The July 2026 SPIRE

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

Upcoming Events

Please see the calendar on page 8 for an updated list of events.

"Here's a unique way to support our parish! If you have a car, truck, boat or other vehicle that's become a nuisance, you can now donate that vehicle to Ascension. You'll be able to write the value of the vehicle off as a tax deduction and Ascension will benefit from the proceeds of its sale. Simply call **855-500-RIDE** or visit

http://www.careasy.org/nonprofit/the-episcopal-church-of-the-ascension

to schedule a free pickup. All you need is the vehicle's title-- the CARS service will handle the rest."

CARS is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization

based out of San Diego, California.

JUNE 2026 Pledge Payment Snapshot

2026 Budget $165,000

YTD Budget:	$82,500
YTD Actual:	$80,445
Difference:	$-2,055

From the Rector

Many of you know that I am a big fan of Dodger baseball. One look inside my office will tell you that. I enjoy watching as many games as I can. Often, while watching a game, I text back and forth with my friend Greg Larkin – also known as "Canon Baseball."

Occasionally, I get invited to attend a game in person – usually with another friend – Steve Nishibayashi. (Steve is the Secretary of Convention of the Diocese of Los Angeles.) I'm hoping my love of the Dodgers will rub off on my grandkids, but they live in a different time zone.

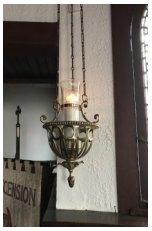
I know it's a little strange that I only follow the Dodgers. I'm not into basketball, football, soccer, or any other major league sport. So my season is 162 games plus spring training (and hopefully the post-season.) It's about all I can handle.

I hope you'll join us for Episcopal Night at Dodger Stadium Thursday night September 3rd. It's always fun to gather with friends from around the Diocese to enjoy a game.

Blessings,
Father Michael+

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.



FRIENDS IN DEED*

Please join in Ascension's monthly collection of specific "Gold Items" for Friends in Deed. They include canned tuna and chicken, hearty soups, stew, chili, pasta and pasta sauce, peanut butter, cereal, rice, oil, sugar, flour, fruit juice, and vegetable juice (V8).

Look for the donation bin at the back of the church.

From Your Vestry

It's really happening! After 40 years as Rector of Church of the Ascension, Father Michael announced that he is retiring at the end of this year. He will celebrate his last mass as Rector on All Saints Day (Sunday, November 1st).

It is only natural for there to be differing emotions, views, thoughts, and concerns about the future of our church without Father Michael. When I first heard about his plans, I asked myself, "Who will help guide us as we plan for the future?" In addition to praying for guidance, I looked at our vison statement for inspiration, "We serve Christ today for those who will come to know and serve Christ tomorrow."

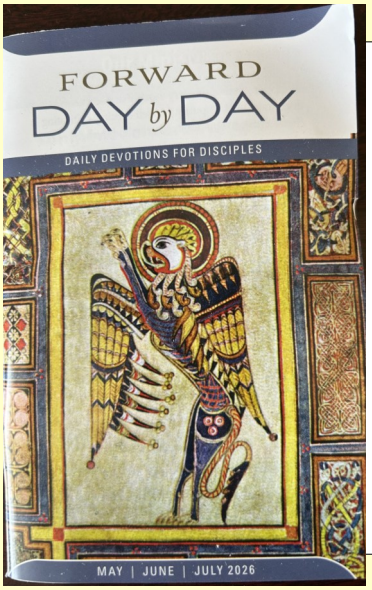
What will serving Christ tomorrow look like for our church? How will we maintain, practice, and expand on our six ministries of worship, fellowship, pastoral care, formation, outreach, and presence? As the self-described "village church," what will our future role be in the community we serve? Taking time to reflect on questions like these will help guide us toward finding a new Rector, one who understands our needs and can lead us to a future that builds on our rich history and traditions.

The discernment/transition process will take time. It includes guidelines and expectations determined by the Diocese and national church. It also involves several stages, beginning with the appointment of a transition committee. At its last meeting in June, the vestry called on Rob Stockly, Jon Prentice, Jean Rowe, Lynne Holl, and Walker Williams to serve on the transition committee. Some of the committee's initial tasks include planning events that celebrate Father Michael's long history of dedication to Ascension, as well as scheduling ample opportunities for parishioners to provide input on the future of the church through surveys, focus groups, and other meetings.

