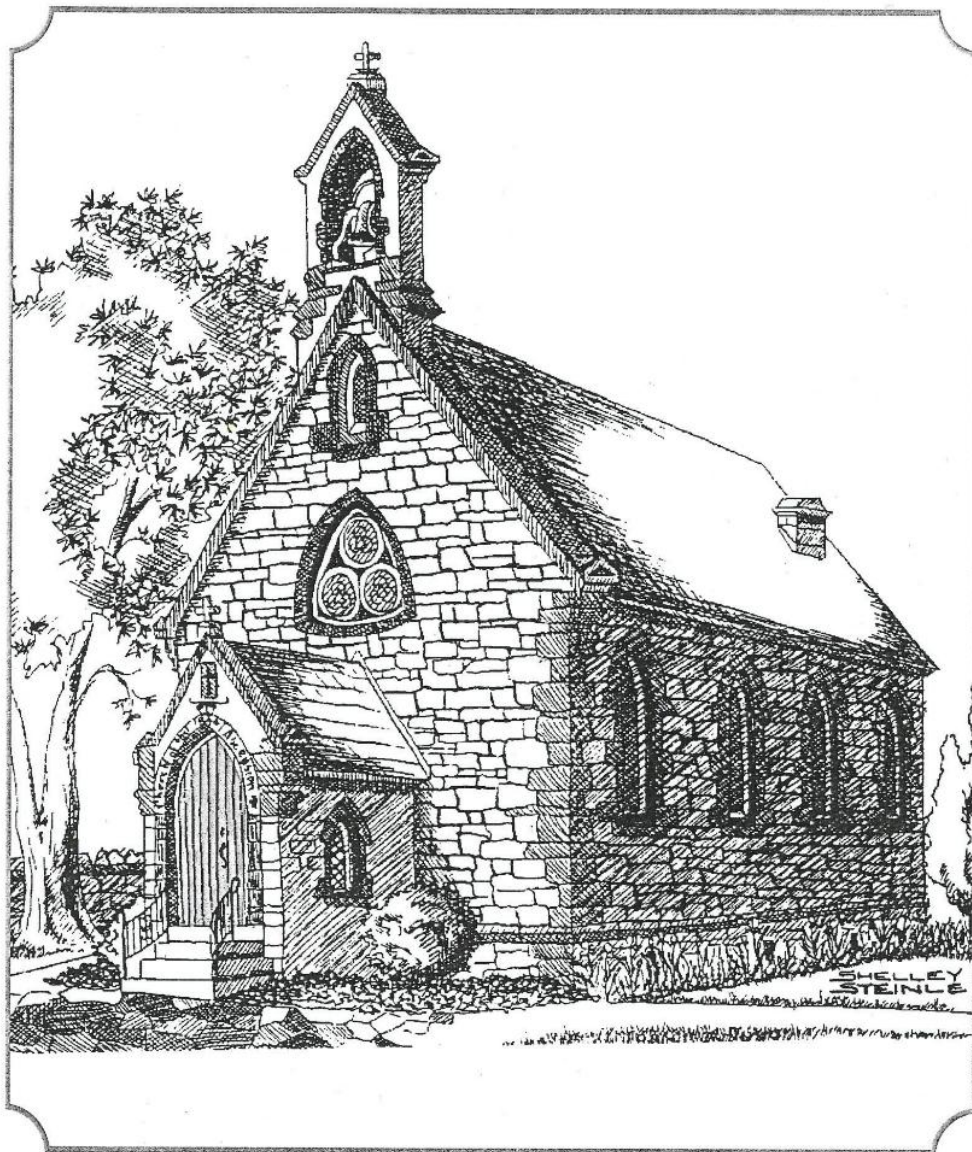


The 181st ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
February 23, 2025



Church of the Ascension – *Founded 1844 A.D*

AGENDA – The 181st ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
The SEVENTH SUNDAY after THE EPIPHANY
February 23, 2025

1. Call to Order/Opening Prayers – The Rev. Pierre-Henry Buisson, Rector
2. Appointment of a Recording Secretary
3. Rector's Address
4. Statement of Voting Eligibility as Specified in Parish By-laws
5. Presentation of Motion to change By-laws concerning the Vestry – Sr. Warden
6. Introduction of 2025 Vestry Nominees (in alphabetical order)

David Anderson	Class of 2027	Melissa Leahy	Class of 2028
Mark Howe	Class of 2028	Deborah Rio	Class of 2028
7. Election (by acclamation) of 4 new Vestry members.
8. Recognition of outgoing Vestry members

Luke Gore	Deb Howard
Jennie Grabill	
9. Presentation of the 2025 Budget, by Debbie Bargar Chair of the Finance Committee
10. Senior Warden Report – Kim Tompkins
11. Remembrance of parishioners departed in 2024

Donna Fine	Joy Badger
Nancy Howard	Donna Hansen
Ron Cox	
12. Administration of Oath of Office to new Vestry members -- Rector
13. The Lord's Prayer and Adjournment

Guild and Committee Reports are printed in this bulletin.

The Vestry will meet in the Guild Room for election of the Wardens.

VESTRY INFORMATION

Officers

Senior Warden: Kim Tompkins
Junior Warden: Gary Lang
Treasurer: Nancy Starnier
Registrar: Jackie Weschler

Class of 2025

Luke Gore Deb Howard
Jennie Grabill

Class of 2026

Beverly Baker
Liz Lowe
Roberta Wilhelm

Class of 2027

Diana Baker
Kim Tompkins

Rector's Address

Dear People of Ascension:

As I'm writing this report, thinking about what happened in 2024 at Ascension, I realize that my heart is burning in me because of all that was accomplished, what we experienced together, and because of you. It's an honor and a pleasure to serve such a congregation, even when we face difficulties. When I look back and think about what we did together, I'm amazed. The committees, commissions, and various ministries did a great job.

When I was discerning the possibility of serving as your rector, I was told that there was strong lay leadership at Ascension. I wondered what that meant. Now I know: you are involved in the life and mission of Ascension, you are doers, thinkers, "prayers," who make things happen in many ways, generously sharing your time, talent and treasure to make Ascension a welcoming and loving worshipping community. You are an illustration of what our Catechism says about the church called to carry out its mission through the ministry of all its members, specifying that the ministry of the lay persons *is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church* (BCP p 855). Keep doing the good work!

With the Vestry, we worked hard on our finances with our consultant, James Jordan, who wrote the book *Financial Management for Episcopal Parishes*. Eventually, in May 2024, after a lot of work by the Treasurer, Assisting Treasurer, Chair of the Finance Committee, and the Church Office, we were able to switch from Quickbooks to Realm Finance and consolidated our various bank accounts into one, the money being segregated by funds in Realm. That helped the Vestry to have a better understanding of our financial situation.

We have also been using Realm for our database in the office. However, Realm has not been totally implemented for the congregation. Through Realm, 208 invitations to connect were sent, only 54 persons signed-in and are using Realm. Helping the congregation to use Realm will be the next priority during 2025.

Our congregation slightly changed in 2024: we had visitors, newcomers; and we lost several people who either moved away, died, or decided to explore other worshipping opportunities.

In 2024 our Senior Warden, Donna Hansen, died after a long illness. I'm so grateful for the way she welcomed me and my family, supported me, helped me, and for the many ways she was serving Ascension. We worked well together. I'm grateful that Kim Tompkins accepted the call to serve as our new Senior Warden.

I can't end this report without a shout out to our wonderful paid staff and volunteers!

Personally, 2024 will forever be marked by my assault on July 17, 2024. I continued to suffer from the consequences of the assault and concussion for the next six months. For a while, I was not able to function normally. Even though it could have been worse, it was frustrating to not perform at my best. I'm thankful for the support I received from Donna Hansen, the Vestry, the Staff and from the congregation.

After 19 months at Ascension, I feel so blessed to have answered the call to serve as your rector. There is not one day when I do not give thanks to the Lord for this calling. I'm proud of you, and I keep you all in my thoughts and prayers.

I invite you now to read the various articles included in this 2024 Annual Report. They are a snapshot of what has been going on at Ascension. You will see the passion, the energy, and the accomplishments of our various ministries. Each one of them did a great job by serving here or beyond our walls. Please be aware that these reports are just the visible tip of the iceberg. So much more happened, lives were changed, relationships were created, forgiveness was offered, the Lord was worshiped, and the Spirit was among us. So let us give thanks for what the Lord did among us and through us.

