

**Ascension Lutheran Church
Council Agenda
Wednesday, August 20, 2025
Bethlehem Room**

Welcome and Call to Order - John Rarick, President

Mission Statement: We are called to create opportunities for all people to become devoted followers of Christ.

Motto: Invite - Grow - Serve

Approval of Agenda – John Rarick

Devotion –Creighton Van Horn

Listening to stories/reflections on getting the blessing & being the blessing.

New Business

- No new business
- Treasurer's report—Steve Smuck

Recurring Business

- Affirm New Members, Confirmands, and Baptisms

Old Business

- No old business

Approval of Minutes – John Rarick

- July Council Meeting

Consent Approval of Reports to Council – John Rarick

- Pastor Tim Delkeskamp's Report
- Pastor Chamie Delkeskamp's Report
- Pastor Steve Herder's Report
- Director of Operations Report
- Foundation Report
- Global Ministries Team Report
- Communications Report

Information Items

Closing Prayer—Ethan East

Adjournment

New Members & Baptisms Report

August 2025

Baptisms for July

Name	Date Baptized
Charlotte Rebecca Knapp	07/06/25
Charles David Newmark	07/13/25

New Members for July

Brigitte Bell
Louis Bell
Katrina Cain
Tyler Cain
Karen Duthler
Jim Duthler
Max Fuhrmann
Kathy Gulrud
Paul Gulrud
Bill Vanderbok
Judy Vanderbok

**Ascension Lutheran Church
Council Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, July 16, 2025 - 7:00pm
Bethlehem Room**

Welcome and Call to Order -John Rarick, President
Meeting called to order at 7:16 PM

Mission Statement: We are called to create opportunities for all people to become devoted followers of Christ.

Motto: Invite - Grow – Serve

Introductions

Council members in attendance: Alan Baker, Ethan East, Michael Feltner, Carrie Leonard, John Rarick, Steve Smuck, Creighton Van Horn, Anna Woodward

Others: Kaylee Searway, Pastor Tim, Pastor Chamie

Virtual via Zoom: Crystal Bryant

Absent:

Approval of Agenda – John Rarick

It was moved (Al), and seconded (Ethan) to approve the agenda as presented.

Devotion - Al Baker

Passage from Charles Swindoll:

When you are at dilemmas in life and unable to decide - enjoy the process and let the Lord be your guide. When we allow the Lord to be our guide it is amazing the joy that comes from this give it to God mentality -trading joy for anxiety.

Treasurer's Report - Steve Smuck

2026 budget is up 3% over 2025. We will likely need the Generosity team to request a 3.5% increase to cover increased budget costs.

It was moved (Carrie), seconded (Anna), then passed unanimously to approve the Treasurer's Report.

New Business –

- Resolution Amendments - Kaylee

RESOLUTION NO: 2025./26.1 -Electronic Voting Resolution

It was moved (Michael), seconded (Carrie) then passed unanimously to approve the Electronic Voting Resolution.

RESOLUTION NO: 2025/26.2: Signature Authorization Resolution

It was moved (Carrie), seconded (Michael) then passed unanimously to approve the Signature Authorization Resolution.

RESOLUTION NO: 2025/26.3 Banking Signature Resolution

It was moved (Ethan), seconded (Al) then passed unanimously to approve the Banking Signature Resolution with the Banc of California.

- Ministry Listing Review for Annual Report - Kaylee

Get the Blessing Be the Blessing list of ministries was presented and will help prepare for the Annual Report. Kaylee intends to be sure that everyone is included in any ministry they are currently supporting. Please review the list and email Kaylee any missing ministry or people. How do we add Kingdom Builders to this report also - should we consider specific reports for each project? Are there new long term ministries that came out of the KB and are there new committees that have formed based on a KB project?

- Thrivent Choice – Pastor Tim

Thrivent Choice is a fund that is created by Thrivent Members. Monies can be used for non-profits, which means ALCTO can be supported by the Thrivent Choice fund. In previous years, Council has voted to use these funds for specific projects. Currently there is about \$19,000 in the fund. Pastor Tim requests the following Thrivent Choice fund amounts be used for the listed projects, supplies, gifts or additional operating costs.

1. *It was moved (Carrie), seconded (Anna) then passed unanimously to approve a \$2,000 fund for Kaylee Searway to operate as an expense account.*
2. *It was moved (Al), seconded (Creighton) then passed unanimously to approve a \$1,000 fund to support the ALCTO Executive Team Retreat.*
3. *It was moved (Ethan), seconded (Michael) then passed unanimously to approve a \$400 fund to cover Gratitude Gifts (books) for outgoing Council, School and Foundation members.*

Recurring Business

- Affirm New Members, Confirmands, and Baptisms

Baptisms for June

Celia Evelyn Cain 11/18/2021 06/22/2025

Samuel Clark Combs 10/28/2024 06/24/2025

New Members

Confirmands for May

Jayce Braddell

Gemma Davis

Aiden Gonzalez

Cameron Jones

Luca Swanson

Nolan Snyder

Shaya Saneinia

Paige Trytten

Old Business

- No old business

Approval of Minutes -John Rarick

- June Council Meeting

It was moved (Ethan), seconded (Al) and passed unanimously to approve the June Council Meeting Minutes.

- Congregational Meeting

It was moved (Creighton), seconded (Michael) then passed unanimously to approve the June 2025 Congregational Meeting minutes.

Consent Approval of Reports to Council – John Rarick

- Pastor Tim Delkeskamp's Report
- Pastor Chamie Delkeskamp's Report
- Pastor Steve Herder's Report
- Kaylee Searway, Director of Operations
- Youth Ministry Report

It was moved (Ethan), seconded then passed unanimously to approve Reports to Council.