Strong, two-way communication throughout this process is a priority for us. I encourage you to reach out and share your thoughts with the transition committee or members of the vestry. (Senior Warden: Walker Williams, Junior Warden: Marie Prentice, Clerk: Adela Gomez, Treasurer: Dan Hanson, Niall Dalton, Lynne Holl, David Kassabian, Jean Rowe)

Working together and remaining focused on the important aspects that make Church of the Ascension special, we can build on our successful140-year history.

Walker Williams
Senior Warden
wgwilliams757@gmail.com



Pick up a copy of the Forward Movement Day by Day Booklet. Copies can be found at the back of the church and on the reception table in Hawks Hall.

A $2 donation is requested.

Last July, the IRS reversed a decades-long regulation that prohibited houses of worship and non-profits from endorsing candidates for political office. This regulation was known as the Johnson Amendment because Senator Lyndon Johnson had it inserted in IRS regulations because a preacher from Texas had urged his congregation to vote against him and for the other candidate.

At the liturgy that week, Fr. Michael talked about it at the announcements. And following precedent found in the Good Book, the Book of Daniel to be exact, Fr. Michael, "robed in white raised his right hand and left hand toward heaven and swore by him who lives forever and ever, that for a time, two times, and half a time," he would not tell the congregation how to vote. The multitude there present let out a huge sigh of relief.

Ah, but the devil is in the details, which is why St. Thomas Aquinas made himself a master of making distinctions, a signature style of his theology. Like how many angels can dance on the head of a pin, St. Thomas wants to know what do you mean by how?

At Church of the Angels, I had no hesitation of telling the congregation how to vote in elections. My telling parishioners how to vote was and is sanctioned by the *Book of Common Prayer.* It's found in the *Prayer for Our Country,* which I remember being told in Sunday School that the prayer was composed by none other than George Washington. (Actually, it was composed by the **Rev. George Lyman Locke** (1835–1919) for inclusion in the 1982 Book of Common Prayer. But, as they say in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence,* "Print the legend.")

A line of the prayer says this: "Endue with the spirit of wisdom, those to whom in thy Name, we entrust the authority of government." Do you hear an echo of something said at the founding of our country? Endue? Endow? "We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men (inclusive language had not appeared yet) are created equal and they are **endowed** by their Creator with certain inalienable rights…And to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men (there's that word again) deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

So, who is really sovereign? It's us. It's each of us and all of us together. If that is true, then when we vote, while party, political philosophy, the concerns of the time and place, proposals for actions to be taken, reforms to be instituted, all play their respective parts, that's not all of it, nor is it the most important part. The prayer is telling us that as self-governing people, we don't because we can't, all assemble together like the Athenian democracy of old. We must choose representatives, and that means those to whom in God's name **we entrust the authority of government.** We entrust that with which we have been endowed by our Creator.

It puts a different light on things, doesn't it? We'll soon be celebrating 250 years of citizens of the United States doing just this. So, following St. Thomas Aquinas in making important distinctions, I never told the parishioners at Church of the Angels either **what** to vote for, or **who** to vote for. That really was for them, as well as me to decide. But **how** to vote, you bet. Those to whom in your name we entrust the authority of government. How should we vote? We should vote like that.

Submitted by Fr. Bob Gaestel

Dodgers

Los Angeles
Dodgers
vs.
St. Louis
Cardinals

The Dodgers welcome The Diocese of Los Angeles!

Thursday, September 3rd, 7pm

Tickets only $48!

- Sign-up sheet on bulletin board in Hawks Hall or call/email the parish office.
- Deadline for ordering tickets is Sunday, July 19

MODULATIONS

By Dr. Stephen Marshall

With Father Michael's retirement announcement, Ascension is now, officially, entering a time of significant transition. Father Michael has gifted this community with his leadership, ministry, and personal faith. I am personally grateful to have had the opportunity to work and minister together with him.

As we spend the coming months focused on how we will experience this transition, I can't help but think of a musical comparative: MODULATION. Modulation is the change of key - the shifting of the tonal center in the music. I am hopeful that during this transitional period, the music at Ascension can be a binding, comforting, and expectant contribution — one that helps to encourage, support, and even inspire in the following ways: toward celebration of what has been, an understanding of where we are together, and an expectancy of how Ascension can move forward, building on the legacy with which we have all been gifted.

