

**Sunday, October 5
THE BLESSING OF THE ANIMALS
and
"Goat Day"**

Bring your animals to church:
birds, dogs, cats, snakes, fish, whatever!
The blessing will take place after the 10:15 mass

Special "pinata" collection for Episcopal Relief and Development
for the purchase of sustainable animals
as part of Ascension's Stewardship in 2008, focused on food

EACH PERSON IS ASKED TO DONATE ONE DOLLAR OR MORE
One goat is \$85. We have donated 6 goats so far this year!

In 2000, the Episcopal Church adopted the UN Millennium Goals
Goal #1 is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

ST. MARY'S GUILD

I invite all women of Ascension to our next St. Mary's meeting and potluck luncheon on Saturday, October 18th at 11:30 am in the Parish Hall.

St. Mary's is a wonderful group of ladies who get together about 4 or 5 times a year to help with our social activities at Church, (i.e.) Ministry Fair, Easter Brunch, Evensong receptions, and other special events. St. Mary's also helps children in need of camper sponsorships; therefore, on occasion we'll arrange fund raisers.

Please join us on October 18th for a potluck luncheon, fellowship, and the opportunity to hear a talk on positive thinking, changing behaviors and beliefs by Laura Wilcox.

Lisa Reed, President

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
OUTREACH
PRESENCE**

The Episcopal Church of the Ascension



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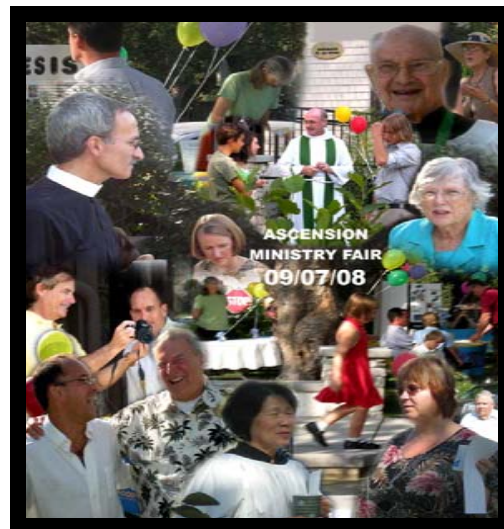
From the Rector

As you may have noticed, my message this month has taken the position of "the final word." Stewardship in the broadest sense is the primary message of this month's Spire. The Senior Warden has shared with you some important facts. His job is to be the bearer of bad news, or at least a word of concern. The final word should always be a word of faith and hope.

I continue to believe that our fundamental mission here at the Church of the Ascension is sound; and, in the long run, our viability as a faithful community is not in question. Over the years our parish has gone through periods of recommitment. All the indications are that we are on the verge of such a period. We have young families. We have dedicated people providing Christian education and formation for all ages. There are exciting opportunities for mission and outreach. And most of all, we have a warm and caring congregation. Our main task is to recommit ourselves and invite others to join us in our commitment to serving Christ. I believe God has blessed us for the last 123 years and that His blessing will be made manifest in our own time.

Yours in Christ,

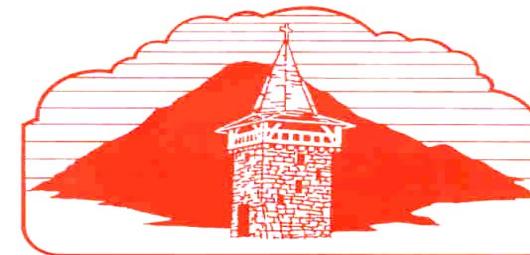
MAB +



DAUGHTERS OF THE KING

We once again have been requested to send our rosaries to chaplains in the military. Anyone interested in donating money, beads, and/or time to this wonderful ministry is invited to talk with Kathy Anderson or Diane Rhodus

New training sessions to become Daughter's will begin in the very near future. Anyone who is interested should leave her name and number with the church office. You will be contacted by Diane or Kathy for training.



The SPIRE

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

October 2008

Worship

Sundays

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

Wednesday

6:00pm Mass

Thursdays

7am Mass

Fridays

12pm Mass



Stewardship: What's going on at Ascension?

Too often, we think of Stewardship as Stewardship. However, there's much more to it. Stewardship is the process of giving of oneself to further the work of God. The full spectrum of Stewardship can be found at Ascension, and there are many opportunities to participate.

