis Obispo. Chef Ben joined us via Zoom sharing with us how and why he uses Fair Trade, organic and ethically sourced ingredients in his business.*

*He also shared with us photos and information on the work of Project Hope and Fairness, helping cacao farmers in West Africa. We tasted Mama Ganache chocolates in the class. We hosted an opportunity for the Ascension Community to order Mama Ganache chocolates. The delicious chocolates arrived in November.*

*In January, our Adult Ed Class featured Mt Meru Coffee Project Board Members joining via Zoom from Wisconsin. They shared with us the 15 yr history of this special partnership between the Greater Milwaukee ELCA Synod and the coffee farmers in the Mt Meru Region in Tanzania. We learned about their investments in facilities, equipment, processes and people. We learned about investments in education and health care. We learned how Fair Trade prices, processes and fundamentals have helped improve the lives of farmers, their families and their communities.*

*In April, our Adult Ed Class was our Sunday Sampler. We learned about and tasted Palestinian Fair Trade Extra Virgin Olive, Fair Trade chocolate and Fair Trade coffee. We learned about the challenges of being an olive oil farmer in Palestine.*

- We continue our practice of welcoming visitors and new members to the Ascension Community with packets of Fair Trade mini chocolates, tea and coffee. We gave gifts of Fair Trade chocolate to this year's Confirmands. We shared Fair Trade chocolate and snacks with the Confirmation Classes this year after they helped us clean and restock the shelves of Fair Trade Lane following installation of the new doors.
- Equal Exchange's interfaith and community business segment includes more than thirteen faith denominations. We are blessed to be one among this group promoting Fair Trade and justice for people and our planet. For calendar 2023 purchases of Equal Exchange products, Ascension was again in the Top 10 among the several thousand congregations and groups, of all denominations, in this EE segment. Thank You Ascension Community for your support of Fair Trade!

We look forward to more opportunities to connect in ministry, service, learning and fellowship.

***Let's Be The Change We Wish To See!***



## **Generosity Team Annual Report**

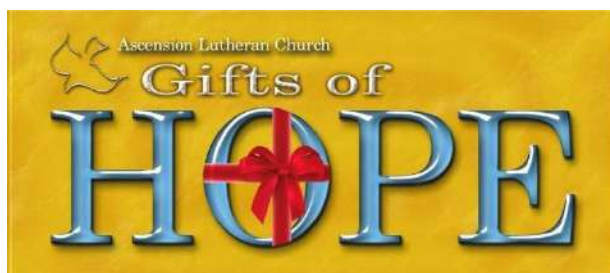
The goal of the Generosity Team is to provide insights and practical ways in which to infuse a culture of generosity into One Ascension, leading to growth in the spiritual and financial wellbeing of church, school, and foundation. The emphasis, from this group, has been on teaching members and others about how being more generous with their time, talents and treasures can lead to unimagined joy and fulfillment. The work of this team is founded on the belief that everything is a gift from God, and that His people are stewards, not owners, of the gifts they have been given. We believe our faith can provide an antidote to the natural, but selfish, desire of pursuing and hoarding wealth.

Our key endeavor as a team includes research, education, programs and testimonials. These endeavors integrate into existing programs and ministries of the church, school and foundation. We feel the key element to success is invitation -- inviting individuals to become more generous, not mandating or pressuring people into greater generosity.

The members of this team are Ed Klodt, Marisa Festerling, Mark Foreman, Ethan East, Pastor Tim and myself. What FUN we have talking about how generous our congregation members are, and how so many respond to the needs of moving our ministry forward, when they are made aware of the needs. Mark Foreman has given so much of his creative mind, talent, and time, putting together videos that you have seen at church services! We have tried to show the benefits we have, as a congregation, through the wonderful staff we have, doing so many different kinds of ministry; including preaching, teaching, making music, repairing the air conditioning, caring for our garden, planning programs, preparing food, ushering, helping plan weddings/memorial services, sharing creativity, sending out mailings/emails/other forms of communication, making worship personal and meaningful, showing all of us how we can be helpful in our own way with people living thousands and thousands of miles away from here -- OK, you get the idea.

We are a blessed community! We know it! We do a lot and will grow and develop into doing so much more. We have seen people respond to every need. Our needs obviously keep growing. Our members evaluate, along with prayer, how we can do even more. Our congregation voted to increase our budget by 5% this year, which began on July 1st, so there is the stated need for this new year, financially. We know the response will be there once again. Thanks for that.

Karsten Lundring



*Ascension's Gifts of Hope Ministry  
2023*

In 2023, Ascension's Gifts of Hope brought hope to many in places near and far.

In the Meru Parish, Tanzania, Gifts of Hope blessed widows and children with new small homes for them, goats, and farming training. Gifts also brought Bibles to Evangelists to use in sharing the Gospel. (For Meru, Tanzania, \$35,561).

Gifts to God's Global Barnyard and ELCA World Hunger will help fight hunger domestically and internationally. (\$14,010).

Locally, gifts for groceries, laundry and "Angel Love" were given to Friends of Fieldworkers in Ventura County (\$23,550) and gifts for groceries, a tank of gas and rent assistance were given to Harbor House to help those in need in our Conejo Valley (\$15,360).

For 2023, one hundred and eight gifts were given. All of these gifts, together with a gift of \$3,265, totaled \$91,746!