Information Items

- Pastor Performance Reviews – Carrie Leonard

Historically the council president conducts the annual performance review for the Senior Pastor. Then Senior Pastor conducts reviews of direct reports. With the addition of Pastor Chamie, it was decided that Pastor Tim will not conduct the review of the Associate Pastor. The responsibility of Pastor Chamie's review then fell to the Council. The review form has been

created by Carrie, Kaylee and a few others. Some of the review criteria came from the doctrine that guides the Methodist Church for its pastors. Executive Session with council happened in May 2025, to cover review the three pastors. This group then met with the ALC Executive Team to discuss performance of each pastor. In July of 2025, Carrie and John met with each pastor individually, to conduct each review. Pastor Tim was present at each meeting. Data points were also used (church attendance, personal days taken, and sabbatical) to help as an objective assessment. The process and discussions were positive and well received. It has been determined that this procedure for future Performance Reviews will remain in place.

- Church Council Retreat – 08/09/25 @ 8:30-1:00pm Rarick Home

During this retreat we will cover the vision from Pastor Tim, what our roles for council involve, and how we, as leaders of the congregation equip, empower, affirm and celebrate our community. We will work to create council goals.

Devotions:

- Crystal will create a Create a calendar and sign up for devotions and closing prayers for future council meetings.

Closing Prayer - Michael Feltner

Adjournment

It was moved (Carrie), seconded (Creighton) and passed unanimously to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:16 PM

Respectfully submitted by Crystal Bryant



Pastor Tim's Ministry Report- July 2025

Grace and peace my sisters and brothers in Christ,

I write this report on August 12th which means to quote the indie rock band Florence and the Machine, “the dog days are over.” Indeed, the dog days of summer were packed with preparing for worship services, retreats, and all the coming events for Fall. For me, they were also packed with thinking about Ascension’s more distant future- one that will be coming, not this year but more like in the next 10 years or so. And the question I have is what is that North Star that will keep us going in the direction that Jesus is guiding us towards.

It has been wonderful to use these Dog Days to step away from the daily crises that we often deal with and focus on the bigger picture by leading 2 retreats, one for our staff’s Executive Team and one for our church council.

The Executive team’s retreat happened July 23rd at the wonderful Serra Retreat Center in Malibu. The two objectives for the day were team building and introducing the cultural vision of “Get the Blessing, Be the Blessing.” We spent most of the time on team-building and going through our Table Group’s 5 Dysfunctions of a Team Assessment. It was a wonderful conversation as we focused on the 1st dysfunction- Trust. In order to learn and grow in our trust for one another we learned our working and communicating styles and spent time growing in our knowledge of each other. We will spend more time throughout the year focusing on the other four dysfunctions.

The church council retreat on August 9th was wonderful and I thank each of you for your attendance. It was a great opportunity for the new church council members to “accelerate through the learning curve” of being on Church Council and to reflect on the vision presentations of Pastor Chamie and me. I look forward to extending those conversations throughout the year in some way. More on that later.

It has been wonderful to co-preach (with Pastors Chamie, Rick and Paul) our summer sermon series called “Walk this Way.” The general idea of the series has been “back to the basics of the Christian faith.” Topics have been: “Firm Foundation,” “Living By the Spirit,” “Practicing Forgiveness & Grace,” “Room Under the Tent,” “Believing in Abundance vs. Scarcity,” “Living Generously,” “Caring for Those Most in Need,” “Nurturing the Young & the Old,” “Balancing Stability & Adaptability,” “Made to Worship,” “Prayers & Peace,” and “Caring for Creation” This sermon series will conclude on Labor Day weekend.

Currently, we are in the midst of what we call “One Ascension Professional Development Week” The activities include gatherings for meals and ice breakers, orientations for new employees, guidance through the information and procedures that we all need to know and have training on (such as payroll procedures, anti-harassment and anti-bias training, etc.) and most importantly, we started the week worshipping together. Thanks to the wonderful planning of our executive team, this week has become and critical component of the One Ascension Spirit where most of Ascensions employees can bond and learn to move in the same direction together.

Finally, we did Vacation Bible School very differently this year. It was on Wednesday evenings so that we could engage with parents as well. I think this was incredibly helpful as we seek to re-build our Children, Youth and Family culture. I very much appreciate Pastor Chamie and Jenelle Smith’s leadership and the opportunity to participate in the teaching of these evenings.

In his service,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pastor Tim". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Pastor Chamie's July 2025 Council Report

Children, Youth, & Family

Children

Jenelle Smith has done an excellent job leading **summer Sunday school** at the 10:30 AM worship. Each week there were 8 to 16 students present in the “one room Sunday school” which met at the picnic tables under the shade structure. We had 26 different children participate in summer Sunday school. We had many parents - and children - tell us how much they loved having Sunday school at the 10:30 worship.



Jenelle Smith with one of our summer Sunday school students. It was a great 8 weeks of summer Sunday school!

This summer we spent time assessing Sunday school during the past school years as well as reflecting on the summer response. We sent out a Children's Ministry survey to parents. On the survey we asked at what time would parents have their child attend Sunday school if given the option: 9:00 or 10:30.

What we have discovered is there is a strong desire and need to offer an option for children at both Sunday morning worship services starting in the fall.

Summer Sunday school concluded on August 10 to allow for a one month hiatus to rest and gear up for the new school year.

Youth

Saying Farewell & Hello

Jen Avalos resigned as youth director on July 31 as she and her husband will be welcoming their first baby come September. Therefore July was a transition month in saying goodbye to Jen and closing her time with us. We said a prayer of blessing over Jen during the Sunday morning worship services on July 20. The youth were invited to come say farewell on July 27 at the last high school Bible study in which Jen took part (we invited middle school as well). The church staff threw a baby shower for Jen at her last staff meeting on July 29.

Because we knew that Jen would be having a baby in September, we had already begun exploring who would fill in during her maternity leave. Spencer Gottmer who teaches middle school at Ascension had already agreed to help during that time. I was very grateful that he

said he would start earlier than expected - on August 1 - and serve as our Interim High School Youth Director. So the month of July included time getting things situated for Spencer to come on board.

In the midst of the transition, I thought it might be a good idea to spend some time with a youth ministry veteran. So I asked Pastor Larry if I could pick his brain and he graciously said yes. We sat on his front porch and I listened intently as he shared key lessons from his DECADES in youth ministry.