In Christ's Love,
Pierre-Henry+

Worship Statistics

	2022	2023	2024
Holy Eucharist			
Sunday	103	105	104
Weekday	5	8	10
Private	41	55	83
Daily Office			
Sunday	1	1	1
Weekday	0	2	2
Other Services			
Baptisms	1	4	3
Confirmation	6	5	3
Marriage	1	0	0
Burial	10	8	11
Other Offices	1	5	5
Attendance Holy Days			
Easter	138	208	187
Pentecost	95	95	112
Christmas Eve and Day	177	199	199
Sunday Average Attendance	81.3	103	104

Statement of Voting Eligibility as Specified in Parish By-laws

Every person not less than 16 years of age who is an Ordinary Member of the Church, and **who is a confirmed communicant** in good standing in the Episcopal Church and **enrolled as such in the records of the Church, shall be a Voting Member** thereof, with the right to vote in the election of Vestry members and upon all other matters having to do with the affairs of the Church. **A confirmed communicant in good standing means a confirmed or received member of the church over the age of 16 who has received Holy Communion in the Church at least three (3) times in the preceding year, and who for the preceding year has been faithful in corporate worship, unless for good cause prevented, and has been faithful in working, praying and giving for the spread of the Kingdom of God.**

Motion to Amend the By-Laws

Kim Tompkins, Senior Warden

Section 2. Number and Term of Office. The Vestry of the Church shall consist of the Rector and ~~twelve (12)~~ **nine (9)** lay members chosen from among Voting Members, each of whom shall have a vote. Of the ~~12~~ **nine (9)** lay members, ~~four (4)~~ **three (3)** shall be elected each year and shall serve 3-year terms. A lay member shall take office as Vestry member immediately upon election. No lay member shall be eligible for renomination and re-election to the Vestry for a period of two years after the member's term has expired, provided, however, that prior service on the Vestry in filling a vacancy shall not be considered a disqualification for re-election.

Section 7. Meetings. Regular meetings of the Vestry shall be held ~~on the second Tuesday of each year~~ **once a month** unless the Vestry votes to suspend or postpone such meeting. Special meetings may be held at any time or place on call by the Rector or by not less than one-third of the number of Vestry Members. Notice of the time and place of all regular and special meetings and of the purpose of all special meetings shall be given to each Vestry Member in person or by telephone, or by email, not less than twenty-four (24) hours preceding the meeting or by mail posted not less than three (3) days preceding the date of such meeting. No business shall be transacted at special meetings except that specified in the notice.

Section 8. Quorum and Presiding Officer. ~~Seven~~ **Five (5)** lay Vestry Members and the Rector, if present, or ~~nine~~ **seven (7)** lay Vestry Members if the Rector is not present, shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business at any meeting of the Vestry.

Introduction of 2025 Vestry Nominees



David Anderson

Occupation: Retired AP U.S History teacher, Social Studies Department Chair, Rochelle Township High School, Rochelle Illinois;, Head Coach two high school state championship teams in two different sports (track and basketball); university supervisor and evaluator of student teachers in Northern Illinois high schools for Northern Illinois University; pre-covid Visitor Services staff Gettysburg National Battlefield Visitor Center

Family: wife Ellen, daughter Lindsey Anderson, son-in-law Tyson Fogel, grandchildren Henry and Eila, son Christopher (deceased)

Years at Ascension: 9

Previous church experiences:

- Ascension: Fellowship Committee 2015-2020; Usher and Lector; Mistletoe Mart volunteer; help with special events
- St. Paul's Episcopal DeKalb, Illinois: Vestry, Junior Warden, Senior Warden, Chair of Rector Search Committee

Ways to use my time and talent: Serving on the Vestry, continuing to usher and help with special activities to further the programs at Ascension



Mark W. Howe

Occupation: Grants Manager, MD Department of Labor

Family: Emelia (spouse), Kim (daughter), Caesar (son), and Beatrice Howe (Daughter).

Number of Years at Ascension: three (3) years.

Activities at Ascension: Adult Ensemble and Worship Assistant

Bio: Mark W. Howe was born and raised in Monrovia, Liberia to an Episcopal Church family, and is deeply rooted in the Episcopal doctrine and tradition. He has served as a chorister, usher, men's president (Trinity Cathedral), and Board Member of the Diocese's relief and humanitarian arm, Episcopal Relief and Development.

Mark currently serves as Grants Manager at the Maryland Department of Labor, overseeing grants for the State's Registered and Youth Apprenticeship Programs. Mark has held key roles at organizations such as the Maryland Department of Emergency Management, Amazon, Ducor Health, the United Nations Mission in Liberia, the World Bank, and Liberia's Ministry of Education. He holds an MBA from the University of Maryland Global Campus, a Bachelor of Science Degree in Economics from the African Methodist University in Liberia, and is a certified Project Management Professional.

In what ways do you see yourself using your time and talents to further the ministry and programs of the church?

I hope to contribute to Ascension's growth by sharing ideas and making critical decisions that shape its future while upholding the church's values and beliefs.



Melissa Leahy

Occupation: Retired (School Psychology)

Family: Sons Benjamin Leahy, Nicholas Leahy

Number of Years at Ascension: 27

Activities at Ascension:

Altar Guild, Outreach Committee, St. Martha's Guild, St. James' Commission, Mistletoe Mart, Thursday Night Bible Study

In what ways do you see yourself using your time and talents to further the ministry and programs of the church?

- I am interested in assisting our parish in adapting to the ever-changing demands of a changing society.
- I have always had a passion for our outreach projects and would love to see our campus be used again for more community programs that not only serve our needs but those of the community as well.



Deborah Rio

Occupation: Retired from Carroll County Public Schools as Administrative Assistant to the Director of Curriculum and Instruction.

Family: Husband of 56 years – Thomas Rio, Daughters – Jessica Rio (Chicago), Sarah and Jeffrey Lange (Lutherville, MD), Grandchildren - Elise and Marco Lange

Number of Years at Ascension – Since 2022, previously 2013 - 2014

Activities at Ascension:

Member of Pins and Needles and worked at the Mistletoe Mart 2023 – 2024, Co-Coordinator of 'Ascension West' for residents of Carroll Lutheran Village who are members of Ascension.

Previous church experiences

- Secretary to the Chaplain of Carroll Lutheran Village, 2014 – 2020 and worshipping there until 2022
- Coordinator of Home-Based Religious Education and attended Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Glyndon, MD. 2001-2006.
- St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Point of Rocks, MD, 1985 - 1990, Organist
- Served as President of the Claggett Committee for one year.
- Grace Episcopal Church in Brunswick, MD from 1973 – 1985, Organist and Director of Children's Sunday School.

Community Activities: Chairperson of CLV Hospitality Committee for a 1-year term 2023 – 2024. Served two 2-year terms as President of the Residents Association at CLV, 2021-22 and 2019-2020. Chairperson of the Spiritual Life Committee for a 1-year term prior to being President. Volunteered in the Village Gift Shop prior to moving into the Village.

In what ways do you see yourself using your time and talents to further the ministry and programs of the church?

I believe that God has blessed me with many opportunities in the past that have required the use of my talents in each step and job opportunity that followed. Most recently I was able to attend the Vestry Vitality Day offered by the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland. By the time we left the all-day session, I was excited about the possibility of coordinating a plan to welcome new members who wish to join the congregation and also those people who find us for a Sunday service or are checking us out for the possibility of becoming members in the future. These are trying times as churches are losing parishioners, and the world seems to be moving further and further away from being God centered. It is vital that we present ourselves as a loving, welcoming faith community to everyone who walks through our doors. Outreach will become more valuable as we continue to exist. I welcome the challenge!

Financial Report from the Chair of the Finance Committee

It is imperative that we, as a church, successfully budget and execute financial planning to achieve our mission and operational success.

Early 2024, an evaluation of our existing financial system divulged its limitations and a change was needed. To meet our church's budget and financial needs, Realm was the online church management system chosen. The spring of 2024, we began the conversion of our financial data and made the transition from our old system to Realm. The conversion to Realm was relatively seamless. We experienced some discrepancies which were researched and corrective actions taken. Using Realm for our financial and budgeting needs has offered such benefits as increased efficiency, financial accuracy, and budgeting capabilities.

Our annual audit, performed by an independent auditor, for the year ending December 31, 2023 resulted in a qualified opinion. Our financial statements represented fairly the financial position of the Church. The audit disclosed that fixed asset and depreciation records were not being maintained. Corrective actions have been taken on these two findings.