We thank Naomi Mbise and her mother Blessed (an Evangelist in the Meru Parish) for joining our Ascension Community in an Adult Ed class, via Zoom from New York City and Meru Parish, Tanzania, to share with us first-hand the needs of widows and children in Tanzania and how much our gifts will help provide homes and food. We thank Denise Cortes and Martita Martinez-Bravo, from Harbor House and Friends of Fieldworkers respectively, for joining us in another Adult Ed class to share the very special ways they provide help and hope to the many they serve in our local community.



With gifts of books from the Early Childhood Center and others, Ascension's Gifts of Hope joined Friends of Fieldworkers and families at a special Laundry Love evening in February, sharing snacks, crafts and friendship with children while adult family members took care of laundry needs.

Thank you, Ascension Church, School and Foundation! We are especially grateful to Mark and Sandra Howe for setting up a generous Foundation Gifts of Hope Endowment Fund.

#### ASCENSION'S GIFTS OF HOPE MINISTRY 2023





## **Annual Report Submission: Ascension Lutheran Church – Global Ministries Team**

### **Global Ministries Team Mission Statement/Focus Area(s):**

Mission Statement: With our congregation, we are "called to create opportunities for all people to become devoted followers of Christ." Together we "invite, grow, serve."

The Global Ministries Team will do this as we pray, work, partner and participate in God's mission around the world, using our ELCA global mission model of accompaniment. ("God's work. Our hands.") The scope of current ministries as well as those ministries we would like to better serve and support is reflected in our name. Inspired by the Biblical mandates to preach the Gospel and remember the poor, the Global Ministries Team will respond to God's love by sharing the good news of God's saving grace in Christ; preserving and restoring creation; and serving others through care, advocacy, education, reconciliation, solidarity with those in need, and interfaith work.

### **Leaders/Points of Contact within the Global Ministries Team**

Louise Evenson, chairperson of GMT (lpevenson@gmail.com), Pastor Steve Herder (pastorsteve@alcto.org), Carol Bjelland (fairtrade@alcto.org)

## **HIGHLIGHTS of the GLOBAL MINISTRIES TEAM-2023-2024**

### **Major Events & Experiences**

- **WELCOMING the STRANGER-Refugees, Asylum Seekers, Displaced people**
  - In November, a number of Ascension members joined in the walk with AMAL, a 12-foot puppet representing a 10-year-old Syrian girl, at the Kia Center in Los Angeles. AMAL had walked over 6,000 miles in 15 different countries to build awareness of children who are displaced in the world.
  - With the funds of a Be the Blessing grant, the GMT led the congregation in a Lenten service project to make 21 WELCOME BASKETS that have been distributed to refugee families in the greater Los Angeles area. We also contributed \$690 in gift cards for the families. Many groups were involved with making welcome baskets including the Sunday School children who hand painted wooden WELCOME hearts to be placed in each basket. We partnered with the Conejo Interfaith Refugee Team for this project.
  - Ascension Lutheran Church hosted the Conejo Interfaith Refugee Team's special Dessert Potluck in March. We heard from two refugee families that had been

assisted by the CIRT and the International Refugee Committee (IRC), as well as an immigration attorney.



- **HUMANITARIAN SUPPORT with Lutheran World Relief**

- As part of GOD’S WORK OUR HANDS in September, we assembled personal care kits for Lutheran World Relief. In addition to 513 personal care kits, Ascension sent 49 hand-made quilts, 27 school kits and \$1,510 for shipping costs to Lutheran World Relief to be distributed to some of the most vulnerable people in the world. This is a ministry of DIGNITY, HEALTH and HOPE.
- Ascension hosted a lunch for people from 4 other area Lutheran congregations who make quilts, pack kits and donate to Lutheran World Relief. We heard from Rev Lisa Kipp from LWR how our quilts and kits are delivered to people in Ukraine, Mali, Honduras and other international locations who need life-saving aid and long-term hope. Additionally, we learned how LWR spreads their specialized expertise in conflict areas (mobile medical clinics) and after natural disasters.



- **DELIVERING LIGHT and HOPE IN UKRAINE-Ray of Life solar light kits**

- In January, the GMT formed a Ray of Life team that brought an opportunity to Ascension to bring solar light kits and water purification kits to people in Ukraine. Through the team’s efforts, we became connected and acquainted with people from W VA to Lutsen, MN to Zaporizhzh, Ukraine. Ascension raised nearly \$25,000 along with New Hope Lutheran Church and other friends, to send 177 solar light kits and 100 purification kits to people in Ukraine in 2024.



