The January 2026 SPIRE

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

Upcoming Events

Please see the calendar on page 4 for an updated list of events.

Tuesday, January 6th
4:00pm

End of Christmas Hymns and Carol Sing-along and Concert in the Parish Hall

Come sing your favorite Christmas songs with Dr. Stephen Marshall playing the piano!

Light refreshments will be served.

From the Rector

As the New Year approaches, I have decided to reflect a little on what we experienced in 2025. It certainly wasn't the best year of our lives, but I can't say it was all bad either.

2025 reinforced in me the need to continue to be flexible in planning for worship and community life. We started off the year with fires. It was a long winter and spring for so many people. We all know someone who lost everything. The trauma persists for our community.

2025 also brought opportunities to enjoy new dimensions to our family life. Baby Jack is now toddler Jack. He and Elsie are in constant motion. Debbie and I are on our way to visit for a week after Christmas. Grandparenting is a great job.

2025 brought the realities of transitions home for us. In November, we elected a new bishop for this diocese – Antonio Gallardo. He will be consecrated in July and will succeed Bishop Taylor. Our new friend Father Bob Gaestel retired as long time Rector of the Church of the Angels, and he and his wife Tracy have landed with us.

The realities of the past few years have taught us that we can think out of the boxes we have constructed and thought were immutable. For example, having to postpone the 2021 Parish Annual Meeting gave us freedom to realize that the Annual Meeting doesn't "have" to be held the last Sunday of January. This year again we're scheduling it for the last Sunday of February.

Personally, on behalf of myself and my colleagues, we're very thankful for the generosity shown to us in the "Clergy Purse."

I pray that 2026 will be better for all of us and uneventful. I wish you all a Happy New Year.

Blessings,
Father Michael+

DECEMBER 2025 Pledge Payment Snapshot

2024 Budget $205,150

YTD Budget:	$205,150
YTD Actual:	$201,951
Difference:	$-3,199

2025 Ascension Christmas Outreach

Thanks to everyone who participated in the Christmas Outreach project with Hillsides. Together Ascension donated **$1050** in gift cards. Hillsides distributed them at Christmas-time to the folks that they serve that were in significant need.

Hillsides

Annual Holiday Shopping Party

Thank you to all who enjoyed the private holiday shopping party at Savor the Flavor on November 22nd. Savor the Flavor donated 10% of the proceeds (**$320**) back to the church.

Introducing Fr. Bob and Tracy Gaestel.

Tracy and I began attending Ascension right after I retired on Pentecost from 42 years as Rector of Church of the Angels in Pasadena. Before that time, I served three years as assisting priest at St. George's La Canada, and prior to that one year as curate at St. Michael and All Angels Studio City. I graduated with a degree in Philosophy from Chapman College and attended Church Divinity School of the Pacific in Berkeley for seminary. Tracy also graduated from Chapman College and we met on Chapman's World Campus Afloat, a semester's voyage from Los Angeles down the west coast of South America through the Straits of Magellan and up the other side across to West Africa and Southern Europe before returning to Florida.

Tracy and I married after my second year of seminary in 1977; and during my third year of seminary, Tracy completed her Master's in Reading and Language Development from Cal Berkeley. I am originally from New Jersey and Tracy is a 4th generation Californian. We have two adult children, Robin and Holly.

Why did I stay at Church of the Angels for so long? Well, there was always something new to do and to learn. I call my time at COA a "play in four acts." The first act was the restoration of the facilities and congregation leading to the church's centennial in 1989. The second act was Tracy and my involvement in *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd,* a Christian spiritual formation program for children certainly, but also a profound deepening of the spiritual life of adults who work in it. Tracy made significant contributions to the spread of CGS and helped develop and strengthen the national organization as a board member for over 20 years. Both she and I took the training in all three levels; and in 1996, I participated in the International Retreat in Assisi working with Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold and Sofia Cavalletti, one of the developers of CGS. Sofia invited me to Rome on three occasions to act as a consultant and to also share how I adapted the presentations in CGS for adults and use in the main Church. During the Centennial of the Diocese, the Archbishop of Canterbury visited Hillsides and came over to Church of the Angels. Fr. Bob gave the Pentecost Presentation to assembled group with the archbishop standing by his side. The archbishop chose the Gift of Wisdom. For Fr. Bob and COA It was, as Humphrey Bogart said in *Casablanca.* "Of all the gin joints in all the world, he walked into mine." The third act was my 12-year involvement with the Pasadena Police Department as a volunteer chaplain. Members of the police department would tell you that I did everything but rappel out of the helicopter. I was in the 80th percentile of marksmanship and learned so much about policing. I'm also a graduate of the Citizen's FBI Academy. I was involved with the police department at the same time that Fr. Michael was a volunteer firefighter. Over the years, we have had many stories to tell and our colleagues referred to us as "homeland security." The final act was protecting COA from existential threats. Someone tried to burn the place down. The arsonist had attacked 30 churches in the Los Angeles area before being caught. Then there was conflict with Hillsides Home over its use of parish property.

Under Tracy's leadership, COA sent a team and built a 15K volume library for Suubi School in Uganda. Tracy retired from Pasadena Unified School District after 25 years as a class room teacher, literacy coordinator, and librarian. She has continued her work in literacy in Africa as a volunteer of the African Library Project that collects and ships books to schools throughout the continent. She has helped to send books to grow the High School for Suubi and is currently working with New Life Academy in Buyende, Uganda to strengthen their reading program and the skills of their teachers.

We are comfortably ensconced in Sierra Madre, renting a house on Highland Ave just down from the Middle School. We are happy to be with all of you at Ascension. Fr. Mike and Debbie, and Tracy and I have shared many common experiences including having had children at the same time. We've been friends for 40 + years.