Our church, like all of us, at times faces financial challenges. Our funds derive primarily from donations from our generous congregation. We have other funding sources which includes, but not limited to, fundraisers, space rentals and special gifts. We ended 2024 with a \$24, 170 deficient which is concerning. During our 2025 budget process, we proactively examined our financial planning and forecasting as well as how to maintain and achieve financial resilience. With our pledges down for 2025, our financial picture looks promising.

Financial Statement of Activities
January 1, 2024 – December 31, 2024

Income:		Expenses:	
General Giving	\$270,840.01	Human Resources	\$ 219,431.15
Special Gifts	\$12,539.00	Administrative/Office	\$ 18,790.16
Loose Plate	\$2,546.82	Christian Education	\$ 805.14
Special Services	\$6,160.00	Diocesan Convention	\$ 300.00
1844 Shoppe	\$12,833.24	Diocesan Shared Ministry Allocatio	\$ 29,793.63
Rental Income	\$15,675.00	Interest Expense	\$ 2,078.86
Facilities Use	\$8,905.00	Liability and Property Insurance	\$ 17,330.56
Coffee Hour Don	\$167.00	Maintenance (total \$124,880.32)	
Bank Interest Ear	<u>\$3,705.07</u>	* General Giving funds	\$ 27,400.10
TOTAL	\$333,371.14	* Middendorf funds	\$ 77,503.00
		* Capital Maintenance funds	\$ 19,977.22
		Miscellaneous Expenses	\$ 5,094.59
		Rental Property – Taxes	\$ 3,472.73
		Stewardship	\$ 533.90
		Utilities	\$ 45,994.42
		Worship	\$ 3,426.87
		TOTAL	\$ 357,541.12
		NET:	(\$24,169.98)

As of December 31, 2024

Restricted Accounts

Altar Guild	\$2,766.94
Children & Youth	\$10,087.29
Cookie Walk Fundraiser	\$4,292.00
Columbarium	\$50,560.43
Fellowship	\$1,143.02
Habitat/Dreambuilders	\$2,633.96
Memorials	\$21,588.44
Mistletoe Mart	\$55,735.71
Outreach	\$14,747.61
Pins and Needles	\$1,083.90
Rector's Discretionary	\$1,447.97
St. Martha's	\$4,980.04
St. James	\$4,741.44
Stone Church Preservation Fund	\$3,362.29
Special Projects	<u>\$9,900.00</u>
TOTAL	\$189,071.04

As of December 31, 2024
Middendorf Loan
 Loan Amount \$150,000.00
 Expenses to Dat \$121,673.00
 Balance Remain \$28,327.00

2024 Payment Recap:
 Principal \$8,987.00
 Interest \$2,078.86
 Balance Due on \$138,388.40

As of December 31, 2024
Middendorf Loan - \$150,000

Expenses:

C2 Crane & Tree Services - sidewalks	\$ 44,170.00
Rainbow Masonry – brick work	\$ 7,870.00
Arocon* – gutter replacement	\$ 26,373.00
Parker Fuel Co. – boiler/rectory	\$ 16,900.00
Arocon – roof repairs – 23 N (Worship Wing)	\$ 3,000.00
Allied Roofing – roof repairs – 23 N Admin Wing	\$ 10,050.00
Arocon – new roof – 30 N	\$ 13,310.00

NOTE: contract \$12,970 – additional work required

TOTAL EXPENSES TO DATE \$121,673.00
Balance Remaining on Loan \$ 28,327.00
** Full Name: Arocon Roofing & Construction*

Church of the Ascension Budget: 2025

Approved by the Vestry 02/28/2025

Income

General Giving	\$ 295,950	Rental	\$ 15,900
Pledged - General Giving	\$ 269,500	Miscellaneous	\$ 44,945
Special Offerings	\$ 6,200	Bank Interest Earned	\$ 3,500
Special Gifts	\$ 17,750	Altar Guild	\$ 2,200
Plate Donations	\$ 2,500	Capital Maintenance	\$ 9,300
		Children & Youth	\$ 9,635
Fundraisers	\$ 71,350	Facilities Use	\$ 13,800
1844 Shoppe	\$ 11,500	Fellowship/Coffee Hour	\$ 675
Pins & Needles	\$ 1,500	Outreach	\$ 5,285
Church Fundraising Events	\$ 20,000	Stone Church Preservation	\$ 550
Children & Youth	\$ 3,000	TOTAL - ALL INCOME	\$ 428,145.00
Cookie Walk	\$ 1,850	2024 MINISTRY BALANCES CARRIED FORWARD	\$ 45,290.00
Mistletoe Mart	\$ 33,500	Total available for 2025	\$ 473,435.00

Expenses

Human Resources		Maintenance	
Salaries & Benefits	\$ 217,850.00	Floor Cleaning/Buffering	\$ 1,000.00
Rector (Salary)	\$ 85,000.00	Elevator Service - Contract	\$ 2,000.00
Rector (Benefits)	\$ 63,750.00	Pest Control - Contract	\$ 600.00
Adult Ensemble Director (Salary)	\$ 11,150.00	Yard Care/Snow Removal - Contract	\$ 11,000.00
Handbell Choir Director/Communication	\$ 9,000.00	Trash Removal - Contract	\$ 2,500.00
Parish Administrator (Salary)	\$ 23,000.00	Mechanical/HVAC - Contract	\$ 17,200.00
Dir. - Praise and Youth Ensemble - (Salary)	\$ 12,500.00	Janitorial - Contract	\$ 16,000.00
Nursery Attendant (Salary)	\$ 3,850.00	Janitorial Supplies	\$ 2,000.00
Nursery Assistant (Salary)	\$ 2,000.00	Inspections - Fire Safety	\$ 3,600.00
Digital Ministry Associates (Salary)	\$ 5,600.00	Maintenance Supplies	\$ 500.00
Summer Program Coord. (Salary)	\$ 2,000.00	Total	\$ 56,400.00
Miscellaneous	\$ 850.00	Repairs (all buildings)	\$ 20,500.00
Background Checks	\$ 100.00	TOTAL - Maintenance and Repairs	\$ 76,900.00
Rector Professional Expenses	\$ 750.00	Administrative/Office Expenses	
Payroll Expenses	\$ 7,300.00	Professional Fee - Auditor	\$ 4,300.00
Social Security/FICA	\$ 4,900.00	Bookkeeping Services	\$ 4,800.00
Automated Payroll Services Fee	\$ 2,400.00	Paper Stock	\$ 1,000.00
Total	\$ 226,000.00	Subscriptions	\$ 3,100.00
Utilities		Misc. Office Supplies	\$ 395.00
Gas and Electric		Postage	\$ 625.00
Rectory	\$ 1,600.00	Bank fees/charges	\$ 250.00
23 N Court	\$ 28,350.00	VANCO Merchant Service Fees	\$ 325.00
Stone Church	\$ 5,000.00	Advertising	\$ 1,100.00
Total	\$ 34,950.00	TOTAL	\$ 15,895.00
Oil - Rectory	\$ 5,560.00	Worship	
Telephone		Copyrights	\$ 730.00
TING Internet	\$ 850.00	Honoraria/Guest Musicians	\$ 500.00
Verizon	\$ 1,400.00	Instrument Maintenance	\$ 750.00
Total	\$ 2,250.00	Miscellaneous Worship Supplies	\$ 600.00
Water & Sewer		Children's Choir Supplies	\$ 100.00
Sprinkler System	\$ 1,000.00	TOTAL	\$ 2,680.00
23 N Court	\$ 2,300.00	Meetings	
Total	\$ 3,300.00	Diocesan Convention	\$ 300.00
TOTAL -Utilities	\$ 46,060.00	Clergy Conference	\$ 350.00
Diocese of Maryland - Allocation	\$ 34,027.00	TOTAL	\$ 650.00
Insurance		Professional Supply	\$ 1,800.00
Liability and Property	\$ 17,350.00	Stewardship	\$ 535.00
Equipment		Rental Property Taxes	\$ 3,475.00
Office Equipment Repair	\$ 250.00	Ministries	
Copier Annual Lease	\$ 1,300.00	Altar Guild	\$ 6,130.00
Copier Usage Fee	\$ 1,200.00	Fellowship	\$ 1,800.00
Computer Upgrades	\$ 500.00	Outreach	\$ 9,320.00
TOTAL	\$ 3,250.00	Rector's Discretionary	\$ 4,500.00
Christian Education		St. James	\$ 3,500.00
Adult Education	\$ 150.00	St. Martha's Guild	\$ 3,500.00
Internal Youth Programs	\$ 1,300.00	TOTAL	\$ 28,750.00
Community Youth Programs	\$ 600.00	Middendorf Loan Repayment	\$ 17,380.00
Youth Outside Activities	\$ 1,000.00	TOTAL - ALL EXPENSES	\$ 481,102.00
Youth Summer Activities	\$ 3,000.00	NET	\$ (7,667.00)
Youth Misc. Supplies/Expenses	\$ 300.00		
TOTAL	\$ 6,350.00		

A FORM for the ADMISSION of NEW VESTRY MEMBERS
together with
THE OATH of OFFICE in THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*The election being concluded and duly certified to the Rector/President by the Tellers,
the new Vestry members shall stand with the Rector before the Congregation. The Rector
begins the Admission, saying*

Rector: Dear friends in Christ, are you persuaded that, according to the vow and promise made at your Baptism, you are pledged to the service of Jesus Christ until your life's end?