- **GIFTS OF HOPE**

Our Gifts of Hope blessed: widows and children in Meru, Tanzania with then new small homes for them (\$35,561); ELCA World Hunger God's Global Barnyard (\$14,010); Friends of Fieldworkers (\$23,550); and Harbor House (\$15,360), plus gifts from our ECC (\$1,415), another gift of \$3,265, for a total of \$91,746! One hundred and eight gifts were given. Thank you, Ascension Church, School and Foundation! We are especially grateful to Mark and Sandra Howe for setting up a generous Foundation Gifts of Hope Endowment Fund. (see extended report on page 60)

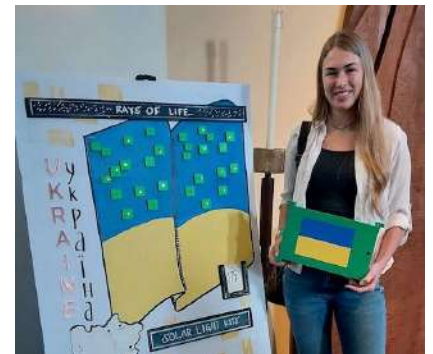
- **FAIR TRADE**

With generous gifts from the Overtons and Ascension's Foundation, Fair Trade Lane's transformation was completed in June, 2024 with a new outside awning, new doors, a shelf filled with shopping baskets and a new art wall. Located at the intersection of *Faith & Fair Trade*, Fair Trade Lane welcomed members of the Ascension Congregation, students, ECC & School families monthly on a Thursday afternoon and Sunday morning. Throughout the School year, in advance of Fair Trade Thursdays, we shared a special Fair Trade message at Wednesday Morning Chapel. We became Ambassadors of the Mt Meru Coffee Project. Ascension continues to be in the Top Ten of Equal Exchange's Interfaith & Community group in its purchases of Fair Trade products. (See an extended report on Fair Trade in this section.)

**The GMT extends our thanks to the ALC FOUNDATION for supporting the LWR KITS and QUILTS project, Gifts of Hope, Fair Trade as well as the RAY OF LIFE solar light kit project.**

- **Connecting with International Students at CLU**

The GMT's relationships with CLU's Center for Global Engagement and international students provided many opportunities for learning, hospitality and friendship including the International Women's Day Recognition Gathering & Dinner in March, the Earth Day Sustainability Fair in April, and the monthly Global Café. At a special dinner with Nina in November, we learned more about her family's ministries in Zimbabwe. We shared gifts to purchase STEM textbooks for a Lutheran high school in Zimbabwe and helped Ascension's VBS in giving their offering gifts to continue the InfoHut ministry in Zimbabwe. In a global Adult Ed class, via Zoom, Naomi and her mother and Magdalena shared with us about housing, food and education needs for widows and children in the Meru Parish of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania. Olha taught us much about Ukraine, its people and the hardships faced in this time of war, giving special meaning to the Ray of Life ministry project. Through lunches, dinners, time at worship & chapel, FaceTime calls, car drives to/from visa appointments, grocery stores, and airports, we learned much about Naomi, Nina, Ohla, Angela & Julia, their families,



their experiences at CLU, and their plans and dreams for the future. We are blessed to have them as our friends.

**The Global Ministries Team meets on Wednesdays at 4 PM, the first or second Wednesday of the month, in the Bethlehem Room. Announcements for our meetings are included in THIS WEEK AT ASCENSION two weeks prior to our meeting along with the topics we will be discussing. We have ZOOM available for anyone who wishes to attend. People are invited to participate/co-lead/volunteer for any of our ministries for any duration of time.**

### **ASCENSION CHURCH LIBRARY: 2024-25 Annual Report**

The library has received many donations this year from members of the church, some of which have been added to our collection and some have been donated to various charities.

The DVD collection has been updated with new titles and moved to a more visible location within the library.

All books and other items in the library will be moved to a new database eventually.

The library committee once again provided the congregation with the Advent Devotional, featuring devotions by various church members and artwork created by Ascension School's third grade class.

The library committee also once again provided the congregation with cookies following the Wednesday evening Lenten services.

Thank you,  
Dan Lareva  
Library Committee Chairman

## **Meet, Greet and Eat Fellowship Mission 2023-2024**

**Mission Statement:** Our mission has been to have a friendly environment outside of the Narthex where people could talk and get better acquainted with other members of the church. This fellowship is important for people to share their lives and thoughts and get better acquainted in a setting of the love that Christ has taught us. We offer food of all kinds for the people just as Jesus did in the feeding of people in the Bible story. People are able to have wonderful and caring fellowship with one another which is what is stated in the book of John 6:35, "I am the bread of life, whoever comes to Me will never grow hungry."

Highlights and Needs: (9:00 Service) We have a team of two leaders, and we also welcome anyone who offers their help in setting up or serving. We do not have a formal meeting place or date. The two leaders keep in touch through phone and computer. We have a sign- up sheet outside for members to offer to bring food items. We ask for and accept food of all kinds, but we like to have food that is healthy and easy finger food. We have had a great variety of food which has been wonderful. Members of the church are excited to see what we have each Sunday.

Highlights and Needs: (10:30 Service) We have 7-8 families that rotate bringing refreshments and we continue to add additional families. Prior to recently starting the 10:30 after worship fellowship, this service did not have a fellowship time, so this has been a great addition. This allows everyone to meet and fellowship every week and get to know each other in a deeper sense. It has been especially gratifying to meet and welcome guests. One longtime member said, "I have been a member for 25 years and this is the first time I have really had an opportunity to meet and get to know people." Everyone looks forward to fellowshipping every week and the kids love the chocolate milk and lemonade!"

## Outreach Team

When the outreach team began meeting in 2023, we first reviewed the 45-page Comprehensive Consultation Report done by an outside church consultant. This was very enlightening as to giving us a view of where we are.