Summer Youth Programs

Jen led one special event in July for middle school: 5 middle schoolers attended Sky Zone. No middle schoolers attended Middle School Bible Study in July. High school Bible study averaged 4 students per Sunday in July. Jen, along with chaperone Lois Halvorson, and 5 high school youth went to summer camp at Luther Glen Bible Camp. The students said they had a great time and really enjoyed the program and activities, growing in faith, and making friends with people from other churches.

Children, Youth, & Families Together



Excited kids at Family Night VBS!

We ran **Wednesday Night Family VBS from July 9 to August 6**. Some families came every week. Some families could make only one week. We designed the nights to allow for vacationing families and people coming and going. We had 46 children age infant through 5th grade who participated. We had 15 middle school and high school youth who participated as station leaders. We had 37 adults who participated in the parent/grandparent class. This is a grand total of 98 participants in Family VBS. Jenelle was in charge of the children's stations. Jen helped organize the youth. Pastor Tim & I led the parent/grandparent portion. Each night began with dinner and time together with everyone. Then those under age 4 went to the nursery while the children ages 4 through 5th grade went to the gym to do crafts, games, and "imagination station" rotations based on the Bible theme for the day. Youth helped run each station. The adults stayed in Founders Hall. **On our last night, families worked together under the leadership of the Global Ministries Team and we packed 200 personal care kits for Lutheran World Relief!**

We had a **family hike and park play day on July 19**. Our youngest participant was a 5-week old strapped to their mama and the oldest participants were in their 70's. It was wonderful having several young families from the ECC and church play at the playground after the hike. I also loved seeing a new kindergarten family talk with some of the older members, including parents whose child went to Ascension School, but now is in her 20's. It was a beautiful time of sharing and people getting to know each other.



Interfacing with the Schools

With school being out for the summer and the ECC beginning their summer vacation at the end of July, the month was quieter for me in terms of interfacing with the school.



I harvested carrots with the kids from "Staycation."

- I spent a little bit of time getting to know Amanda, the new Office Administrator. I spent time with new vice principal Heather Harston as we started envisioning the new school year. I also spent time collaborating with Principal Rich Gregory in dreaming and planning for the future. In addition, I met with Jessica Placas-Hengst as she will be moving into a new role working with Nature Explore at both the ECC and school and doing extended care. We talked about gardens for One Ascension!

- I wandered over to the ECC to play outside with the kids.

- I led a little "mini chapel" story time and prayer with the Staycation kids from the school. We also explored the garden, counted monarch caterpillars, and harvested carrots.

Worship

Pastor Tim and I continued to enjoy collaborating and preparing sermons for our summer series. We team-preached on July 5 & 6. Then we each preached a weekend separately. Pastor Rick Ertel preached the other Sunday in July as Tim and I were at a wedding in Laguna Beach for a family from the church. I am thankful for our retired pastors who are there to deliver a good word, help support the active pastoral staff, and provide pastoral care to the congregation when we are away.

We have really enjoyed engaging with people through the summer series. One highlight has been Dianne Beck who has written weekly reflections on her blog that spin off the sermon. She also led a "walk and pray" on Thursday mornings to read the scripture from the weekend worship and to reflect on the sermon theme. I got to join a couple of the "walk and pray" mornings and it was a delight

Other

Teamwork... I enjoyed retreating at the Serra Center in Malibu with the executive team. Carrie Leonard did a great job in leading us through the beginning conversations of Patrick Lencioni's *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*. I chose to go to the retreat center a day early to work on youth and children's ministry pieces as well as women's ministries. I also wanted to go soak up some personal quiet time with Jesus.

Women's Ministry... I led July Word & Wine, teaching the women about St. Hilda. Cathi Peterson was a marvelous host for the evening. In addition to Word & Wine, I have stayed in



communication with the Women's Monday Morning Bible Study leadership team as sign ups for a new year began in July. I also created and sent out a Women's Ministry survey to help us better plan for the year ahead in meeting the needs and ideas of the women in our One Ascension community. Another July highlight was attending "100 Women Who Care" with ten women from Ascension as we gathered with other women in the Conejo Valley to learn about service organizations and how we can support them.

A group of Ascension women who attended "100 Women Who Care."

Church Family... Tim and I enjoyed some lovely dinners with church families.

On a personal note, it was a big change in the Delkeskamp Household in that our oldest son packed up a little U-Haul and Tim moved him to Arizona where he got his first apartment and begins his first job since graduating from California Lutheran University. I was feeling all the feels. I am thankful for the gift of marriage and motherhood and feel it also helps me better serve our families.

Grace & Peace,

Pastor Chamie

Annual Report – Pastor Steve Herder – July 2024 to June 2025

Thank you, Ascension, for allowing me to continue to serve as one of your associate pastors! At the beginning of this fiscal year, I was working $\frac{3}{4}$ time and then when we were fully staffed, I went back to my half-time work. I am blessed by the ministries that I get to work with and with each of our ministry leaders. Please read their reports in this Annual Report. Thank each of them, keep them in your prayers, and if you feel called, join us in one of these exciting and life-giving ministries! I love working with our amazing staff, each one of them. Thanks too to our Council, Foundation and School Board. God has blessed us to be a blessing, near and far!

The ministries that I help oversee, with our ministry leaders, are: Senior Adult Ministries with a focus on pastoral care; Prayer Ministry; Community Concerns Team; and Global Ministries Team. Important parts of my work include: leading worship occasionally; helping to organize our Sunday Adult Education; co-lead our social media ministry (doing 2+ posts every day of the year); and singing with our children at the ECC. (Our ECC staff surprised me by dedicating the ECC part of our school yearbook to me, as a thanks for my music ministry with them each Friday.)

Some of the ministry highlights for me of this past year include:

- + 24 Weeks of Prayer in '24 and 365 Days of Prayer in '25, with the daily prayer & reading;
- + a larger community event for Blessing of the Animals;
- + starting Wednesday Work Blessing (pastors encouraging you in your workplace);
- + training 12 people to do Hospital Visitation Ministry;
- + participating in the many ministries of our Senior Adult Ministry Team, Community Concerns Team, and our Global Ministries Team (see the details in our team reports);
- + with 11 other friends doing the Habitat for Humanity build in Zambia.