New Vestry members: I am so persuaded.

Rector: Do you willingly accept your election to serve as a Vestry member in this Parish?

New Vestry members: I do.

Rector: Do you here, in the Presence of God, declare that you will execute faithfully the office of Vestry member to the best of your ability and knowledge; and, so far as you are able, will pray daily, give and work diligently to establish His Holy Church more firmly in this community; and, by your example, will lead others to worship in His House and to hear His Holy Gospel?

New Vestry members: I will, by God's help.

Rector: Will you now raise your right hand and please recite the Oath of Office for Vestry members as set forth in the Constitution and Canons of this Diocese?

*The new Vestry members raise their right hands and together recite the
Oath of Office.*

New Vestry members:

I, [N a m e], do declare my belief in the Christian Religion and do further declare that I accede to the doctrine, discipline and worship of The Episcopal Church in the United States of America. I pledge my adherence to the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Maryland and to the By-Laws of this Parish. And in obedience to the same, I do solemnly swear that I shall faithfully execute the office of Vestry member of Ascension Parish, Westminster, Carroll County, Maryland, without prejudice, favor or affection, according to the best of my skill and knowledge. So help me, God.

Rector: Will all of you who witness this Admission and Oath do all in your power to support these persons in their service to this Congregation?

The Congregation responds enthusiastically.

Congregation: WE WILL!

Rector: May Almighty God, who has given you the will to do these things, also grant to you the strength and power to perform them, that He may accomplish His good work begun in you.

ALL: AMEN!

The Rector, taking each new Vestry member by the hand, says individually to each these words of Admission.

Rector: [N a m e], by the authority vested in me as Interim Rector of this Parish and President of this Congregation, I receive, accept and admit you to be a lawfully elected and duly sworn Vestry member of Ascension Parish for the term of your election; in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

ALL: AMEN!

The Rector concludes the Admission:

Rector: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore.

ALL: AMEN!

The Congregation may applaud and greet the new Vestry members.

Adjournment

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Adult Ensemble

The Adult Ensemble leads the music during the 10:15 am worship service on the 2nd and 4th Sunday of the month and special services throughout the year. In conjunction with the Handbell Choir, both contemporary and traditional music is sung that closely aligns with the scripture readings.

Membership has remained fairly stable over the past year. We welcome all voices.

The pipe organ in the Stone Church is played one Sunday a month, Christmas and Easter, as well as weddings and funerals. Since the 2022 flood and plaster reconstruction, it requires semi-annual tunings.

We look forward to continuing to coordinate music with the Handbell Choir and growing our ensemble.

Submitted by Mary Butler

Altar Guild

The Altar Guild services the needs of the clergy in regard to worship services, the altar, the sanctuary and the sacraments. Duties include setting up for communion and special services, baptisms, confirmations, weddings and funerals. We care for the gold, silver and stainless-steel communion vessels, brassware, candles, linens and altar hangings.

The Altar Guild currently has 22 members spread across 5 teams. Each team rotates on duty every 5 months for 1 month at a time. (As a result, each team only has Christmas once every 5

years!) While on duty, teams meet on Saturday morning to clean and set up for Sunday services. On Sundays, 1 or 2 team members are present at each church service to clean up afterwards. During this past year we worked closely with Fr. Pierre-Henry to review and update our Altar Guild reference manual.

In addition, the Altar Guild members meet twice a year to discuss altar needs, upcoming worship services and procedures. Donations from the congregation towards communion wine and wafers, altar flowers, Easter flowers and Christmas poinsettias help keep the Altar Guild self-sufficient.

Ideally, we have 5 members per team. Therefore, we are short at least 3 Altar Guild members for 2025 and are looking for new volunteers – both men & women!

We are blessed with the spiritual reverence, peace and friendship we feel while caring for God's sacred spaces. If you wish to learn more about this very special ministry, please contact Kim Tompkins. Submitted by Altar Guild Directress: Kim Tompkins

Book Club

In 2024, the Book Club at Ascension met on the last Wednesday of the month, at noon in the Guild Room. The books that are read are recommended by the members, each book discussion being led by that person. We meet January through May, then September and October, to discuss the book selection for that month; June through August we informally meet and share our summer reading selections. Due to the holidays that fall at the end of November and December, we take a break. Many of the members purchase their lunch from the St. Vincent de Paul Society's Free Lunch program that is held in our Fellowship Hall each week.

Books read in 2024 included "Queen Victoria's Mysterious Daughter", "The Keys to the Kingdom", "The Five People You Meet in Heaven", "The Women" and "A Calamity of Souls". 2025 has started off with a change in meeting time, from noon to 12:30, to accommodate the members of Pins & Needles who also come to Book Club and to make it easier to get lunch from the lunch program. We currently have 10 active members. Everyone is welcome to participate. For more information, contact Cheryl Vecera 443.794.3691 or cherylvecera@gmail.com.

Breakfast Bunch

The Breakfast Bunch enjoys breakfast at Baugher's Restaurant on Sundays after the 8:00 am service. This photo was taken November 17, 2024.



Buildings and Grounds

The Buildings and Grounds Committee is responsible for the maintenance and repair of all church property, buildings, contents of the buildings, equipment, grounds, HVAC, and electrical and plumbing systems. Buildings and Grounds Committee members, together with the Vestry, are involved in long-range planning for improvement of facilities and property.

We sincerely thank our Rector, Father Pierre-Henry, and Vestry for their leadership. Difficult, financially impacting, and time-sensitive decisions must be made on an ongoing basis. We could not move forward without their hard work and patience with the process.

We are excited to be working with Kim Tompkins as our new Senior Warden! We want to thank our Junior Warden, Gary Lang. His expertise in diagnosing, repairing, doing electrical and plumbing work, resourcing supplies and help from friends, and addressing day-to-day maintenance emergencies displays his devotion to our church.



We appreciate Gary's leadership in helping Bryan Barry complete his "Little Library" Eagle Scout project.

Thank you to Jackie and Kevin Weschler for doing the heavy lifting to keep our floors clean and protected. Thank you to Jackie for taking the lead in securing and managing our cleaning service.

Thank you to Debbie Bargar, Nancy Starnier, Bev Baker, and Ann Fariss for tracking our income and expenditures, writing checks, and communicating the status of our accounts to us. As well, Ann's expertise in directing contractor and inspection phone calls, forwarding emails, and tracking down our committee members can only be credited to God's Extrasensory Perception plan for her that day!

We have not forgotten the role that our previous Senior Warden, Donna Hansen, played. She had a loving heart, a calm sense of reality, and the love of God and one another foremost in that leadership role. We are grateful for her positive impact on Buildings and Grounds Committee decisions.

Throughout the year, the Buildings and Grounds Committee complies with mandated inspections; secures competitive quotes for projects; reviews contracts; and oversees the work carried out by those inspectors and contractors.

Summary of Significant Projects by Building in 2024:

The key to the funding source of each project is as follows:

- DML: Diocese of Maryland Middendorf Loan
- AMF: Ascension Memorials Fund
- BGMF: Buildings & Grounds Maintenance Fund

Stone Church

New Sacristy Window with Protective Outside Covering: **AMF**



On November 21, the restored stained glass window was installed in the sacristy of the Stone Church. The work was completed on November 25.