What we do:

Parishioners give freely of their time, contributing to the ministries of the Church. These ministries strengthen our bonds to God and each other. There are too many to comprehensively list on a single page; here are just a few:

- Breadmakers bake the bread we share during Eucharist
- Small group participants help each other to grow in Christ
- Lay Eucharistic ministers bring the sacrament and a measure of cheer to those who can't attend
- Coffee hour hosts facilitate fellowship by providing an excuse to stay after the service

What we give:

Monetary giving is (a) Biblically mandated, (b) good for you, and (c) essential to the ministry of the Church. There are many opportunities for giving:

- Annual giving supports all of the ministries of the church

Keeps the doors open to the community

Will, increasingly, support our ministry of outreach

- Capital campaign giving
Enables making our campus safe, accessible, and beautiful
Preserves this place for future generations
- Long Term giving
Affirms that the work of the Church will continue long after we stop attending
- Outreach giving
UTO and Episcopal Relief and Development address compelling human need

What we share:

Parishioners strive to make our Church a welcoming place. (In fact, we have a welcoming ministry specifically to make sure new folks don't go unnoticed). But it's not enough to just be ready. We are also called to actively share our faith and invite others to join our fellowship. Ask folks how they came to Ascension; you'll hear some good stories.

What we demonstrate:

Ascensionites strive to live out God's mandates in everyday life. We are called to consciously think about what God gives us and to use those things for the greater good:

- In their personal and professional lives, parishioners strive to be not only ethical, but also moral
- The parish values adoption. A few families have recently become stewards of a new life, or are in the process of doing so.
- Folks with the gift of free time volunteer. For example, there is a small group of parishioners who visit and support individuals who have been imprisoned.

We strive to be a reflection of our faith

So please take this (and every!) opportunity to think about what you have been given and what you have to give.

Upcoming Events

9/27 Daughters of the King Quiet Day

10/5 Blessing of the Animals/Day of the Goat

10/9 Vestry Meeting

10/26 Parish Ministry Council Meeting

11/1 Safe church seminar

11/09 Evensong and Potluck

Senior Warden's Blog - October 2008

Kathy and I are about to, as they say across the pond, go on holiday. We will be spending some time in the Northeast and Canada seeing the fall changes in color (and visiting with Mother Jennifer). Of course, the impetus for this trip is not so sublime, as at its end we will head to Washington, D. C. (read Quantico, Va.) for the 52nd anniversary of my Marine Corps Basic Class and to celebrate the 233rd birthday of the Corps.

Of the approximately 650 members of my Basic School class, we expect that perhaps 150 of the 500 living members will attend. Curiously, only a handful of this group made the Marine Corps their career (we did have 4 general officers and numerous colonels and lieutenant colonels among those who did). Most of the group moaned and groaned and griped and sniped throughout their active and inactive service. Indeed, the goal of the great majority was to get out and earn enough money so that they could buy the Corps and close it down! Not really- although one member of our class owns the Irvine Company and probably could buy the Corps and close it down!

Based upon my experiences, I believe gripes and groans are a part of the life of every organization, even here at Ascension. While I hear a few moans and groans and gripes and snipes from Parishioners, these complaints are, like those of my Marine compatriots, made in a loving and creative (if occasionally frustrated) way. We all want to see things get better. We all want to further the mission of our church. While some are unhappy about certain things done or embraced by Ascension or the larger church, few want to see either closed down. But sadly, even though we fervently wish otherwise, the possibility of shutting down Ascension may soon be facing us.

As we approach year-end, we face another budget deficit of massive proportions (approximately 15% to 20% of the budget). Last year we were fortunate to have a year-end outpouring of generosity that offset the anticipated deficit; but as I write this article, the market has gone down 500 points, and I wonder whether a similar outpouring of good will is possible. In light of this situation, let me comment on causes and then offer some unpalatable solutions.

Our church has approximately 100 pledging units (105 last year, 98 at the beginning of this year, 94 now); the pledged amount is relatively stable (\$180,541 last year, \$200,255 at the beginning of this year, about \$197,500 at the end of July). Other income including plate offerings, endowment income, and facilities use fees make up the balance of the \$268,000 of income projected at the beginning of the year. We budgeted expenses of about \$282,000 (yes, we optimistically budgeted a \$14,000 deficit believing that the funds would materialize). Unfortunately, an unbooked tax payment from 2007, a mis-allocated insurance cost, a decrease in pledges and plate offerings, and unexpected other expenses have increased the current deficit to about \$22,000, a deficit which we project to grow to about \$45,000 by year's end.

While the Vestry is charged with keeping our Church within our budget, in practice there is little that it can do: 68.2% of the expense is salaries and benefits; 27.4% is other fixed costs such as utilities, diocesan assessment, insurance, paper, postage and the like. That leaves only about 4.6% (less than \$15,000) that the Vestry can easily manipulate (but who wants to cut catechesis, altar supplies, or maintenance?). We had hoped to get at least one filming gig; but at the present time, movie contracts seem to be few and far between.