These ministries have been recognized with Certificates of Appreciation from: The City of Thousand Oaks (for our community work); Friends of Fieldworkers (organization of the year award); CLU's International Women's Day Award; ELCA "One of the Most Generous Congregations"; Global Refuge (Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service) as a "Top Generous Congregation"; Thanks from New Horizons for our solar light kits for Ukraine; Thanks from Lutheran World Relief for our quilts and kits; Thanks from Habitat for Humanity Zambia. I want to thank you, Ascension, for your gifts to Caring Ones and the Agape Fund. With those monies, we can assist many people who find it very difficult to find the help they need. Galatians 2:10!

Because so many in our congregation and community are in need, and with so many challenges in our country and world, we seek to love with the love of Jesus, let our light shine, and to give people love, hope, and grace with the gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ!



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



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 458 people who are above 65 years old (268 women; 190 men). There are 32 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 centers, 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. **Eucharistic Ministers** – Trained leaders bring Communion to those who are not able to come to a worship service. Pastor Ron Cox coordinates. **Hospital ministry training** began in June.



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 sometimes at Hillcrest Royale. Join us!



Lunch Bunch is back, thanks to Pastor Larry and Chris Wagner (and friends) on the second Wednesday noon of each month. \$5 for a delicious lunch. 75 friends gathered for LB on 3-12-25!



3M (Minor Maintenance Ministries) – connects volunteers with those who need help with their yard or home projects. Chris Daleiden is coordinating this ministry. We welcome volunteers.

GriefShare Group – We have one each week on Thursdays at 1:00pm, in the prayer chapel. This 13-week video-based and faith-based discussion continually repeats. Brenda Heinrich leads. www.griefshare.org. **All Saints Sunday** – the first weekend 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 eight drivers who provided 40 rides!



SAM Trips – Half-day trips to local sites around us; looking 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. **Valentines** – Our school and our youth make cards for our oldest! **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.



August 2025

Praying this prayer each day, from Psalm 145:13b-14

“The Lord is faithful in all his words,
and gracious in all his deeds.
The Lord upholds all who are falling,
and raises up all who are bowed down.”

365 Days of Prayer in 2025



Every day I will bless You, and praise Your name forever and ever.
(Psalm 145:2)
Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart.
(Colossians 4:2)

Ascension Lutheran Church, School and Foundation
Thousand Oaks, CA

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Our Prayer Chapel is open before and after worship services					1 Prayers for the election of our ELCA Presiding Bishop <i>Psalm 71:5-9, 17-18</i>	2 Prayers of well-being for our country and each community <i>Leviticus 19:32</i>
3 Prayers for our children and elders <i>Matthew 19:13-14</i>	4 Pray for all our Christian Life Hours at senior living places <i>Genesis 15:1-6</i>	5 Those who are hospitalized and hospital staff <i>Psalm 33:12-22</i>	6 Men's Bibles & Brews <i>Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16</i>	7 Prayers for Pastor John in Rwanda <i>Luke 12:32-40</i>	8 Prayers of thanks for our Foundation Trustees <i>Psalm 18:1</i>	9 Happy Work Anniversary, Jenni McCoy! <i>Hebrews 6:13-20</i>
10 Prayers for stability and adaptability <i>Isaiah 43:16-19</i>	11 Happy Birthday, Pastor Willis Moerer <i>Jeremiah 23:23-29</i>	12 Prayers for Habitat for Humanity, our August benevolence <i>Psalm 82</i>	13 For our Eucharistic Ministers who do home visits <i>Hebrews 11:29-12:2</i>	14 Prayers of peace in Ukraine, the Middle East, and Sudan <i>Luke 12:49-56</i>	15 Prayers for our 3M: Minor Maintenance Ministries at homes <i>Hebrews 10:23-25</i>	16 Happy Birthday, Pastor Steve! <i>Psalm 95:1-7</i>
17 Prayers for our worship leaders <i>Luke 4:1-13</i>	18 Prayers for all our food ministries with those in need <i>Isaiah 58:9b-14</i>	19 Tomorrow we sing Happy Birthday to Margaret Ricci <i>Psalm 103:1-8</i>	20 Our TK-8 School starts! <i>Hebrews 12:18-29</i>	21 Prayers of thanks for our Church Council <i>Luke 13:10-17</i>	22 For California Lutheran University <i>Psalm 122</i>	23 Prayers for our High School Bible studies each Sunday, 5:30 pm <i>Philippians 4:1-9</i>
24 Prayers for peace <i>Luke 6:12-16</i>	25 Prayers for our ECC and school staff <i>Proverbs 25:6-7</i>	26 Thanking God for Barbara Krum and her visits to our elders <i>Psalm 112</i>	27 Prayers of thanks for our School Board <i>Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16</i>	28 Love for our guests & visitors who come to our worship services <i>Luke 14:1, 7-14</i>	29 For our missionaries in Tanzania, David and Kellen <i>Psalm 8</i>	30 Prayers of thanks and stewardship of God's creation <i>Psalm 104:1, 10-18</i>
31 Happy Work Anniversary, Diane Kusnierek! <i>Luke 12:22-34</i>						15-30



Habitat Build an Unforgettable Experience

by Stacy Bosco,
Photos by Pastor Steve Herder, team

For 12 American travelers, a Habitat for Humanity build in Zambia was a chance to experience a very different part of the world while truly serving as God's hands.

The assignment: building a house for Mary Chongo, a 64-year-old disabled grandmother raising her three orphaned grandchildren. Mary, along with Charles, Bright and Jane, lived in a two-room hovel made of dirt – which was in fragile condition, with a leaky roof. As if that weren't enough, the owner of the land upon which the home sat had given the family notice to vacate within the next few months.



Mary Chongo, left, and two-room home. Mary's condition leaves her in constant leg pain.

The American volunteers set out to build the house for Mary in one week. It was an exceptional gift for Mary and her family, and, as it turned out, for the travelers as well.