6" Gutters and Downspouts Installed: **DML**

Stone Walkway Repaired: **DML**



30 North Court Street Rental Property

New Roof: **DML**

6" Gutters and Downspouts Installed: **DML**



Holy Cross House

Slate Roof on Worship Wing Repaired: **DML**
Roofing on Administrative Wing Replaced: **DML**
6" Gutters and Downspouts Installed: **DML**
Brick Repointing: **DML**



Rectory

New Water Heater: **BGMF**
New Boiler: **DML**



6" Gutters and Downspouts Installed: **DML**
Brick Repointing: **DML**
Outside Windows Wrapped with Aluminum: **BGMF**



Although we hire many contractors, we also do a lot of work ourselves. If anyone is interested in lending a hand with special projects, sharing resources, or attending a meeting, please contact a committee member. Our meetings are usually held on the first Monday evening of each month in the Guild Room.

2024 Buildings and Grounds Committee:

Gary Lang/Junior Warden, Helen Lang, Roberta Wilhelm, Buck Lyon-Vaiden, Bill Sears, Frank Baker, Deb Vana, and Steve Vana

We look forward to working with Dan Simmons, Tom Rio, Karen Margroum, and Dennis Margroum in 2025!

Children and Youth Ministries

Committee Members: Carrie Goff, Roberta Gore, Diana Baker, Merle Martin, Jackie Weschler, Deb Howard (retired 2025), Betsy Reinders (retired 2025)

2024 was another remarkable year for Children and Youth Ministries at Ascension! We welcomed new families, strengthened our community, and created lasting memories through worship, education, and fellowship.

Our events brought joy to all ages, kicking off early in the year with **Mr. Jon & Friends on January 15th for MLK Day** and a **Bowling Night at Greenmount Bowl on January 27th, where 41.5 people attended**—yes, we even counted the half!

During Lent, we introduced **Lenten Children and Youth Projects** during Sunday Coffee Hours, allowing our young people to engage in meaningful outreach in the Fellowship Hall over five Sundays. As Holy Week approached, the **Children dyed Easter Eggs on Palm Sunday (March 24th)**, followed by a fantastic **Easter Egg Hunt on March 31st, coordinated by Carrie Goff.**

Our annual **Mother's Day Breakfast fundraiser was a huge success, hitting our \$3,000 goal** to support our programs.

The summer excitement began early, with **Summer Programs registration opening on April 20th** and fun outings like **Strawberry Picking on May 26th** and **watching the Memorial Day Parade together on May 27th.**

In September, Kickoff Sunday was a special time for our church family, featuring the **Blessing of the Backpacks, Commissioning of Teachers and Youth Volunteers, and a community luncheon.**

We tested out a new event, a **'Mingle and Play Café' for families on September 14th.** This was a great concept, but not the turnout we had hoped for—learning experiences like these help us shape future events!

October was full of excitement, as our **middle and high school students planned and hosted their own Halloween party on October 27th.**

In December, we wrapped up the year with our beloved **Annual Christmas Pageant, which was "A Lamb's Tale."** The children rehearsed each Sunday starting in October, leading up to the performance on December 15th.

Sunday School & Children's Chapel

Our **Children's Chapel continued to thrive**, with kids joyfully worshiping together each week. A big thank you to **Merle Martin for her leadership, and to Erin Hagan, who joined the nursery and chapel team this year!**

Our nursery also continued to flourish, thanks to the loving care of **Suzanne Walter and Erin Hagan.**

The **2023-24 Sunday School year** wrapped up with meaningful learning experiences, and the **2024-25 year** kicked off with even more engagement:

- **Explorations Class (Grades K-5, led by Carrie Goff):** The class worked through Old Testament stories, pausing to focus on Advent and the Christmas Story. Outreach projects included gift bags for moms at the Pregnancy Center, Halloween treats for pets at the Humane Society, pajamas and gifts for Cat's Closet/Liz's Locker, and Christmas snack bags for families in need. In January, they made bird feeders as part of their outreach efforts. They also participated in the **Carroll County Arts Council Peep Show** and plan to enter again in 2025.
- **Foundations Class (Grades 6-8, led by Diana Baker & Jackie Weschler):** Students explored the **"What Do Others Believe?"** curriculum from Virginia Theological Seminary, diving into interfaith learning and discussions.
- **Confirmation Class (Led by Pierre-Henry Buisson & Deb Howard):** This program provided a meaningful journey for our youth exploring their faith and commitment.
- **Transformations Class (Grades 9-12, led by Roberta Gore):** After her retirement from Sunday School teaching, Roberta graciously returned to lead the high school group for the 2024-25 year. The **high schoolers took the lead in teaching their own lessons**, with Liam, Brayden, Erin, Isaiah, and Maddox stepping up to share their insights. They also planned and hosted the **Halloween party for younger kids and families**. Roberta reflected, *"I thought the Halloween and Christmas parties were really nice, and really any time the older and younger kids did something together was meaningful for everyone."* The class also welcomed **Pierre-Henry for special visits** and hopes to plan a Eucharist during class time soon.

Free Summer Programs

We had an amazing summer! **Vacation Bible School (VBS) ran from June 17th-21st, following the "Hometown Nazareth" program, with eight kids participating.** Summer program sessions continued from **July 29th-August 9th, serving over 120 children.** Our **Drama Camp, featuring "Alice in Wonderland," ran from August 13th-23rd and had 53 participants!** This year, **Megan Biller was our only paid summer coordinator**, and we are so grateful for her dedication, along with all our incredible volunteers.

Looking Ahead

As we enter 2025, we are eager to continue expanding our programs, creating new outreach opportunities, and deepening our intergenerational connections. None of this would be possible without the generosity, time, and talents of our congregation.

We are beyond grateful for the vibrant, supportive community at Ascension, and we look forward to another year of growth, faith, and fellowship!

DreamBuilders

DreamBuilders MD: An interfaith community of teens and adults building homes for those in need.

Founded in 2002 at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Highland, MD, Ascension Church joined the following year. Currently, DreamBuilders MD consists of four Episcopal churches and one Jewish congregation, all of which are in Howard County, except for Ascension.

Most of the week-long projects involve working after a natural disaster. In total, there have been 53 week-long mission trips plus various local projects such as with the Arc of Howard County.

In January 2024, DreamBuilders MD returned to Puerto Rico for the 4th time (an adult trip) and to Hazard, KY for the 2nd time in June (a teen and adult trip).

Plans for 2025 include a one-day project on April 26 in Howard County and a 3rd trip to Hazard, KY on June 15-21.

The major fundraiser – Spaghetti Dinner, Silent Auction & TV Raffle – will take place on Saturday, March 8 from 5-8 PM. For more details about how you can contribute with donations and help at the event, please read the Ascension Enews and the February or March Ascension Extension newsletter. Website: DreamBuildersMD.org

Submitted by Buck Lyon-Vaiden

Fellowship Committee

Fellowship Committee Members: Jaclyn Weschler, Kat Dittrich, Cheryl Vecera, Diana Baker

In 2024, the Fellowship Committee continued to grow and provide new opportunities for connection within our parish. We began the year by hosting the **Annual Parish Meeting Luncheon**, a cherished tradition that brings everyone together.

Our **church picnic in June** was a highlight, held in our beautiful courtyard. Additionally, we encouraged various members and committees to **host Coffee Hour**, which became such a success that we extended volunteer sign-ups **into the beginning of 2025**. Through the generosity of members stepping forward to help, we have been able to sustain **Fellowship Hour** (renamed in 2025) as a vital part of our parish fellowship, allowing more people than ever to stay after services, build relationships, and strengthen our sense of community.

The **8:00 AM congregation** has also continued its tradition of going out for breakfast after service. What started as a small gathering has blossomed into a growing **'Breakfast Bunch'** group that enjoys fellowship together each week.

In the fall, we hosted a **Kick-off Sunday Luncheon in September** and were blessed to have **Roberta Gore's improv troupe** volunteer their time in November, providing us with laughter and joy as we prepared for the Advent season.

One of our biggest successes has been our **monthly Themed Potluck Lunches**, held on the **third Friday of each month**. Each gathering features a unique theme, and we were thrilled to **continue this tradition in 2024**. If you haven't attended yet, we highly recommend it! These events are relaxed, fun, and welcoming—even if you don't bring a dish, there's always plenty to share.

We are deeply grateful for the **support of our congregation**. Many members provide **coffee grounds, coffee cups, and food donations**, while others contribute generously to our **donation basket** at Fellowship Hour and events. These contributions sustain our ministry, and we are incredibly thankful for everyone's kindness and generosity.