This report listed Ascension's strengths of:

- Our staff
- Leadership
- People
- Traditional Worship
- Finances
- Prayer
- Facility

It listed our weaknesses of:

- Inward focused
- Declining attendance
- Unhealthy attitude of greeting new guest
- Contemporary worship
- Evangelism
- Discipleship
- Fellowship
- I would add more recently, our Youth Program

The consultant addressed in detail the weaknesses that are vital to the future of Ascension. Below are quotes from the consultant.

- “The primary need for Ascension is to address the decline in attendance.” (The 2008 attendance was 807 and today it is under 375. This is a decline of approximately 27 people per year. No one can predict the future but if we continue to decline as we have consistently done since 2008, we will be at zero in less than 15 years.)
- “When looking at the themes across all scores, I believe one big problem in particular is holding the church back: An inward focus.”
- “The church appears to gather for itself, not for the sake of reaching others.”
- “Members think that the priority focus should be on meeting their own needs, a dangerous inward focus.”

The consultant offered the below insights.

- “An outward focus needs to happen immediately.”
- “Perhaps the biggest hurdle is breaking the status quo. Doing nothing is not an option because doing nothing will not honor God.”
- “Living things grow. While growth itself is not the only indicator of health, if a church is alive and thriving, then it will grow. Conversely, if a church is dying, then it will not grow. Either a church lives and grows or dies and declines.”
- “A church can be overly scheduled and busy with lots of good things, while it should be focusing on the best things.”
- “Things need to change.”

It is never easy to hear one’s weaknesses and reality is sometimes harsh. The consultant’s report is valuable because it tells us what we need to hear and inspires us for the urgency to make bold changes.

Below are a few changes the Outreach Team has implemented and is working on.

- Expanded the 9:00 after worship fellowship.
- Started the 10:30 after worship fellowship.
- Initiated 10:30 worship greeters.
- Working on nurse care for worship services.
- Working on Sunday school for the 10:30 worship service.
- Improve our website.
- Create events to invite friends.
- Working on improving the band sound for the 10:30 service.
- Working on having outreach as a filter and culture for all Ascension events.

It is imperative for the survival of our church to be focused on outreach. It is Jesus’ command to make disciples and bring people to a faith life. I believe to become more of an outreach church that we need to go beyond just mental thinking, go beyond just good intentions, go beyond just keeping busy and get down to the nitty gritty and get into the trenches of making disciples and bringing people to a faith life. Jesus does not ask us to just try but to do. The Great Commission, to make disciples, should be the filter and culture of everything Ascension does.

Peace,

Duane Cirks



**ASCENSION  
LUTHERAN**

---

Email Prayer Team

"Continue in prayer being vigilant in it with thanksgiving. "  
Colossians 4:2

Ascension's Email Prayer Team consists of about 100 former members, members and friends of the church. These faithful people pray for the needs of our Pastors, family, friends, congregation, the community, and the world. Galatians 6:2 says, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." We also have the privilege of thanking and praising God for His answers to our prayers and to thank him for joyous things, such as the recent hiring of our Youth Director, Jen Avalos. Psalm 106:1 "Praise the Lord. Give thanks to the LORD for he is good; his love endures forever."

How does the Prayer Team work? If you have a prayer request for the Prayer Team, you may use the blue cards in the pews, call the office, or talk to a Pastor and the team will be sent the prayer request by email and will pray. Prayer requests go out several times a week, as needed. Prayer requests are to be kept confidential.

Thanks to all on the Prayer Team for their commitment and faithfulness to this essential ministry. May you be blessed with a deeper relationship with Christ Jesus because of all the prayers you offer for others.

Thank you to the Prayer Team members for your faithfulness in praying for others and serving God in this essential ministry.

Linda Morrow  
Email Prayer Team Coordinator.



**Our vision:** “We are called to create opportunities for all senior adults and caregivers to become devoted followers of Christ, with our congregation and community.”

[www.alcto.org](http://www.alcto.org)



**Our ministry is to, with, and for seniors!** We work with four groups: active seniors, transitional seniors, frail seniors, and caregivers. At Ascension we have 354 people who are above 65 years old (207 women; 147 men). There are 20 who are in their 90s! We always emphasize intergenerational ministries with our Church, School, and Foundation. Our seniors are involved in almost every ministry of Ascension, in worship, education, and with our community and global ministries.



**Visitation ministries** – This is a central ministry as we visit people in their homes, at the hospitals, in retirement center, nursing homes, and board and care homes. We listen, care, pray, read Scripture, bring Holy Communion, and thank them for their ministries, especially prayer. If you know of someone who would like a visit, let Pastor Steve know. Barbara Krum has done much visitation ministry this past year. **Eucharistic Ministers** – These trained leaders bring Holy Communion to those who are not able to come to a worship service. Pastor Ron Cox coordinates.



**Christian Life Hours** – Norm Guetschoff (and his team of seven plus) now lead these worship services at Royal Oaks on Erbes, Atria Grand Oaks on T.O. Blvd, Sage Mountain in N.P., Sunrise in Westlake. Pastor Steve leads at University Village Oak View and Hillcrest Royale. We have also led these at Sunrise Simi Valley, Senior Concerns, Atria Hillcrest, and Vallecito.



**3M (Minor Maintenance Ministries)** – connects volunteers with those who need help with their yard or home projects. Beverly David was our leader until she moved out of state this past year.