Pastor Steve and Julie Herder; Steve and Susie Smuck; Scott, Sherith, Silje, Brock and Gunnar Squires; Carly Anne Johnson, Janelle Kim, and Tiffany Weiss of Thrivent Build International made up the team.

The distance between Los Angeles and Doha, Qatar, is a little over 8,300 miles. Doha – a dazzling city with a breathtaking skyline of futuristic skyscrapers -- was the first stop for the Ascension team, which flew over on two successive days.



There were side trips and visits before the build. The Herders were among those who went to Hwange Park, Zimbabwe, to see the wildlife there. That unforgettable experience included night temperatures in the 30s, recalls



Pastor Steve, and for heat, they were supplied with old fashioned rubber hot water bottles.

They visited the Ngamo School and the Ebenezer Child Care Trust (orphanage) in Livingstone, Zimbabwe. At the latter, Pastor Steve reunited with Pastor Alfred Chana, whom he had met 10 years ago, when Chana was the bishop of the Lutheran Church there and when Ascension's Gifts of Hope included a project called Bricks of Hope for Zambia. Chana is now chaplain at Ebenezer, which includes a home for children, a school, and a 40-acre farm.

"They're doing great work there," remarks Pastor Steve. He also notes that former Ascension members Larry and Jane Lee Winter, now living in Arizona, are major supporters of Ebenezer.

They saw Victoria Falls, known locally as Mosi-oa-Tunya, which translates to "the smoke that thunders" in the Tonga and Lozi languages. The massive falls could be a mere trickle in six months as they are dependent on the seasonal rainfall cycles. They are situated on the borderline of Zimbabwe and Zambia.



*Top: Wildlife at Hwange Park, our team traveling on small plane.
Above: Ngamo School Student.
Left: Pastor Alfred Chana
Below: Choir singing at the Ebenezer Child Care Trust.*



The team moved on to Zambia, and attended Sunday worship services in a Lutheran church in Lusaka. “The Zambian people are very proud of the fact that most of the country is Christian. A lot of things are faith-based,” comments Pastor Steve.

Then it was on to the building site near Kabwe.

There are roughly 220 houses in the tidy community of Habitat for Humanity-built brick homes, complete with its own water tank system and faucets to use.

The team started with training by their Habitat build supervisor, Paul. Photos show the team mixing concrete, hauling bricks and sheet metal, and laying brick after brick after brick.

“To each home there are 2,000 of those cement blocks,” notes Pastor Steve. “We moved most of them, not all of them. There are workers who are in charge there. One of the guys actually lives in one of those homes,” he adds. “He started five years ago and now he’s a really good construction worker. His name is John.”

John is among the 32 new friends Pastor Steve has added to his prayer list.

It appeared to be backbreaking work. Was everyone aching and sore?

“Oh, yes,” Pastor Steve replies. “By Thursday and Friday of that week, in the cafeteria members of our crew were just sleeping, either on the table or on the cement floor. They just laid down and slept through. It was so tiring.”



But there were many moments that kept everyone fired up and ready to go.

“When Mary first met us, the concrete floor had been poured for her new home, and some of the concrete blocks had been prepared, she was on her knees, she was so grateful,”

notes Pastor Steve. (See below.)

There were songs, sung by neighbors at the site, wafting through the air. They sang of Jesus being with us always.





Also, notes Pastor Steve, "One of the highlights was being able to play with children there. Every day we would break for lunch and go to the schools where the women of the community had prepared a lunch for us. Then we'd go outside and play with the children." They sang camp favorites like "Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes" and "Jesus Loves Me." And they even attempted the Pastor Steve favorite, "Hip Hip Hippopotamus."

By the final day, amazingly, there was a house. Two bedrooms and a living room, with a separate building for a latrine and shower in back.

Only some finishing work on interior plastering and windows was left for the Habitat workers. One of them told our Ascension group that they had worked harder than any international group of volunteers who'd come there. (This we have no trouble believing!)

There was a ceremony to celebrate. Some of our volunteer group joined with the local people to dance to the beat of drums. Mary gave a speech. And then, Sherith Squires symbolically handed over the key to her new home. It was enough to make one laugh and weep with joy.

There was a long trip home fraught with reminders of the turmoil of these times. (At the hotel where the team stayed, a USAID truck sat unused in the parking lot next to Habitat for Humanity, Save the Children, and World Health Organization vehicles, while stories swirled of friends who'd just lost their jobs. And for awhile, when the U.S. base in Qatar was bombed by Iran in retaliation for U.S. bombing, there was uncertainty about whether there would be disruptions in flights back to the States.)

But for that stretch of arduous days in that remote land, the team was one with the Spirit, doing God's work. And the memories of that time are the gifts the team will have for the rest of their lives.



*Top: Village children; Center: celebration, Sherith Squires presents key to Mary
Left: Team in front of Mary's brand new house*

Ascension's Gifts of Hope 2025

[Second draft of a proposal based on the GOH Team meeting today, July 29, with Stacy Smith, Carol Bartell, Carol Bjelland, Bev Selle, Jill and Andy Binsley, Dave Harkins, and Pastor Steve. Notes from Pastor Steve: We have good photos to go with each of the areas of gifts! We did a major change from our first draft: dropped the two Zambia projects (the group was open to the possibility of them next year), and instead we will include opportunities to give to Gaza and Ukraine. We feel good to be supporting now the three places in the world where there is such heartbreak in warfare. This will be the first time in the history of GOH, since 2002, that we have included international gifts beyond the continent of Africa. Save the dates Nov 9 for GOH local and Nov 16 for GOH global. Pastor Carmen Retzlaff from our ELCA will be with us on Nov. 16.]

Reconciliation Lutheran Church, Juba, South Sudan

Our Gifts of Hope is back to South Sudan for a third time in the last 20 years because of the strong work of our Lutheran Church there and because of the unbelievably impoverished living conditions, severe health needs, and the millions of refugees from war-ravaged Sudan. Our Gifts of Hope for South Sudan is partnering with ELCA Global Mission and Lutheran World Relief, trusted partners! Our ELCA missionaries, pastors and medical staff, are bravely being the hands of Christ to so many who are suffering.