Looking ahead, we are excited to **explore new opportunities for parish events in 2025**. We will continue hosting our annual **church picnic, Kick-off Sunday, and Christmas play luncheons**, as well as offering opportunities for members to **host Fellowship Hour**. We hope this remains a thriving part of our community life.

If you have any **ideas for new events**, we would love to hear them! Please reach out to any committee member—we are always open to fresh ideas and new ways to bring people together. Additionally, if you enjoy **brainstorming and planning social gatherings**, we would love to welcome new members to our team!

Here's to another wonderful year of fellowship! Submitted by Diana Baker

Handbell Choir

The Church of the Ascension Handbell Choir - the ultimate team activity! We are literally a human keyboard where everyone is important and valued. We glorify God in worship services through the art of handbell ringing.

In 2024, the full Handbell Choir enjoyed providing music during 10:15 a.m. worship services from January - June and September - December. Several handbell ringers learned music written for a small handbell ensemble that was played during July and August worship services.

Our joy-filled rehearsals include persons of many ages - from the young to the young-at-heart. Lynn Lyon-Vaiden is grateful for the dedication and commitment of the Handbell Choir members. New ringers are always welcome! Previous music experience is helpful but not necessary.

Lay Eucharistic Visitors Ministry

Introduction

The Lay Eucharistic Visitors (LEV) ministry plays an essential role in our church community, providing a vital connection for members who are unable to attend services due to age or health-related issues. This report summarizes the function of the ministry and highlights the significant activities and achievements in 2024.

Function of the Ministry

The primary function of the Lay Eucharistic Visitors is to share the Eucharist with those who cannot come to church due to age or health issues. By visiting these members once a month with the Lord's supper and sharing the current events of the month, we aim to help them stay connected with the church and feel the love of the Lord. These visits offer an opportunity for fellowship and spiritual nourishment, ensuring that all members of our congregation feel cared for and included.

During each visit, the Lay Eucharistic Visitors provide the weekly church bulletin along with any other relevant information, such as *Forward Day by Day* or other pamphlets. This ensures that our homebound members remain informed and involved in the life of the church.

An important aspect of the ministry is communication with the Rector. If there are any concerns or needs identified during visits, these are shared with the Rector, but only with the permission of the member. This ensures that the care provided is respectful and protective of the member's privacy.

Yearly Review for 2024

The year 2024 has been a productive and fulfilling year for the Lay Eucharistic Visitors ministry. We had five dedicated members who committed their time and energy to this service. Together we served 22 members through a total of 74 visits.

Highlights and Achievements

- **Consistent Visits:** Each of the 22 people received regular visits, ensuring a consistent connection with the church community and spiritual support. Not all homebound remained homebound for the entire year. Thanks be to God.
- **Enhanced Communication:** The ministry has improved its communication process with the Rector, ensuring timely pastoral care when needed.
- **Distribution of Resources:** Along with the Eucharist, the visitors faithfully distributed the weekly bulletin and other informative materials, keeping members updated and engaged.
- **Volunteer Engagement:** We successfully maintained a team of five committed volunteers who have shown remarkable dedication and compassion in their service.

Challenges Faced

Despite our successes, the ministry has occasionally faced challenges during the year:

- **Health Concerns:** Several people experienced fluctuating health conditions, which sometimes impacted the regularity of visits.

Looking Forward

As we look ahead to 2025, we have several goals and aspirations for the Lay Eucharistic Visitors ministry:

- Expand our volunteer base to include more members of the congregation who feel called to this ministry.
- Conduct 6-month meetings for volunteers to review and solidify our group efforts.
- Strengthen communication with the Rector to continue providing responsive and compassionate care to our homebound members.

Invitation to Join the Ministry

We warmly welcome anyone interested in joining this vital ministry to contact the Rector or Sandy White for more information. Your participation would be greatly valued and would significantly contribute to the spiritual well-being and connection of our church community.

Conclusion

The Lay Eucharistic Visitors ministry has been a source of immense blessing and support for our homebound members. As we reflect on the past year, we are grateful for the dedication of our volunteers and the continuing support of the congregation. We look forward to another year of growth and meaningful service, ensuring that all members of our church feel the love and care of our church family.

Thank you for your continued support and prayers for this ministry.

Submitted by Sandy White, Lay Eucharistic Visitors Coordinator

Mistletoe Mart

We were very excited to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Mistletoe Mart in 2024! The three-day event was held Thursday, November 7, through Saturday, November 9. The Mart has become one of the premier juried arts and crafts shows in the tristate area, and the talent of each artisan is truly amazing! This past year there were 50 specialty shops for our 50th anniversary and over 2130 patrons attended.

Throughout the Mart, we posted memorable pictures from the past years for all to enjoy. We sold a beautiful, limited edition, hand painted porcelain commemorative ornament specifically designed for Ascension for the Mart's 50th anniversary. There was a ribbon cutting ceremony Thursday morning and we held a Stone Church open house early Friday morning for the vendors, with Dr. Kreider playing the organ.

The café was busy selling soups, salads, and sandwiches; the 50th anniversary turkey chili with cornbread was a big hit Thursday evening; the new turkey, cheddar, apple sandwich sold out each day; and the Friday turkey dinner was as popular as always! The Country Store bake table had delicious home-made desserts!

The 1844 Shoppe and Pins and Needles room always seemed to be filled as they sold their beautiful items! The children enjoyed the Angel Room crafts! And everyone, adults and children alike, were delighted to see Santa and Mrs. Claus! It was simply wonderful being able to spend time with our remarkable artisans, delighted patrons and each other!

Each year the Mart donates 25-30% of the proceeds to community outreach, with the balance supporting specific Ascension expenses. Proceeds from Mistletoe Mart 2023 provided \$9,500 to community outreach (14 different organizations) and \$24,228 to Ascension during 2024.

The Mistletoe Mart committee meets monthly throughout the year. We still receive some final bills in January. Therefore, during our February meeting we will review the Mistletoe Mart 2024 proceeds and determine the community outreach donations.

However, the future of the Mistletoe Mart is in jeopardy. We are striving to have our 51st Mistletoe Mart November 13-15, 2025. However, there are several critical team lead positions which must be filled by March 31 so that training can begin to support the successful transitions for this year's Mart. The organization, planning and coordination activities for these specific areas can begin as early as late spring / early summer. **If these lead positions are not filled by March 31, we will not be able to hold the Mart.**

These open team lead positions are:

1. Tear Down / Set Up – to replace Kevin & Jackie Weschler for this year

Plans, coordinates and develops a team to organize and take down the Holy Cross Hall altar and pew chairs as well as furniture from the Fellowship Hall, Parlor, classrooms and offices before the Mart and then sets up afterwards. Is on site to provide instructions to the movers when the furniture is picked up before the Mart for off-site storage and then delivered back to Ascension after the Mart. Provides physical assistance to Mistletoe Mart team leads when requested to pull their items from the Mistletoe Mart closet to prepare for the Mart and place packed boxes back in the Mistletoe Mart closet afterwards. Moves the requested tables and chairs to each vendor location. Assists

with setting up the Café and Baked Good Table area. Please contact Kevin and Jackie to further discuss.

2. Decorating - to shadow and assist Betsy Reinders this year and assume role by Mistletoe Mart 2026

Plans, coordinates and develops a team to organize supplies and decorate the Holy Cross Hall, Fellowship Hall and hallways prior to the Mart and then removes and packs the decorations afterwards. This also includes “fluffing the greens,” decorating bulletin boards and hanging the Mistletoe Mart vendor signs at each vendor location. Please contact Betsy to further discuss.

The following team lead positions have now been filled:

1. **Social Media Coordinator** is now Lauren Beeker, replacing Beth Anthony.
2. **Publicity** is now Lynn Lyon-Vaiden and Susan Considine, replacing Sandy White.

We value the success of the Mistletoe Mart over the past 50 years. We treasure the friendships we have developed and the relationships that have been fostered with each other, our vendors and the community. Over all these years, we have been able to donate \$251,205 to Community Outreach and \$682,224 to Ascension. We pray these open lead positions can be filled by March 31, 2025, so that we can continue to hold the Mistletoe Mart.

Submitted by Mistletoe Mart Co-Chairs: Jenny Beeker, Kim Tompkins

Outreach

The Outreach Committee had another successful year of reaching out to and supporting our church, town and surrounding community in many ways during 2024.