Clearly, we need to increase our income. For your information, our pledges as of the end of July were as follows:

Pledge Amounts 2008				
Pledges	Amount Pledged	Weekly Amount	Percent of Pledges	Total
1	>10,000	\$ 200.00	1.02%	\$ 10,400.00
4	> 8,000	150.00	4.08%	31,200.00
2	> 6,000	110.00	2.04%	11,440.00
5	> 4,000	60.00	5.10%	15,600.00
19	> 2,000	35.00	19.39%	34,580.00
67	> 0	27.00	68.37%	94,280.00
98		\$ 3,798.00	100.00%	\$ 197,500.00

Considering that we have lost four of those pledging units, I suspect that we are pretty tapped out in seeking pledges; and given the state of the economy, I am hesitant to turn to those who have pledged for help. Of course, there are approximately 60 parishioners who don't pledge; and if even just a few of them felt moved to contribute to our church, it would help. If we pay the projected deficit from the endowment funds, the church will be broke in about 5 years. That is unacceptable. So, difficult times call for difficult solutions. Here are a few:

1. Eliminate the music program and try to make up the remaining deficit through increased or additional pledges;
2. Sell the parking lot to a developer;

(continued from page 2)

3. Sell the parking lot to Gooden School and lease it back for use on Sundays;
4. Sell the Parish House to a developer (or the Parish House and the parking lot);
5. Sell the classrooms to Gooden School and lease them back for use on Sundays;
6. Sell the playground to a developer (or co-develop it, erecting condominiums from which we could derive rental income); or
7. Any combination of the foregoing.

I don't know that any of the foregoing is desirable, but something must be done as we are not living within our means. If you have read *THE HISTORY OF A PARISH* by Catherine Turney, you will know that the first solution offered to solve recurring fiscal problems was to sell the Parish House, Rectory, or other property, and that actual sales of church property did sustain the church in its direst hours. It is sad that we have come to this pass once again.

Father Michael has faith that the Lord will provide. I am not so sanguine. I think the Lord needs our help. I ask not only for your prayers, but also for your suggestions and support.

Yours in Christ, Ted

PASTORAL CARE

Lay Eucharistic Ministers/Visitors

Lay Eucharistic Ministers are chosen by Father Michael to administer the Sacramental wine at the altar. The LEMS are also asked to read the lessons during the worship service. Another duty of some of the LEMS is to take communion to shut-ins following the service on Sundays, (these are the Lay Eucharistic Visitors). Visiting our shut-ins is a most fulfilling ministry as it allows us to bring the joy of communion to those who would otherwise be unable to receive. We need

more volunteers to become Lay Eucharistic Ministers. Please prayerfully consider becoming a LEM; it is a special way to serve God, the Church, and Parishioners. If you are interested, you can contact Father Michael, Rev'd Kirby Smith or Karen Mooradian.



NOTES FROM THE LOFT



One of my favorite aspects of attending summer music conferences is participating in the choral reading sessions. During one session this summer at Houston, I discovered a powerful anthem written by Anthony Caesar (b. 1924), an English clergyman, organist, and composer. The text is taken from Psalms 127 and 134:

Except the Lord build the house, their labour is but lost that build it.

Behold now, praise the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord;

Ye that by night stand in the house of the Lord; even in the courts of the house of our God,

Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the Lord. Alleluia. Amen.

Both solemn and joyful moods are portrayed, ending with a quiet feeling of peace. The choir will present this anthem for the first time on October 5 – I hope you'll enjoy it. The communion anthem for the 5th is Thomas Tallis' "If Ye Love

Me, Keep My Commandments." Anthems for the rest of the month include:

October 12: Rejoice in the Lord Always – Henry Purcell; Put Peace Into Each Other's Hands – John Hooker

October 19: Salvation Has Come to Us – Robert Powell; Christ Be With Me – K. Lee Scott

October 26: Eternal God – John Rutter; God Has Spoken, Bread Is Broken – Jeremy Young

Each September it's a joy for me to have the choir return to the loft, to be able to make music with them both on Sundays and at our Wednesday rehearsals. This season I've been particularly appreciative of their efforts – after what was for me a rather nontraditional summer. All is right with the world – well, at least with our world – with the choir in the loft!

Have you noticed a new face in the choir? Recently we were pleased to welcome soprano Anna Thomas to our ranks – when you see her, do express your appreciation for her gift of time and talent.

Debora Huffman, Director of Music and Organist