**GriefShare Group** – We have one each week on Thursdays at 1:00 p.m., in the prayer chapel. This 13-week video-based and faith-based discussion continually repeats. Brenda Heinrich leads, [www.griefshare.org](http://www.griefshare.org). **All Saints Sunday** – the first Sunday in November, we remember our loved ones who have died.



**SAM's Tram** – This is our transportation ministry for seniors who need a ride to worship or to a doctor/dentist or to a store. Led by Bob Tokin and his team of drivers.

**SAM Trips** – Half-day trips to local sites around us! This ministry is on hold as we look for a new leader. **Prayer Shawls** – Members knit prayer shawls or scarves for those in need. **Greeting Cards** - a wonderful caring ministry with sending cards to people. Valerie Krum leads. **Christmas Caroling** – this is one of our favorite ministries of the year, with our youth, to bring the joy of Jesus to some of our oldest members. **Valentines** – Our school and our youth often make precious cards for our oldest members! **Health and wellness.** Di Starzak leads our CPR/AED ministries.



It is a joy to be in service to, with and for our seniors of our congregation and in our community. (Our story was published in a past issue of the journal “Generations” by the American Society on Aging.) In 2021 Ascension’s SAM Team was featured in Pastor Don Koepke’s new online book, “Growing an Older Adult Ministry.” For more info: [pastorsteve@alcto.org](mailto:pastorsteve@alcto.org). Page updated 8.12.24



# Annual Report for Women's Monday Morning Bible Study 2023-24

*“Growing together in faith, love and prayer”*

Something amazing happens nearly every Monday morning at Ascension during the school year. If you were to sneak a peek, you would find yourself in the presence not only of dozens of women eagerly plumbing the depths of God's Word, but of the Holy Spirit. For wherever these women are gathered around the campus, He is there—and you can tell from the atmosphere of joy, faith, love and prayer.

This is Women's Monday Morning Bible Study, and this past year, 61 women gathered weekly (except for holidays) to discuss Warren Wiersbe's "Be" study on the book of Acts. Led ably by table leaders Kelley Bannon, Myra Chandler, Helen Cox, Margo Dameron, Susanne Hopkins, Linda Morrow, Ruth Neumann, and Cathi Peterson, five table groups met on Monday mornings for study and prayer and, of course, socializing.

One of the lingering effects of the Covid-19 outbreak has been that we no longer meet all together in Founder's Hall as we did for many years. Instead, a couple of our groups met this past year in Founder's Hall, while others gathered in the Dugout and the Bethlehem Room, as well as in one participant's home.

But we had the joy of getting together quarterly for a Fellowship time. Sometimes, it was just 90 minutes of eating a light breakfast and catching up with friends. Other times, we had guest speakers. And always we experienced the joy and delight of being together. We thank both Pastor Tim and our advisor, Pastor Steve, for their wonderful care and support of our ministry (and for always being ready to answer our many, many questions!). They have blessed us richly!

On Sept. 16, we start another year—and as of this writing, we will be nearly 70 strong. All but two of our 2023-24 participants have re-upped and nearly a dozen of our participants are new to Women's Monday Morning Bible Study.

We are very excited to do two studies this coming year—"The 12 Disciples" by Douglas Connelly, September-December, and John Stott's study on the book of Ephesians, January-May.

Our leaders will remain the same, except for Cathi Petersen, who has retired after several faithful years of being a table leader. We are so appreciative of her dedication to this ministry, her creative ideas and her joy in Jesus. Even as we say goodbye to Cathi, we welcome new table leaders and co-leaders Elizabeth Doswell, Ethel Jordan, Kim Overton, Debra Papageorge and Connie Reimer. Thanks to them, we can have six groups this year!

In great anticipation of what God will do in the coming year, we pray along with the Apostle Paul that our "roots will grow down into God's love and keep [us] strong." –Ephesians 3:17b NLT

In Christ's love,

*Susanne Hopkins and the WMMBS Leadership Team*

## **Worship Annual Report 2023-2024**

The worship team at Ascension had a great year with excellent volunteer numbers. Every week the 9AM service averages a sum of 18 volunteers. This is divided into 1 reader, 2 acolytes, 7 ushers and 8 communion assistants.

This last year, we began a new chapter for the 10:30AM service volunteer system. As the 10:30AM service is growing in numbers, we wanted the volunteer numbers to reflect that. So, we began using the same pre-scheduling system that is used for the 9AM volunteers. There is an average of 2 communion assistants and 1 acolyte volunteer per service.

Rally Day was an impressive day with 26 total volunteers! This was made up of 2 acolytes, 10 ushers and 14 communion assistants.

This year, our holiday services had an incredible number of volunteers. Our Christmas Eve and Day Services saw 4 readers, 12 acolytes, 14 ushers and 16 communion assistants!

Holy Week and Easter Season (including Lent services) had a collective 8 readers, 15 acolytes 35 communion assistants and 44 ushers.

We had 12 guest preachers throughout the year, asked by Pastor Tim to bless us with their preaching. Some highlights include Pastor Cynthia Berry, Ed Klodt, Pastor Paul Gravrock and Pastor Doris Nolan. The peak season of guest preaching is during the Lent Services, with each Wednesday service led by a guest preacher/speaker.