Outreach continued to support financially and physically the following community agencies each month;

- Access Carroll (Medical Care on wheels to our homeless population)
- Carroll Food Sunday (providing food to food pantries and families in need)
- Shepherd's Staff (supports families and individuals with many needs not covered by Social Services)
- Monthly cards celebrating the season or holiday are mailed to approximately 25-30 shut-in or ill Church of the Ascension members.
- 5-6 Family Friends families consisting of single parents with children receive a monthly bag of cleaning, paper products and/or toiletry items to help cover needs not covered by food stamps.

Disbanded, but supported through mid-2024

- New Life for Girls (Faith based drug and alcohol rehab facility)
- Upper Room Ministries (Soup Kitchen)

Outreach supported both of these ministries until their closing. Those previously directed funds have now gone to new ministries including but not limited to:

- Carroll County Youth Services Bureau (providing gas cards to ensure transportation for mental health counseling etc.)
- Carroll County Human Services Program (providing funds to help with housing deposits or fund to eliminate eviction of families consisting of a single parent with children who need assistance in having housing and not ending up in shelters or on the street).
- The Pregnancy Support Center of Carroll County

In addition to the support listed above, some of our special additional events held were as follows:

January- Annual Craft and Crop Day-a day that is attended by many folks wanting a day to share with friends away from daily tasks to craft and socialize. All funds raised go to our many Outreach projects. Money to support a youth attending a Dream Builders trip

February- Coffee Hour “Pregnancy Support Center Baby Shower” to kick off our support of this service for uninsured and underserved expectant mothers.

March-Wine and gift card donations to DreamBuilders MD Annual Spaghetti dinner fundraiser, bagged lunches for Habitat for Humanity

April-Easter Candy Walk to raise money for Outreach projects

May-Donations to Shepherd's Staff Blessing Closet

June-Provided Bagged Lunches to Habitat for Humanity Volunteers

July-Provided bagged lunches to Habitat for Humanity Volunteers

September-A new replacement "Little Library" was supported as an Eagle Scout project for one of our church members.

October: Operation Christmas Child-the support from our church congregation allowed us to send 82 boxes to other countries to share the love of Christ to boys and girls aged 17 and under. Shepherd's Staff Blessings Closet donations, Hurricane Relief Effort

November: Outreach provided food to Mistletoe Mart set up volunteers for lunch

December: **Angel Tree** which provided Christmas gifts and grocery cards to 5 of our Family Friends families to ensure a special Christmas for each child and parent. **Cookie Walk** to raise funds for children in our congregation who may be in need of scholarship money for DreamBuilders MD, Summer camp at Claggett etc. **60 "Warm Wishes" bags** were assembled containing Chapstick, socks, gloves, tissues, toothbrushes, combs, hand warmers, tote bags, candy and other items for distribution at a local soup kitchen and shelter.

Current Outreach Committee members: Anne Arena, Diana Baker, Jenny Beeker, Kat Dittrich, Carrie Goff, Jennie Grabill, John Holbert, Deb Howard, Melissa Leahy, Laurie Waldrup, Pam White
In memory of: Donna Hansen

In Closing: Many, many thanks to our Church of the Ascension congregation and members who continue to support our ministries with donations of time, talent and treasure and who pray incessantly for our many continued efforts as a church to serve our community.

Pins & Needles

Pins and Needles meets each Wednesday from 10 a.m. until approximately 2 p.m. throughout the year. Seventeen active members and nine alumni make up the roster. The group has two components – fellowship among its members and producing handmade items for sale. Each meeting day, members may choose to bring a lunch, or, for a nominal sum, lunch may be purchased from the Loaves and Fishes Soup Kitchen which is open to the public and held in the Fellowship Hall.

For many years, the main objective of Pins and Needles has been to produce enough handmade crafts to sell over the three days of the annual Mistletoe Mart held in November. The proceeds of the sale of items go directly into the Pin's checking account for disbursement as voted on by the group. November 2024 was the 50th Mistletoe Mart which speaks volumes to the dedication of the members of the group. Pins and Needles also maintains a small space in the corner of the 1844 Shoppe to sell their handmade items to the public on Fridays and Saturdays and to members of the parish on select Sundays in December when a Christmas Shop is held, and children are assisted in purchasing gifts for family members.

When a handmade quilt is made by one or more of the members, a raffle is held, and the proceeds are used to help fill the needs of the Church and the community.

In late spring/early summer of 2024, donations were made to Ghanaian Mother's Hope for their Annual Reading Camp. During the summer, we participated in the Free Summer Programs – donating funds to help provide lunches during the Drama Camp and hosting a craft session for the children in the community. In November, we participated in the 50th Mistletoe Mart by selling our hand-crafted items, along with a Quilt Raffle. In December, we purchased two gifts for the annual

Angel Tree, filled two boxes for Operation Christmas Child, gave a donation to the Rector's Discretionary Fund and the General Fund. *Submitted by Deborah Rio*

Praise Ensemble and Children's Choir

The Praise Ensemble has a current, ongoing membership of 16 singers and instrumentalists ranging in age from 15 - 80 years old. 75% of our musicians were new to the music ministry when they joined.

As well as singers, we have enjoyed a wide range of instrumentation including: acoustic and electric guitars, flutes, recorder, upright bass, trumpet, and a wide variety of percussion. Because many of our members are new to music, we regularly include music education and exercises designed to promote good vocal health, singing diction, and instruction in how to read music. Additionally, we learn about music selection for liturgical seasons.

Music for our group is selected collaboratively with our pastor Fr. Pierre-Henry, and then ideas are submitted by members of the group. We also consult the historical repertoire of the parish. In order to reach the hearts and minds of the entire parish as well as for the formation of our younger members, we schedule a wide variety of sacred music. The range of our music includes: traditional hymnody as well as ancient sacred a cappella music, folk music from the 60s and 70s from the Come Celebrate Hymnal, as well as contemporary music. Our newest genre has included traditional choral works.

Both of our organs and our piano have been serviced, are in good working order, and are on a regular schedule for future maintenance.

I am so grateful for all of my Ascension family and the pouring out of love and support for all of our music program! Thank you for your encouragement and wonderful feedback and ideas!

Submitted by Donna Parker

St. James' Guild

St. James' Guild underwent a reformation to better serve our parish with improved efficient processes. The core value remains the same; faithfully serving and supporting our church family through their grief from the passing of a loved one. The name was changed to St. James' Commission to better reflect its size of leadership and minimal need for meetings. St. James' Commission functions through the love and volunteer support of Ascension parishioners as needed when a memorial reception event is scheduled.

In 2024, St. James' Commission provided the accommodations for 4 receptions for the family and friends of the following beloved parishioners who have passed on to life eternal:

Donna Fine passed on 1/11/2024. Reception was held on 2/24/2024 and approximately 140 people attended.

Ron Cox died on 6/12/2024. A reception was held on 7/12/2024 with approximately 125 in attendance.

Joy Badger passed on 8/30/2024. The reception was held on 9/12/2024 with approximately 55 people in attendance.

Donna Hansen passed on 11/17/2024. A reception for family and friends was held on 12/14/2024. Approximately 155 people attended.

A reception was offered for the following but was declined. Other arrangements were made by their family:

Robert Anthony died on 2/9/2024. He is the father of Mary Butler, Ascension's Adult Choir Director. He was not a church member.

Nancy Howard died on 5/5/2024

Nelda Welds passed on 6/4/2024. She is the mother of Donna Parker, Ascension's Praise Ensemble and Children's Choir Director. Nelda was not a parishioner.

Erik T. McCarson died on 5/20/2024. A funeral service was held for him in the Stone Church on 7/20/2024. The family used the Fellowship Hall for a reception. St. James' Commission representative, Jill Horn, consulted with the family to advise them with reception planning, hall and kitchen use and also toured them around the facilities. Grief support was also provided prior and post reception on several occasions for his sister.

St. James' Guild plans to continue this ministry for years to come. We find it is a rewarding experience as it aligns with our church vision as we *Connect* in meaningful ways with our families and their guests in hopes of *Growing* in faith through the opportunity to *Serve* others. Submitted in Christ's Love with gratitude for all who served in any way to make this ministry possible.

Commission Members: Ellen Anderson, Beverly Baker, Jill Horn and Melissa Leahy

St. Luke's Guild

One of the greatest gifts God has given to us is the opportunity to pray for one another. For over 30 years, the St. Luke's Guild has served Ascension by offering prayer requests to God for all kinds of issues. We have prayed for everything from serious illnesses to job needs to prayers for success during exam week! No request is too hard or too trivial for our God to handle.