Gaza and Ukraine

This year we have heard daily stories of sorrow from two more war-torn places, Gaza and Ukraine. Gaza has been described as the hungriest place on the planet. The people of Ukraine have been suffering terribly from the war with Russia. Christ's compassion calls us to reach out in love. For the first time in our Gifts of Hope history, since 2002, we are reaching out internationally beyond the African continent, through our ELCA and Lutheran World Relief partners.

Friends of Fieldworkers / Harbor House

Locally, we are supporting Harbor House in Thousand Oaks, which is our best way of helping those neighbors in our community who are unhoused. Several of our members support Harbor House with their time serving on the board, preparing a hot meal, or volunteering in their office. This year we added a gift for Mental Health Counseling. We thank God for Denise Cortes and her team!

Last year Ascension received the "Organizational Friend of the Year" award from Friends of Fieldworkers! We love supporting these families and advocating for their well-being. They do back-breaking work planting and harvesting our vegetables and fruits, and we want to

support their families too, with the love of our Savior Jesus, since this has been an especially difficult year for them. That's why we added the gift of "Emergency Relief." We keep Director Dr. Martita Martinez-Bravo and staff in our prayers.

ELCA World Hunger, God's Global Barnyard

Each year our church and school joyfully support our ELCA World Hunger through a ministry called "God's Global Barnyard" to help feed the hungry. Your gifts support our work in 86 countries with local church partners! The gift of a farm animal is very popular with our children/grandchildren, and the children themselves love giving these gifts to others. Ask them what gift they would like to give! For some of these gifts we have ornaments and cards that you can use and send. #UntilAllAreFed

Gifts of Hope Alternative Gift Options Include...

South Sudan, Reconciliation Lutheran Church in Juba

- \$30 Vaccinations for a child
- \$50 Vocational training, sewing and computer skills
- \$75 Feed a child: nutritional meals and clean water
- \$100 Support our missionaries, pastors and health staff
- \$200 Help with solar panels for mobile health clinics
- \$____ General Gift

Gaza

- \$____ Humanitarian assistance; 100% direct relief through our trusted partners

Ukraine

- \$____ Humanitarian assistance; 100% direct relief through our trusted partners

Harbor House of Thousand Oaks

- \$25 Utility bill help \$200 Car repair or rental assistance help
- \$50 Groceries \$____ General Gift
- \$75 Mental health counseling **[this amount and gift idea we need to check with Denise first]**

Friends of Fieldworkers in Ventura County

\$25	Baby Love	\$200	Scholarship to post-high school education
\$50	Laundry Love	\$____	General Gift
\$150	Emergency Relief		

ELCA World Hunger, God's Global Barnyard

\$10	Chicks	\$250	Fish Farm
\$20	Honeybees	\$715	Family Farm
\$30	Piglet	\$910	Climate Resilience*
\$50	Goat	\$____	General Gift

**Climate Resilience:* In many areas around the world, a single hurricane, flood, drought or other disaster can destroy the livelihoods of entire communities. A climate resilience kit can prepare our most vulnerable neighbors — especially farmers — to adapt to changing weather. With a fruit-tree farm, seeds and tools, farmers' field school, community garden, honeybees, three environmentally friendly cookstoves and an irrigation project, this gift includes the tools they need to grow heartier crops and to use resources more efficiently.

Thank you for so much for including me in your council retreat on Saturday, August 9th. It's an honor to serve with this amazing team of people; I am marveled by your vast array of experiences and perspectives...it's going to be an amazing year in ministry!

Maintenance

We are currently in the final days of school year preparations. When you meet for council we will have had our first school day of the year with students on the TK-8 campus and the third day of the school year with ECC kids. The maintenance team is power washing, moving downstairs lockers, and filling dozens of last-minute requests from teachers and team. Our new School Administrator Amanda Kokiousis, or Mrs. Q as we plan for the students to call her, is proving to be an excellent communicator. She has been funneling teacher and TK-8 staff requests for the maintenance team through our maintenance@alcto.org email. It's gone very smoothly and been easier to keep track of the requests.

I am very proud of Jeff for taking a vacation after this intense and busy season of school preparation. He's modeling good work/life balance for the rest of us, and being very intentional about celebrating a well completed season before moving into a new one. I believe this Biblical practice of taking things in each season and remembering to celebrate go back to the Creation story in Genesis, the Commandments in Exodus and Deuteronomy, and in God's instruction for his people in Leviticus: God rested after his work making creation, he commanded us to observe sabbath, and he gave very specific instructions on how to celebrate feasts and remember.

When Jeff returns from his vacation August 18-22 he and I will meet to discuss the projects we completed in summer, the ones lingering for fall, and start to calendar our big priorities through December.

Annual Report

We are "all systems go" for our initial schedule related to the annual report. Reports are due to Carolyn by Monday, August 18th, so by the time we meet she will have the majority of the reports in hand to begin formatting and putting together. We still anticipate an initial draft available for the council around September 8th or September 10th. After you, the Council, give your final comments at your September 17th meeting the report will be finalized, printed, and posted by Friday, September 19th in advance of the Annual Meeting on September 28th.

Professional Development Week

I may have some recency bias happening, but I think this has been the smoothest and most productive professional development week I have seen in my time here. Monday morning we started with worship, then moved to breakfast and a short training that is required in California. Carolyn Bahr did an amazing job coordinating breakfast for us from Corner Bakery. Jude Delkeskamp set us up to be well caffeinated with fresh coffee and tea. Amanda Kokiousis was ready with name tags and she took photos of everyone for a team directory. Rich Gregory led some songs for worship. Pastor Tim, Jenni McCoy, and Pastor Chamie all spoke eloquently. It was a beautiful morning where everyone was contributing and the details really came together.