Over summer, while our Choir and Carillons are on break, we have a string of song leaders to guide the 9AM services. Choir director, Wyant Morton scheduled two song leaders for every 9AM service over the summer. With just 6 rotating volunteers, a collective 28 song leaders guided the service over summer. Wyant and Pastor Tim also help schedule amazing guest musicians over the summer like Yvonne Zoetewey, Kathie Ferkin, Megan Schulze and so many more.

As I lead scheduling communion assistants, readers, and acolyte volunteers every week, Terry Shepersky expertly heads the usher team in both scheduling and leading them every week.

All our amazing worship band leaders continued guiding their teams this year. Chancel Choir Conductor Wyant Morton, with 50 choir members. The Carillons (Bell Choir) led by Director Matt Cahill with 12 members. Country Spirit led by Nancy Lee with 2 members. And Praise Alive band leader, Melissa Berg, with 12 members. And I know everyone is grateful every week as we are so blessed with the beautiful organ playing of Margaret Ricci.

Our Altar Guild is run by Lory Britzman, who arranges and organizes communion every week for our congregation. Thank you Lory!

This year we had an incredible 37 new members join our congregation! And a wonderful 23 baptisms this year. We are so blessed with these new additions.

Worship is truly made possible every week with volunteers. Whether that be acolytes, musicians, communion assistants, readers or ushers. Terry and I are always looking for volunteers to make Ascension's Sunday Services possible.

If you are interested in getting involved here are a few contacts that would be happy to give you more information about joining their team:

Chancel Choir: Wyant Morton, [wmorton@alcto.org](mailto:wmorton@alcto.org)

Carillons: Matt Cahill, [maceagle01@gmail.com](mailto:maceagle01@gmail.com)

Praise Alive: Melissa Berg, [mberg@alcto.org](mailto:mberg@alcto.org)

Ushering: Terry Shepersky, [tshepersky@gmail.com](mailto:tshepersky@gmail.com)

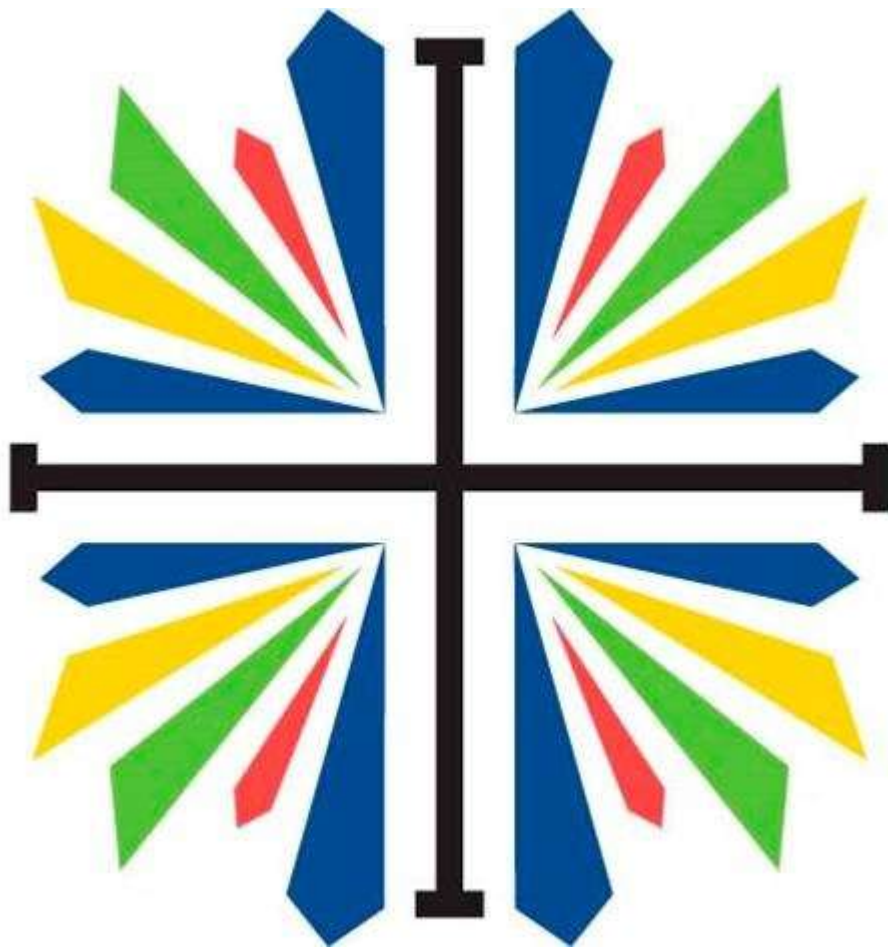
Communion, Acolyte, Reading: Jenelle Smith, [jsmith@alcto.org](mailto:jsmith@alcto.org)

Thank you to everyone who participated in worship at Ascension this year. We are excited to praise with you soon.