The St. Luke's Guild is composed of members of our church family who are committed to pray for those in need, our families, our friends, and those outside of our church community. Such praying members are known as Intercessors. We have members who are housebound but consider praying for those in need as part of their ministry, and indeed it is.

When someone has a prayer request, they will notify either Father Pierre-Henry or me. I will then send out a prayer request email message to the members of St. Luke's. If wished, prayer requests can remain CONFIDENTIAL. The Intercessors will then pray as they are led by the Holy Spirit. Often we do not receive follow ups to know the result of our prayers, and that is ok. God knows. It is, however, wonderful when we learn that a healing has occurred or a prayer was answered with a good result. It is extremely encouraging to hear PRAISE REPORTS!

If you would like to learn more about the work of St. Luke's or have a prayer request, please contact either Father Pierre-Henry or me. We will then share the need with our intercessors. Sometimes, we hear too late that someone has been dealing with a serious illness or issue and that makes us sad, because we would have been honored to lift that need up to the Lord on their behalf. If perhaps you would be interested in knowing more about becoming an Intercessor, please let us know.

St. Luke was a physician, dealing with illness and disease during Jesus' time. We are proud for our Guild to be called in his name. And we are honored to continue to serve our church family by sharing the burden of praying with them. Please never hesitate to contact us. God listens.

Submitted by JoAnne Kreider
410-790-2431 lambjoy@hotmail.com

St. Martha's Guild

Our purpose is to support the Rector in his endeavors. We work at the Rector's direction serving as hosts for receptions. We also make contributions to members of our church who are involved in religious studies and mission work.

We meet after the 10:15 service when we have events that need to be discussed, September thru June. Our members are Beverly Baker and Melissa Leahy (Co- Presidents.), Nancy Starner (Secretary), Sharon Schwartz (Treasurer), Cathy Tibbs (Correspondence), Liz Lowe, Kat Dittrich,

and Jill Horn. Our small but mighty group is active throughout the year in serving our rector and parish.

Looking back at 2024, our committee participated in the following:

In January, we bade farewell to our interim rector Father Allan and celebrated with a reception during coffee hour.

On January 6, 2024 in conjunction with many parishioners and the transition committee, we provided an induction reception for our dear Pierre-Henry. The reception had a French flair to honor our new rector. It was well attended!



In February, another successful Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper was held. We are always so grateful for such wonderful parish participation for this event. Despite a price increase and a time adjustment, we had a great turn out and served between 150-200 folks. As always, we served plain, blueberry, chocolate chip and gluten-free pancakes and of course sausage and applesauce.



In April, Pierre-Henry had a big birthday!! The surprise (!) celebration was held in the Fellowship Hall which was transformed into a French Bistro for the day! Music was provided by Tom Schwartz's band. A grand time was had by all. Merci to our parishioners for making this party a success.



The United Thank Offering, our only outreach project, was collected after the Lenten season while our 'Attitude of Gratitude' strengthened.

In early June we celebrated our Confirmands at our Church Picnic. In addition, St. Martha's Guild provided some funds to offset costs for two of our youth to attend the DreamBuilders MD June mission trip to Kentucky.



Our members completed the year in June with a delicious dinner out together at Maggie's. As we started the 2024-25 Guild year, we gave a reception after an Evensong service in September. We continued our tradition of providing Thanksgiving and Christmas cards to some of our needy families in the community



St. Martha's Guild looks forward to providing the annual Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper on Tuesday, March 4. Please contact Melissa Leahy or Jill Horn if you are able to help.

We welcome new members...no specific skills necessary...just a desire to serve.

Submitted by Melissa Leahy

Sunday Morning Adult Bible Study

The Sunday Morning Adult Sunday School meets 9:00 - 10:00 am in the Guild Room. We use the lectionary for that Sunday's 10:15 am service as our lesson plan. Our purpose is to amplify the readings, dig deeper into their meaning and strengthen the understanding when the readings are presented during the worship service. Our goal is to enhance the parishioner's experience during

the worship service through a better understanding of the lectionary and its integration into the worship service.

Three leaders: Jill Horn, Bobbie Gooding and John Holbert prepare questions to ask following the recitation of each selection. Each participant in the class is afforded the opportunity to recite the lectionary and then the leader that morning follows with questions related to that reading. The questions are intended as a starting point for discussion about that particular reading. We normally have 8-10 participants each Sunday; there is room around the Guild Room table for any who want to participate. Submitted by John Holbert

The 1844 Shoppe

Introduction

The 1844 Shoppe was established with a mission to support our church's financial need to repay a Middendorf loan. The shop has evolved into a community endeavor, embodying the spirit of giving and volunteerism.

Mission and Vision

Our mission is to provide financial assistance to our church while fostering a sense of community and support among our members. We envision a future where the 1844 Shoppe continues to be a place of generosity, service, and connection.

Achievements

- Supported various church initiatives through fundraising efforts.
- Engaged community members in volunteer activities, strengthening communal bonds.
- Expanded our reach and impact within the local neighborhood.

Financial Overview

This year, we have successfully raised funds that have significantly contributed to the church's budget, allowing for the continuation and expansion of essential services and programs.

Future Goals

- Increase fundraising activities to support more church projects.
- Recruit more volunteers to enhance our service capacity.
- Broaden our outreach efforts to include more community members.
- Initiate a stronger online presence to increase exposure and improve revenue

Acknowledgements

We extend our deepest gratitude to all our volunteers, donors, and community members who supported The 1844 Shoppe during 2024. Your dedication and generosity are the foundation of our success.

Conclusion

As we look ahead, we are inspired by the possibilities for growth and impact. Together, we will continue to uphold the values of service and generosity that define our community. Thank you for your continued support! Submitted by Sandy White

Thursday Night Bible Study

Hope and Faith

We began 2024 by reading and discussing articles and sermons about hope and faith written by some of our favorite authors.

Embracing the Uncertain: A Lenten Study for Unsteady Times by Magrey deVega invited us to engage and wrestle with life's uncertainties, not ignore them.

The Resurrected Life: Making All Things New by Rev. Charlie Holt

This unique Easter-season curriculum provided a space in which we could discover what it truly means to live a new life. We learned how the resurrection of Jesus Christ changes everything for us. We explored seven key areas of life transformation as Jesus heals, redeems, and makes us new.

During summer 2024, we studied the book of Colossians. Paul wrote this letter during his first Roman imprisonment to address false beliefs and warn of the danger of falling prey to “hollow and deceptive” teaching (2:8). He knew the best way not to be led astray was to be “rooted and built up in [Christ]” (v. 7) through a relationship with Him and familiarity with Scripture.

Fall 2024: *The Lamb of God: Seeing Jesus in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy* revealed that the overarching story of Scripture from beginning to end is the story of the Lamb—the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Our 2025 Lent Study will be *Journey to the Resurrection*.

How can you apply Jesus’ crucifixion to your life in practical ways? How can you and those you lead see the deeply spiritual practices in Jesus’ journey to the cross? *Journey to the Resurrection* answers these questions.

Everyone is welcome to join us, in-person or via Zoom, for Bible Study, Fellowship, Prayers and Compline.

Submitted by Lynn Lyon-Vaiden

Tuesday Morning Bible Study

The Tuesday Morning Bible Study generally meets from 9:30-11:00 on first, third, and fifth Tuesdays in Room 202 (Pins & Needles room).

Our studies of the Bible—sometimes a particular book and sometimes a topic—are discussion-based, as we share our thoughts, questions and insights. Members of our group use several different translations, and this adds to our understanding and appreciation of God’s word.

In 2024, we began the year with an in-depth study of the *Sermon on the Mount*. Then, in June, we began Philip Yancey’s 8-session video study *The Bible Jesus Read*. The video presentations prompted us to pause part way through to take a deeper look at the history of the Israelites in the books of the Hebrew Scriptures.

We ended the year with a special celebration of the birth of Jesus. We viewed a video, *The Shepherd*, which was produced by the creators of *The Chosen*; we read the Christmas story and created a beautiful nativity scene.

Our meetings always begin with devotions led by a member of the group, and we end with prayer. There are 21 members of our group, and others are always welcome.



***Ascension is called to be a family of faith
so reflecting the life of Christ,
that we draw all people to him.***