

## Join Our Yoga Class! All levels welcome!

A Yoga class is being offered Wednesday evenings from 6-7 p.m in the Parish Hall. The fee per class is \$5.00. The class is being taught by Paul Hagen, a Sierra Madre resident who has practiced and taught Yoga for twelve years. The class involves gentle Yoga movements, stretching, relaxation, and breathing techniques. Bring a Yoga mat or large towel for an hour of relaxing fun.



## Where Should Your Notice Go?

We now have bulletin board space in the Parish Hall for information about volunteer opportunities, community events, and Diocesan notices.

Notices, pictures, notes, and sign-up sheets that apply directly to life here at Ascension should be placed on the hallway bulletin board.

Remember; notices for non-Ascension community events should be placed only on the new bulletin board located in the Parish Hall.



St. Mary's Guild will be meeting on Saturday, May 9, 2009 for a potluck/business luncheon at 11:30 am in the Parish Hall."

*Our vision is that the Church of the Ascension serves Christ today for those who will come to know Christ tomorrow.*

**WORSHIP  
FORMATION  
PASTORAL CARE  
FELLOWSHIP  
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PRESENCE**

### The Episcopal Church of the Ascension



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**Did you know...** The three leadership groups at Ascension are the Vestry, the Staff, and Parish Ministry Council (PMC). Parish Ministry Council supervises all the programs of the church. There are six Ministry Leaders, one for each of our core ministries: Worship, Pastoral Care, Presence, Outreach, Formation, and Fellowship. Also present at meetings are the Rector, the Wardens, and the Parish Connector – whose job is to connect parishioners to programs.

Each Ministry Leader supervises the activities of all the groups that come under that ministry. For example, the Presence Ministry Leader oversees the Memorial Garden, Parish Photography, the Spire Newsletter, our Web site, the Welcome Ministry, and Work Parties.

Parish Ministry Council meets every other month. At these meetings, Ministry Leaders share what is happening in their ministry, what special needs the various groups in their ministries may have, what new proposals they want presented, what budgetary needs they may have etc. Leadership often asks this group for evaluations of church events, better ways of doing things, ideas for new directions.

On the alternate month, each Ministry Leader meets with the leaders of all the groups that fall under his/her ministry. These meetings are a time to focus on the concerns of that one ministry – what is working, what isn't, what new ideas should be examined, who should be thanked, to what extent Christ has been a part of the ministry of each group and how members are growing in discipleship since the last time the ministry met. It is a time when all the groups in that ministry can discuss their ministry together, make suggestions, and determine major concerns.

Before the leaders of the various groups meet with their Ministry Leader again (two months later), the individual groups have met and as a part of each of those meetings discussed what they would like to convey to their Ministry Leader for the next PMC meeting..

Using this formula, we hope to be able to focus on ways we can improve the programs of the church, create new groups as parishioners reveal to us a new need, and make the changes that will enrich what our programs can do. This structure will ideally let every member of a group have access to Parish Ministry Council through conversations with the group's leader. 2008-09 is our first year using this formula for Parish Ministry Council. The way the Council functions will continue to evolve as we determine new and better ways to serve the program needs of the parish.

Jean Rowe, Junior Warden

Our Parish Ministry Council Leaders are

**Fellowship -Elizabeth Callihan Formation-Maggie Outhouse Pastoral Care - Karen Mooradian**

**Presence -Mike Beach Worship-Nonie Lathrop**



# The SPIRE

The Newsletter of the  
Episcopal Church of the Ascension  
Sierra Madre, California

May, 2009

## Worship

### Sundays

8:00 Mass  
8:55 Coffee Hour  
9:10 Education  
10:15 Mass  
11:30 Coffee Hour

### Wednesdays

6:00pm Mass  
7:30pm Choir practice

### Thursdays

7am Mass

### Fridays

12:00 Mass

## FROM THE RECTOR

On the Thursday after Easter, Debbie and I went on a nostalgia trip to Wisconsin, accompanied by our son Chris and Debbie's mom – Fay Owen. We drove through Milwaukee, walked around the grounds of Nashotah House where I went to seminary, toured the Hawks' Inn in Delafield, the place from which Roger Wood's family comes, and ended up in Lake Geneva. We visited Lake Geneva because I served the Church of the Holy Communion as their seminarian from the fall of 1979 through the spring of 1981. I hadn't been back to the church since then, and I was surprised at the feelings that seeing the place brought out.