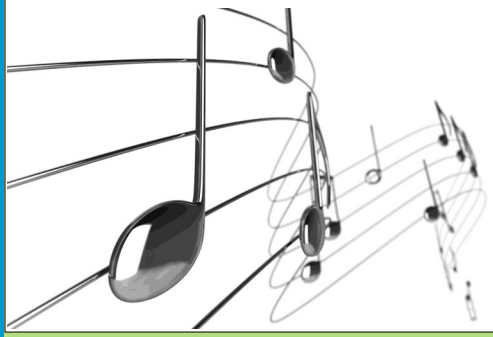
And now we look forward to getting to know all of you and sharing with you our continuing journey into Christ.

Submitted by Father Bob Gaestel

MUSIC AT ASCENSION

Thank you all for your enthusiastic support of holiday music at Ascension! Working collaboratively, we were able to pull together musicians and create musical experiences that were uplifting to our community! A special thanks goes out from me to Father Michael, Kim, and the rest of the Ascension staff for helping me through this, my first Holiday Season here. And, of course, my greatest thanks goes to Colette, Alexandra, Diane, and Lavette for their faithful and capable service through music!

Now, we enter 2026 with a specific goal to grow our choir. Let's add some more voices. People of all ages are welcome to talk with me about joining! We rehearse Sundays 9:00-10:00am. I look forward to hearing from you!

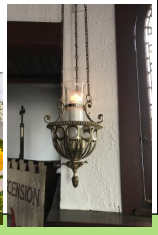


As a final farewell to the Holiday Season and as a way to kick off the New Year, I am inviting everyone to join in some holiday music, a little mini-concert from me, and one more chance to sing your favorite holiday Christmas songs around the piano in the Parish Hall: Tuesday, January 6 (Epiphany) at 4:00pm. Please invite all your friends again and join in the fun!

With Gratitude,
Stephen Marshall

Altar Flowers and Sanctuary Candles

The **2026** sign-up sheets for altar flowers and altar candles are now available on the bulletin board in Hawks Hall. **Payment should be made by CHECK (**$50.00 for flowers and $15.00 for a candle**) payable to Church of the Ascension.**** Please include a note giving the date that you signed up for and any dedication.



SENDING A HEARTFELT THANK YOU TO ALL OF YOU WHO DONATED TO MAKE OUR SANCTUARY SO BEAUTIFUL FOR CHRISTMAS. IT TRULY LOOKED MAGNIFICENT THANKS TO YOUR GENEROUS CONTRIBUTIONS.

IN CHRIST,
ST. ANNE'S ALTAR GUILD

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

WORSHIP, FORMATION, PASTORAL CARE, FELLOWSHIP, OUTREACH, PRESENCE

25 E. Laurel Avenue, Sierra Madre, CA 91024 ~ 626-355-1133 www.ascension-sierramadre.com

JANUARY 2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1 **NEW YEARS DAY** ***PARISH OFFICE CLOSED***	2	3
			Fr. Michael Vacation through January 4th			
4 **8am Worship w/Eucharist** ***Facebook Live*** **9am Choir Rehearsal** **10:15am Worship w/Eucharist** ***Facebook Live*** Fr. Michael Vacation	5 8:15am-9:45am Gooden Chapel **8:30am Yoga/Hall** Fr. Michael out of office/Clergy Support Group	6 10am-10:30am Gooden Chapel End of Christmas Hymns and Carol Sing-along and Concert at 4:00pm/Parish Hall	7 8:15am-9am Gooden Chapel **8:30am Yoga/Hall** **5:30pm Yoga/Hall** **Men's Group Monthly Luncheon/Noon Nano's Café RSVP to Fr. Michael** **6pm Wednesday Night Dinner Grp Meets**	8 **8:15am Mass** **9am Rector's Forum**	9	10 **11am Interment for William O'Doherty/ Memorial Garden**
11 **8am Worship w/Eucharist** ***Facebook Live*** **9am Choir Rehearsal** **10:15am Worship w/Eucharist** ***Facebook Live***	12 8:15am-9:45am Gooden Chapel **8:30am Yoga/Hall**	13 10am-10:30am Gooden Chapel	14 8:15am-9am Gooden Chapel **8:30am Yoga/Hall** **5:30pm Yoga/Hall** **6pm Wednesday Night Dinner Group Meets**	15 **8:15am Mass** **9am Rector's Forum** **10:30am Staff Mtg**	16	17
18 **8am Worship w/Eucharist** ***Facebook Live*** **9am Choir Rehearsal** **10:15am Worship w/Eucharist** ***Facebook Live***	19 **8:30am Yoga/Hall** **MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY** ***PARISH OFFICE CLOSED***	20 10am-10:30am Gooden Chapel **7pm Vestry Meeting/Hall**	21 8:15am-9am Gooden Chapel **8:30am Yoga/Hall** **5:30pm Yoga/Hall** **6pm Wednesday Night Dinner Group Meets**	22 **8:15am Mass** **9am Rector's Forum**	23	24
25 **8am Worship w/Eucharist** ***Facebook Live*** **9am Choir Rehearsal** **10:15am Worship w/Eucharist** ***Facebook Live***	26 8:15am-9:45am Gooden Chapel **8:30am Yoga/Hall**	27 10am-10:30am Gooden Chapel	28 8:15am-9am Gooden Chapel **8:30am Yoga/Hall** **5:30pm Yoga/Hall** **6pm Wednesday Night Dinner Group Meets**	29 **8:15am Mass** **9am Rector's Forum**	30	31

Spire Creator: Kim Lumino, Parish Administrator