Jenelle Smith, *Worship Coordinator*

“Praise the Lord. How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him!” – Psalms 147:1

# ONE ASCENSION BUDGETS



**Ascension Lutheran Church**  
 Budget Summary  
 Fiscal Year July 1 - June 30

**Revenues:**

|                        |    | Church<br>'24 - '25<br>Budget | Church<br>'23 - '24<br>Budget | Church<br>'23 - '24<br>Prelim Final | Church<br>'23 - '24<br>Variance | Church<br>'25 - '24<br>Budget Change |
|------------------------|----|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Offerings (Church)     | A) | 1,515,371                     | 1,443,210                     | 1,383,203                           | (60,007)                        | 72,161                               |
| Other Revenues         | B) | 49,680                        | 37,700                        | 42,686                              | 4,986                           | 11,980                               |
| <b>Total Revenues:</b> |    | <b>1,565,051</b>              | <b>1,480,910</b>              | <b>1,425,889</b>                    | <b>(55,021)</b>                 | <b>84,141</b>                        |

**Expenditures:**

|                                      |    |                  |                  |                  |               |               |
|--------------------------------------|----|------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Salaries & Benefits                  | C) | 1,260,727        | 1,153,170        | 1,079,811        | 73,359        | 107,557       |
| Allocated Staff Expenses             | D) | (213,912)        | (183,202)        | (180,999)        | (2,203)       | (30,710)      |
| Benevolences                         | *  | 54,068           | 62,780           | 53,048           | 9,732         | (8,712)       |
| Programs / Committees                |    | 61,319           | 66,832           | 64,968           | 1,864         | (5,513)       |
| Administrative Expenses              |    | 102,300          | 102,950          | 90,937           | 12,013        | (650)         |
| Property Maintenance                 | E) | 100,770          | 93,750           | 111,685          | (17,935)      | 7,020         |
| Utilities & Insurance                | F) | 107,928          | 94,774           | 93,117           | 1,657         | 13,154        |
| <b>Operating Expenditures</b>        |    | <b>1,473,200</b> | <b>1,391,054</b> | <b>1,312,568</b> | <b>78,486</b> | <b>82,146</b> |
| Debt Service                         |    | 99,675           | 99,675           | 99,675           | -             | -             |
| <b>Total Expenditures</b>            |    | <b>1,572,875</b> | <b>1,490,730</b> | <b>1,412,243</b> | <b>78,486</b> | <b>82,146</b> |
| <b>Operating Surplus / (Deficit)</b> |    | <b>(7,824)</b>   | <b>(9,820)</b>   | <b>13,645</b>    | <b>23,465</b> | <b>1,995</b>  |

A) An increase of 5% is incorporated in anticipated offerings. Actual increase from 23FY to 24FY through May = 4%

B) Other Revenues increase is based on last three month's average interest rate.

C) Large salary increase is over half based on as yet unfilled Associate Pastor & Youth Director positions

D) Represents shared costs to the School and ECC for maintenance, finance and admin. Staff paid by Church. Admin.added for current yr.

E) Property Maintenance includes a \$25,000 contribution to the One Ascension maintenance fund; contingent on surplus.

F) Both insurance costs and utility expenses were materially impacted in the current year and are anticipated to continue.

\* - see attached Benevolences Sheet

**Ascension Lutheran Church**  
**Cash Review as of June 30, 2024**

|                                           | <u>\$\$\$'s</u> |
|-------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Cash (Balance Sheet)                      | 834,250         |
| + Liquid Receivables (ALS/ECC/Foundation) | <u>174,759</u>  |
| <b>Total cash</b>                         | 1,009,009       |

**Reserved Funds (net of Liabilities):**

|                                |                |
|--------------------------------|----------------|
| AGAPE                          | 28,030         |
| Mission Possible               | 212,558        |
| Garden Fund                    | 52,672         |
| Be the Blessing                | 54,063         |
| One Ascension Maintenance      | 54,599         |
| Benevolence and Programs Items | <u>181,879</u> |
| <b>Total Reserved Funds</b>    | 583,801        |

**Available Unrestricted Cash**
                     425,208

| <u>Debt</u>       | <u>Total<br/>\$\$\$'s</u> | <u>Annual Cost<br/>\$\$\$'s</u> | <u>Monthly Payments</u> |                 |               | <u>Rate</u> | <u>End Date</u> | <u>Remaining</u> |
|-------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------|-----------------|------------------|
|                   |                           |                                 | <u>Principal</u>        | <u>Interest</u> | <u>Total</u>  |             |                 | <u>Term</u>      |
| Church Mortgage   | 1,075,870                 | 98,844                          | 4,106                   | 4,131           | 8,237         | 4.625%      | 8/1/2039        | 15 Yr 1 Mo       |
| ECC Mortgage      | 2,022,256                 | 163,440                         | 4,709                   | 8,911           | 13,620        | 5.300%      | 8/1/2044        | 20 Yr 1 Mo       |
| Construction Note | 1,219,968                 | 76,248                          | -                       | 6,354           | 6,354         | 6.250%      | 8/1/2025        | 1 Yr 2 Mo        |
| Foundation Note   | 18,666                    | 831                             | -                       | 69              | 69            | 4.450%      | None            | NA               |
| <b>Total Debt</b> | <u>4,336,760</u>          | <u>339,363</u>                  | <u>8,815</u>            | <u>19,465</u>   | <u>28,280</u> |             |                 |                  |

## Ascension is a Generous Congregation!

|                                                                                                                                |                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
|                                                                                                                                | 24 FY               |
| <b>Offerings to the General Fund</b>                                                                                           | <b>\$ 1,333,787</b> |
| Congregational Benevolence                                                                                                     | \$ 54,974           |
| Designated Gifts thru 5/31/24                                                                                                  | \$ 335,522          |
| Gifts to School thru 5/31/24                                                                                                   | \$ 91,503           |
| Other Foundation Grants thru 5/31/24                                                                                           | \$ 38,206           |
| <b>Total Giving</b>                                                                                                            | <b>\$ 1,853,992</b> |
| <b>Total Benevolences</b>                                                                                                      | <b>\$ 520,205</b>   |
| <b>Percent of giving other than to church operating expenses</b><br>(i.e., earmarked for other than church operating expenses) | <b>28%</b>          |