I'm happy to say that after some time, Holy Communion appears to have broken out of that cycle and become healthy again. I suppose that the lesson I learned might have been this: "a pretty church isn't enough to make a congregation strong." It takes strong and healthy people. The lesson I carry home is that we are at our best when we know who we are as a congregation, and we can't just fall back on our beautiful and historic building for our identity as a parish. It is people who make a village, not buildings.

Yours in Christ, MAB +

## Upcoming Events

Wednesdays, 6-7pm Yoga

5/17 Parish Ministry Council

5/19 Election Day- Remember to Vote!

5/19 Vestry Meeting 7pm

5/21 Ascension Day-Mass at 7:00 am and celebratory Mass at 10:15 am.

5/30 Leadership Work Day 8:30—12:30, Parish Hall

5/31 Pentecost Sunday



I was very young and naïve when I was assigned to Holy Communion, and my eyes were opened in some painful ways. The place seemed to be a magnet for trouble. Two priests were fired while I was there, and often I was called on to preach at the last minute. I now realize that the congregation didn't know itself very well; and, furthermore, the parishioners didn't want to know themselves very well. The early 80's was a time of great change in the Episcopal Church, and Holy Communion's choice as to how to deal with those changes was to hide their heads. The result was that the church called priests who had things to hide as well.

## SMALL GROUPS

In the course of her book John Paul the Great, Peggy Noonan speaks of her own spiritual journey. Here are a few of her thoughts on small groups. "I had joined a Christian Bible study group with some women, mostly Protestant, who were to one degree or another desperate to believe in something, but it had to be the truth. (They'd already tried the nontrue, and it hadn't worked.) We had weekly meetings. They were important to me, in part because I learned so much about what was in the Bible – I hadn't really known- and also because as people got to know one another, they shared their lives and experiences, and I learned from those too. ... They all knew- they had come to the conclusion along the way- that the lives they had previously lived were unwhole, not in accord with the peace that they somehow knew or intuited was out there, and available, and summoning."

You are invited to visit, explore, and check-out any of the many small groups we have at Ascension. We look forward to welcoming you.



## SENIOR WARDEN'S BLOG –

The 21st day of May marks Ascension Day -- the commemoration of Christ's Ascension into heaven and the 124th birthday of the Church of the Ascension. It is followed in ten days by the celebration of Pentecost – the 50th day after Easter and the arrival of the Holy Spirit (and historically and symbolically, the day on which Moses accepted the Ten Commandments). Thus, following the rebirth of Easter, we are challenged to raise our sights upward and accept the challenge of the Holy Spirit to carry the light of Jesus to our world.

In March, members of the Vestry, Parish Ministry Council ("PMC"), and staff met to determine how we at Ascension might best raise our sights upward and accept the challenge of the Holy Spirit. At our retreat, Father Michael reminded us that translating spiritual guidance into practical reality is not always easy and that we are, indeed, a church in transition.

When I first served on the Vestry, over ten years ago, Father Michael alerted us to the sociology of the modern church. That is, there are "family" churches, "priest centered" churches, "program" churches, and "corporate" churches, with transitioning churches in the interstices. Family churches revolve around one family that supports and directs the activities of that church. Priest centered, or "Parish," churches revolve around the rector, vicar, or priest in charge to the end that almost nothing can be accomplished without the priest's direction. Program churches shift responsibility for all but the liturgy to the laity with the priest directing, encouraging, and coordinating. Corporate churches have layers of staff and volunteers to carry out their programs. As you can see, the sociological hierarchy is correlated with size and wealth, although not entirely.