You can likely read more about some of the more engaging sessions in Jenni and Rich's reports. For my part I taught the sexual harassment prevention training required by the state of California every two years and the Violence Prevention update required every year. While not anyone's favorite subjects to discuss, we got

through it and moved toward a high compliance percentage for the training. Those who were unable to attend and new hires will need to do the online version and provide their certificate of completion. We'll have some fun getting to know each other at trivia on Thursday. I'm looking forward to praying over the ECC on Friday afternoon and the TK-8 classrooms next Tuesday afternoon.

Human Resources

It feels like we have hired hundreds of people in the last couple of weeks...I am sure it is a dozen or less, it just feels like more. I am so grateful to Camryn Lomeli for the work she has done to get us on APS Payroll and adopt their hiring platform. Our applicants have a more seamless process, only applying online and having to fill in all of their information once. All of our positions are posted on Indeed as part of the cost, and Dominick Bosco imbedded the widget so that applicants can click over to Indeed straight from the church website. Onboarding paperwork is simplified and done electronically.

For all that we have automated, there are still dozens (maybe hundreds?) of details to change at this time of year: position changes, full time or part time status, pay increases, changing department codes, updating TB certifications. Camryn is handling it with ease, and the tiniest bit of help from me and from Mike.

Finance

Camryn, Mike, and I sat outside of the ECC and had an initial meeting to discuss the process and cadence of our monthly close. We went through a detailed spreadsheet of tasks related to close to discuss who does them and what the timing within the month looks like. We layered in what our payroll calendar requires of us, and how that detracts from focus needed for closing the month. We mapped out what focusing on close for the first five business days (excluding payroll process days) of each month would look like between now and December. We discovered that most months we would be able to provide reports by the second Wednesday to be included in the council packet, except for October, which would require an additional day. Some additional hurdles we need to overcome to meet this cadence are closing the fiscal year and completing the audit. We also needed to upload the 2025-2026 budgets into our software by month, which we have now completed. We had a short-term goal of closing May and June so that the council and School Board will have their preliminary reports for the year at their respective August meetings, which has been completed. You may see us utilize some blocks of time called "work blocks" when we will focus on particular tasks and not be available for inquiries. This is all in service of our goal to provide accurate reporting on a consistent time frame.

Thank you,

Kaylee Searway

Director of Operations



ASCENSION LUTHERAN CHURCH
FOUNDATION REPORT TO THE COUNCIL
August 20, 2025

At its August meeting the Foundation approved two grants for One Ascension programs totaling \$4,167.75:

- \$2,500 to Louise Evenson to cover the shipping cost for this year's LWR kits and quilts. In honor of LWR 80th anniversary, the Global Ministry Team has committed to making a record number of hygiene, school and baby kits this year. The quilting ministry is on track to increase the number of quilts made as well.
- \$1,667.75 to Diane Starzak for replacement of the Automatic External Defibrillator (AED) in the Bethlehem Room.

The Foundation is putting significant emphasis this year on legacy and estate planning. Grant Pederson is scheduled to conduct an Educational Class between services on September 14, 2025.

The Foundation's total assets currently are about \$1,900,000. The investment portfolio has performed well during the first seven months of 2025, but we have experienced significant fluctuations due to the uncertainties around the economy, inflation, and the effects of announced and proposed governmental actions. In the past month the Investments Committee has reviewed the Foundation holdings and sold one equity mutual fund and purchased another equity fund with the proceeds. The Investment Committee believes the portfolio is well positioned and diversified at this time. We will continue to monitor the investments closely.

Alan Baker

Foundation Representative to the Council

Global Ministry Team Report for August Ascension Church Council Meeting

August 20, 2025

The GMT has been on a summer meeting hiatus in July & August, but our support to those in need continues! Here is a snapshot of what has been done, and what is soon to come:

1) GMT Fall 2025 Meeting Schedule:

a) *August - no GMT meeting*

b) *September 10th - GMT Meeting September 10, 2025 4-5:30pm, Bethlehem Room*

* We plan to welcome Ali and Sarah from Kafika House who will share an update on the work being done, to thank us for our 2024 Gifts of Hope support and the impact it has allowed them to create.

* We proposed a swap to the Monthly Benevolence to align with a visit from Rev. Eric Shafer October 5th and Pastor Chamie preaching on Creation Care Aug 30th-31st (Creation Care in September and Global Refuge in October). This will also allow us to prepare for any requested support for Blessing of the Animals the first weekend of October.

* We are looking forward to an update from the Synod-wide assembly and the Churchwide assembly. This will include hearing about the Synod focal topic of "What it means to be Lutheran Today"

c) *October 1st - Global Refuge*

* Rev. Eric Shafer will be at Ascension on October 5th, including leading an Adult Education Session

* August 13th Pastor Steve and Bev Selle attended a meeting at the synod office to learn from Andrew Steele about the impact of American policy changes and USAID to those seeking refuge in America. We also heard about Global Refuge's hope to expand services into Southern California (San Diego County) which will help those with legal refugee status to begin/advance a thriving life in their new location. The Southwest California Synod recently voted to become a Global Refuge Synod. An overview of the discussion will be provided.

* In addition to church monetary support to Conejo Interfaith Refuge Team approved from the GMT budget in June, individual members have supported CIRT over the summer with gifts of needed furniture. We will discuss potential needs of CIRT.

d) *November 5th*

- * Gifts of Hope
- * CLU report back on the ELCA Hunger Gathering
- * Pastor Steve - Habitat for Humanity (Ascension Team Trip to Africa in July 2025, other Habitat)
- * Update about Dave Nonnemacher end of year trip to Ukraine

e) *December 3rd - the Many Gifts of Christmas*

* in addition to remembering and celebrating the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ, we will participate in "Hope for the Holidays". Ascension is a Hub for receiving, bundling, and sending Christmas cards for those in detention centers in collaboration with Global Refuge (formerly Lutheran Immigration Services)

- * Gifts of Hope

2) The **LWR Kits** Team purchased supplies for Kits before prices increased in August. 200 Personal Care Kits were assembled for LWR at VBS on August 6th. More kit (Personal Care, Baby, School) assembly events will be scheduled in the Fall.

3) **Fair Trade Lane** took a very brief hiatus in the summer, but it is open again.