**Ascension Lutheran School & Early Childhood Center**

FYE 25 Budget vs FYE 24 Projection

|                                             | ALS                    |                    |                  | ECC                    |                    |                   |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
|                                             | FYE 24<br>Prelim Final | FYE 25<br>Budget   | YOY<br>Change    | FYE 24<br>Prelim Final | FYE 25<br>Budget   | YOY<br>Change     |
| <b>Revenue:</b>                             |                        |                    |                  |                        |                    |                   |
| Tuition/Fees/Ext.Care/SS A)                 | \$1,945,055            | \$2,184,579        | \$239,524        | \$2,496,646            | \$2,664,998        | \$168,352         |
| Net Fundraising Receipts                    | \$153,620              | \$153,390          | (\$230)          | \$0                    | \$0                | \$0               |
| Other Income                                | \$8,325                | \$20,900           | \$12,575         | \$32,179               | \$43,625           | \$11,446          |
| <b>Total Revenue</b>                        | <b>\$2,107,000</b>     | <b>\$2,358,869</b> | <b>\$251,869</b> | <b>\$2,528,825</b>     | <b>\$2,708,623</b> | <b>\$179,798</b>  |
|                                             |                        |                    |                  |                        |                    |                   |
| <b>Expenditures:</b>                        |                        |                    |                  |                        |                    |                   |
| Salaries & Benefits                         | \$1,498,475            | \$1,756,492        | \$258,017        | \$1,769,050            | \$1,973,302        | \$204,252         |
| Allocated Staff Expenses                    | \$91,886               | \$117,386          | \$25,500         | \$86,033               | \$96,316           | \$10,283          |
| School/Admin. Expenses                      | \$281,163              | \$227,865          | (\$53,298)       | \$166,421              | \$141,272          | (\$25,149)        |
| Security B)                                 | \$12,594               | \$72,500           | \$59,906         | \$12,594               | \$72,500           | \$59,906          |
| Property Service & Maintenance              | \$142,603              | \$140,026          | (\$2,577)        | \$143,952              | \$134,276          | (\$9,676)         |
| Utilities & Insurance                       | \$84,354               | \$91,940           | \$7,586          | \$97,150               | \$109,268          | \$12,118          |
| <b>Total Operating Expenditures</b>         | <b>\$2,111,075</b>     | <b>\$2,406,209</b> | <b>\$295,134</b> | <b>\$2,275,200</b>     | <b>\$2,526,934</b> | <b>\$251,734</b>  |
|                                             |                        |                    |                  |                        |                    |                   |
| Operating Surplus (Deficit)                 | (\$4,075)              | (\$47,340)         | (\$43,265)       | \$253,625              | \$181,689          | (\$71,936)        |
| Debt Service                                | \$0                    | \$0                | \$0              | \$163,440              | \$163,440          | \$0               |
| Prior Year Fin Aid Gifts Offset             | \$20,900               | \$44,200           | \$23,300         | \$0                    | \$0                | \$0               |
| Plus: Middle School Activation Fund         | \$0                    | \$38,000           | \$38,000         | \$0                    | \$0                | \$0               |
| <b>Adjusted Operating Surplus (Deficit)</b> | <b>\$16,825</b>        | <b>\$34,860</b>    | <b>\$18,035</b>  | <b>\$90,185</b>        | <b>\$18,249</b>    | <b>(\$71,936)</b> |

A) 7% Annual increase for tuition &amp; ECC fees. ALS revenue assumes 170 total students with the addition of 8th Grade.

B) Security expenses are based on the full utilization of the seed donation. This new item accounts for 1/2 the tuition increase.

Ascension Lutheran Church Foundation  
 Fiscal Year 6/30/2025 Budget  
 Updated August 1, 2024

| FYE<br>YE Estimate<br>6/30/2024 | FYE<br>Budget Proposal<br>6/30/2025 |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|

**Support and Revenues:**

Dividends, Interest, Realized/Unrealized Gain  
 (Loss) on Investments  
 Contributions

|         |        |
|---------|--------|
| 260,256 | -      |
| 40,006  | 25,000 |

**Total Revenues:**

|         |        |
|---------|--------|
| 300,262 | 25,000 |
|---------|--------|

**Expenses**

Grants and Scholarships  
 Administrative Expenses

|          |           |
|----------|-----------|
| (63,542) | (100,000) |
| (12,312) | (13,100)  |

**Total Expenses**

|          |           |
|----------|-----------|
| (75,854) | (113,100) |
|----------|-----------|

Increase (Decrease) in Net Assets

|         |          |
|---------|----------|
| 224,408 | (88,100) |
|---------|----------|

Beginning Net Assets

|           |           |
|-----------|-----------|
| 1,529,732 | 1,754,140 |
|-----------|-----------|

Ending Net Assets

|           |           |
|-----------|-----------|
| 1,754,140 | 1,666,040 |
|-----------|-----------|