We are a church that has been moving, under Father Michael's guidance, from a parish church to a program church. We are not fully there, but we have taken substantial steps in that direction. Most recent was the Vestry's transfer of program responsibility to the PMC and its focus on providing the financial and organizational structure to support our programs. This change would be folly were it not for the many dedicated parishioners who have undertaken the task to develop and carry out our Formation, Presence, Outreach, Fellowship, Worship, and even Pastoral Care responsibilities. In that regard, special thanks are due Halcyon Koerber for her dedication, leadership, and unstinting efforts. Thanks to her, many others have stepped forward and, I believe, that we have a vision, incomplete as it is, of where we can and want to go.

The next challenge is to articulate that vision. How do we best serve Christ today for those who will know Him and serve tomorrow? Just looking at our campus shows some of the physical weaknesses – the parish hall lacks sufficient facilities to support our continuing programs; the parish house is deteriorating and in a few years will be beyond repair. But more important than the physical facilities is the program itself. How best can we use what God has given us to proclaim the good news and serve others?

In 2003 and 2006, we participated in the Natural Church Development Survey. This survey asks a representative

sampling of the congregation (new members, long time members, those in various leadership positions) to assess the church's spiritual strengths and weaknesses in various categories, including leadership, gift oriented ministry, passionate spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship services, holistic small groups, need oriented evangelism, and loving relationships. The results in 2003, while not disheartening, were not terribly encouraging and focused attention on the need for small groups and greater individual participation. The results in 2006 were very encouraging. We had strengthened our commitment in each category and, while we still had a way to go, seemed to be on the right track. Now is the time to assess our congregation again and see if we are still on course. We will soon be contacting a limited number of parishioners to ask for help in making this assessment.

But simply determining where we are is not enough. We still must sharpen our vision. This can be done in the abstract (e.g., we should offer weekday child care to working parents; we should use our facilities for elder care, etc. ), or by examining our facilities use (we are, of course, limited to what is possible on our campus). The possibilities are, however, substantial (should we raze the parish house and build a new architecturally compatible facility that can be used for multiple purposes – if yes, for what purposes and where will the funds come from?).

Your Vestry is in the beginning stages of asking and answering the questions that we hope will lead to a renewed vision for Ascension . We have created a planning committee to investigate the questions mentioned above. As we determine various viable possibilities over the next couple of months, we will be asking for your input. I urge you to share your suggestions with us at that time.

The glory of Easter lifts our spirits. Christ's Ascension asks us to look beyond our immediate space. And the arrival of the Holy Spirit reminds us that all is possible. Please join our quest for a new vision for Ascension as we enter our 125th year of serving Christ today for those who will serve Christ in this place tomorrow.

Yours in Christ, Ted

### Active Military Pictures Wanted

Matt Bamberger's official Navy photograph is on the hallway bulletin board along with his current address.

Parents, Grandparents, Uncles, Aunts, and Cousins, where are the pictures of your family's Service Man or Woman?

If you have put a name on our "Currently Serving in the Military List," bring us a photograph along with the Service Person's name, rank, branch of service, and posting location.

During the Prayers of the People we learn their names, but few of us know their faces. We want to know them better!

## The Honor of Being a Lay Reader

A few weeks ago I sat down to "go through stuff," and I came across a journal I had written about 10 years ago. I love to journal....it has been something I have done since I was 9 years old when I received my first diary with the little lock and key. It is full of childhood dreams and memories. When I happened on this 10 year old journal of mine, I cracked it open and started reading about a very important day in my life....the first time I served God in his house as a Lay Reader. This journal entry inspired me to write about how amazing it is for me to serve God in this manner.