* 4 Fair Trade dates in August including following the Lunch Bunch gathering Wednesday Aug 13th, Church services weekend of Aug. 16-17, and Thursday Aug. 21st. For you planners out there, here's the list of additional dates: September: 9/10, 9/18, 9/20 & 9/21; October: 10/8, 10/9, 10/11 & 10/12; November: 11/12, 11/20, 11/22 & 11/23; and December: 12/6, 12/7, 12/10 & 12/11.

* Fair Traders spent time with Ascension's Sr. Luther Leaguers last month. They played the Fair Trade game, enjoyed pizza & some Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream (made with Fair Trade chocolate and sugar). This was a great way to form deeper connections to our Ascension Youth, an opportunity to learn about their devotions focused on the idea of change and about "highs" "lows" & God Spotting, and share the Fair Trade sign-off message "Let's Be the Change We Wish to See".

- * In August, Carol Bjelland will be a panelist (via Zoom) for a USA meeting of Fair Trade.

4) Pastor Steve and 7 additional members of the GMT advanced the **Gifts of Hope 2025 planning**. Our focus was to address those in unbelievably impoverished living conditions, the lack of nutritious meals and clean water, those with severe health needs and reduced availability for lifesaving vaccines, the millions of refugees, the lack of vocational training, support creation care through climate resilience equipment to help our most vulnerable neighbors - especially farmers - adapt to changing weather, and to bring the word of hope and life through Jesus Christ to so many who are suffering. For more details on each of the groups we are lifting up, we attach the draft of our 2025 GoH Campaign.

- * Reconciliation Lutheran Church, Juba South Sudan (partnering with ELCA Global Mission and Lutheran World Relief)

- * Gaza and Ukraine Humanitarian Aid (for the first time in our Gifts of Hope history, since 2002, we are reaching out internationally beyond the African continent, through our ELCA and Lutheran World Relief partners).

- * Friends of Fieldworkers (in addition to our historical gifts, this year we added the gift "Emergency Relief" to support new and unique challenges these neighbors have experienced this year)

- * Harbor House, Thousand Oaks (we believe this is our most effective way to help neighbors in our community who are unhoused)

- * ELCA World Hunger, God's Global Barnyard

I have mentioned the need to be discriminating about glomming onto new trends/offers/tech in communications. Here is a perfect example. Lately, I have received quite a few messages from Instagram and Facebook exhorting Ascension to become **META Verified**. It would provide more security plus access to support, among other things, for the low, low price of \$15 a month. (Why did this feel like a shakedown? We got support for free a few years ago. But I digress.)

Well, two can play at this AI game, META. I asked ChatGPT about it! Ha ha!

Q: Is META verification worth it for a church Facebook and/or Instagram page with less than 5,000 followers?

ChatGPT said:

“Meta Verified for Facebook or Instagram can be tempting because it promises the shiny blue check and some extra perks, but for a church page with fewer than 5,000 followers, the benefits are often **more limited than Meta’s marketing makes them sound**.

Here’s the breakdown for your situation:

What Meta Verification Actually Gives You

- **Verified badge** — Shows legitimacy, which *can* build trust, but churches already tend to have built-in community trust if their name, location, and content are clear.
- **Proactive impersonation protection** — Meta will be quicker to remove fake accounts impersonating you. This is most valuable if your church is well-known or a target for scams.
- **Priority support** — You get access to live chat with Meta support. This can be handy if you’ve ever struggled to recover an account or fix ad issues.
- **Increased reach (claimed)** — Meta says verified accounts may get more visibility, but real-world results vary. If you’re not already consistently posting engaging content, the bump is minimal.
- **Exclusive features** — Occasionally, early access to new tools, but not usually game-changing.

Cost vs. Value for a Small Church

- **Cost:** Around \$12–\$15 per month *per platform* (and each page/account is separate).
→ That’s ~\$288–\$360/year if you verified *both* your Facebook and Instagram.
- **Value for small following:**
 - If your main goal is **local outreach**, strong community engagement and targeted ads will give you a better return than verification.
 - The “trust” benefit mostly matters if you’re competing with many similar names or facing fake accounts.
 - The reach bump is *usually* small compared to what consistent, high-quality posting + local ads can do.....(edited)

Bottom line:

For most small churches under 5,000 followers, Meta Verified is *nice-to-have*, not essential. You’ll likely see better results by putting that \$15/month into boosted posts or community-targeted ads. But if you’ve faced impersonation or have a high-visibility name, the badge could be worth it for peace of mind.”

So there you have it. But as you may well have experienced yourselves, ChatGPT is also not to be trusted. It has been known to make up citations and to hallucinate. It’s also easily swayed by suggestions you can place within your question. It’s like having to do business with someone you know would lie or cheat you. I’m praying for teachers and others who have to contend with this all the time.

(more)

COMM 2.

I guess it shouldn't be surprising that one can no longer pull up data that used to be fairly easily available for year-by-year comparisons on Facebook. It's also harder to pull more recent data. Here is what I took down for this past month's top performing material:

July 13-August 13 top Facebook

1. Thank You educator Julie Herder 1,730 views, 753 reach; 2. "But ask the animals" Zimbabwe Habitat build 1,572 views, 631 reach; 3. New ELCA Presiding Bishop 1,546 views, 757 reach; 4. Did you know that our Ascension Pastors take turns preaching at University Village? 1,268 views, 646 reach; 5. Remembering Jean Kramer on her 107th Birthday 1,214 Views, 621 reach

6. Amazing Talent Tueful and Trent 521 reach; 7. Pastor Tim Affirms Church Council 517 reach; 8. 100 Women who care 507 reach; 9. Happy Birthday Willis Moerer 492 reach; 10. Five high school youth attend camp 488 reach.

And Instagram. The first two Reels have been boosted for a fee, and they're still running. They are the Summer Sunday School/Fair Trade Reel 1 with 1,780 views, and the Youth Council Convenes with 1,457. Food Pantry Donations was also boosted. The other items, reels and posts were not boosted.

Thank you for your time and commitment,

Stacy

Stacy Smith Bosco