As a little girl sitting in the pews of Ascension Church on Sunday mornings, I would watch the boys serving as acolytes with great interest. I watched each and every thing they did, and I just knew that I could do the same thing. Being an acolyte seemed to me the very best way that I could serve God in His house. I wanted to carry the cross, and I wanted to "bring things to the altar." But in those days, it was not meant to be....and believe me, I asked! "They" told me "no, the boys do that." A bit perplexed at the moment, I accepted without objection. (I was also told boys only when I went to sign up to play baseball, but that is another storyJ)

Life went on, and I grew up. I went away to college, I went away to graduate school, but I always came home for holidays, vacations, and church at Ascension. After I lived in another state for a while, I returned home to my beloved Sierra Madre and Ascension. Funny how time really does change things....this time I sat in church and watched Karen Mooradian perform her duties as the first woman Lay Reader. A huge smile broke out on my face. Our time had come. Up to this point, I had been focusing on finding the work God had planned for me in my daily life and serving Him through my work. I was led to places I was not expecting and ended up in a profession I never considered when I ventured off to college. God knew where He needed me, and with His guidance, I saw my path clearly. Working with and amongst the Deaf has been and continues to be my life's work for God. But coming home to Ascension once again, I could see that I could now serve God in a new way....by serving at the altar of His home. I asked, and this time I was told yes.

Serving as a Lay Reader is something I hold dear to my heart. I have always felt a sense of awe when I walk into our church....the beauty of it, the history it has for me, the amazing warmth and love I feel within those walls, the familiar pew, the friends and family, God's large and spiritual presence. It is like no other place for me. Like a little child, I get goose bumps and I feel as if something wonderful is going to happen. And it does happen. The word of God is shared. When I stand up there and read the lessons, I feel a huge responsibility to be sure that God's word is expressed in a thought provoking way. The lessons we hear are crucial to our daily lives and impact the work we do when we exit the doors at the back. The words are our food, and it is my honor to be delivering them. I take reading God's word very seriously, but I also feel great joy; the Holy Spirit surrounds me, and I feel God working through me with each word. When I follow our beloved Priests with the communion goblet, I enjoy looking in your eyes, perhaps slightly touching your hand, exchanging a smile, assisting your children, telling you that this is the cup of salvation, and completing your communion experience.

I love to look at all your faces as you come to the railing and watch you as you take communion. I feel I have connected with you on a level that I would not otherwise get to experience. It is a brief moment during which we share something very special.

It has been over 10 years now, and being a Lay Reader and serving God in His house is one of the most important parts of my service in this life. I always knew, way back to when I was a little girl, that "being up there" would feel special and inspiring. It's transforming.

Jennifer Jesser

Please prayerfully consider becoming a Lay Eucharistic Minister. As Jennifer has written, this ministry is a special way to serve God, the Church, and your fellow parishioners. Other ways you can be a part of the Worship Ministry include singing in the choir, joining the Altar Guild, or becoming an usher or presenter, a congregational lector, a prayers of the people reader, an acolyte, or a welcomer. . If you feel called to serve in any of these ways, contact Father Michael, Father Kirby or our Worship Ministry Leader Nonie Lathrop.

### Notes from the Loft

A huge word of thanks to all who made our glorious Easter music possible – to our wonderful choristers and to our gracious donors who funded the guest musicians! Ascension's Easter tradition continued with a very full choir loft and, of course, trumpeter Jay Cohen. I spent most of post-Easter week humming the hymns and anthems that were sung – I hope that the music of the day remained with you long into the week as well.

Speaking of thanks, I must express my deep gratitude to all of you for your many gestures of support during my recuperation from surgery – your prayers, cards, and phone calls meant more than you can know. As well, I appreciated Father Smith's hospital visit – and Father Bamberger's attempted visit (security turned him away – can you believe that?!). My heartfelt thanks also go to Father Larson for filling in for me at the organ console. It is good, indeed, to be among you again.

Please remember the Association of Anglican Musicians Los Angeles Conference from June 28 through July 3. Information regarding the conference may be found at <http://aam09.org/home.html>. A hard copy is also posted on the Parish Hall bulletin board. The conference is in need of volunteers – if you're interested, please let me know and I'll put you in touch with the volunteer coordinator. It should be an incredibly exciting week, so I hope that some of you will be able to participate – either as registrant or as volunteer.

Continued Easter blessings,  
Debora Huffman, Director of Music and Organist