If these musical possibilities spark any responsive interest in you and you might like to engage with me in any of it, please let me know. As a response to the ministry of Father Michael and with a sense of expectancy, may it be an exciting modulation for us all!

On June 6, 2026, our very own, David Kassabian, graduated from Bosco Tech and was his class Valedictorian. David is a member of the vestry and in the fall will be attending Pomona College.

David is pleased to share his commencement address with the Ascension Community. We could all learn a little something from Sisyphus.

Best of luck David and know you have our continued prayers for your journey and future successes.

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Good evening to the administration, faculty, alumni, the class of 2026, their friends, and their loved ones.

My name is David Kassabian, and I am honored to be the Valedictorian and Class President of the Class of 2026.

I would like to begin by thanking everyone who has had an impact on our graduating class. Through your guidance, support, and investment in us, we have grown into young men prepared to face what the world has to offer. We would not be set up as well as we are today for what comes next without you, and we thank you.

Throughout high school, one quote has echoed in my mind: "One must imagine Sisyphus happy."

Albert Camus wrote these words in his essay, The Myth of Sisyphus. He saw a parallel between the Greek myth and the cyclical nature of life.

In the myth, Sisyphus was a king who repeatedly outsmarted the gods. As punishment for his antics, they condemned him to push a massive boulder up a mountain. Each time he neared the summit, the boulder rolled back down, forcing him to begin again, and this cycle continued for eternity.

Camus argues that Sisyphus' fate mirrors our human experience. Life is cyclical, marked by moments of success and failure, and there is always another summit visible in the distance. This endless pursuit can leave us exhausted and uncertain:

If we are always chasing something, what's the point in catching up?

In his quote, Camus posits that the process itself is the point.

To imagine Sisyphus happy is to imagine him deriving meaning from the process rather than the outcome. To imagine Sisyphus happy is to find purpose in monotony and to rebel against despair. To imagine Sisyphus happy is to live with determination, staying the course unapologetically.

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Looking around, I see many people who have done exactly this. I see people who have pushed past injuries to excel at their sport. I have seen people turn a C into an A before the end of a semester. I have seen people get into colleges that they viewed as a reach just months ago.

All of you have kept pushing your boulder up your mountain, and in doing so have rejected despair and derived meaning in whatever journey you were in the throws of. You all have imagined Sisyphus happy, and by virtue, imagined yourselves happy.

Naturally, it is tempting to think of graduation as the summit. For years, this day has existed as a distant goal. We counted down semesters, completed assignments, prepared for exams, and made plans for what would come next. Although ever present in our minds, conscious or unconscious, it feels like it has still caught us by surprise. For two reasons, we can think of this as an end: We have been working to get here for four years, and we just got here sooner than we may have imagined. So, now that we are here in regalia celebrating the end of this chapter of our lives, I warn you:

As exciting as tonight is, graduation is not the end of the climb. We will wake up tomorrow to find that the boulder has rolled down the mountain, and we will have to chase after it to keep pushing yet again.

For some of us, that boulder will be adapting to life hundreds or thousands of miles from home. For others, it will be entering the workforce, serving our communities, supporting our families, discerning what path we're meant to follow, honing our craft, and finding peace with God and ourselves. We will encounter setbacks. Our boulders will roll down the mountain- the cycle will continue- But we can take comfort in knowing that we are capable of chasing after them and beginning again. We take comfort in knowing that we find solace in the process rather than giving up.

As we leave this place and begin the next chapter of our lives, I leave you with the same words that have guided me throughout high school:

One must imagine Sisyphus happy.

And I urge you: you must imagine yourselves happy.

Holy Eucharist in thanksgiving for America's 250th birthday

Sunday, July 5, 2026

8:00 a.m. Holy Eucharist Rite 1

10:15 a.m. Holy Eucharist Rite 2

Coffee Hour following: 10:15 Liturgy

Apple Pie & Ice Cream

Forward Movement
inspire disciples. empower evangelists.

Forward Today: Bless Our Land

Wednesday, June 28, 2017

Dear friends in Christ,

Early next week, the United States will celebrate its Independence Day. The day is more than the sales that will probably keep malls and stores busy this weekend. The day is more than a few fireworks. Independence Day is a day to give thanks for the blessings of this nation and to recommit to treasuring and building up the ideals of our country.

Photo by Flickr user Celso FLORES / Creative Commons

As Episcopalians will know, this day is a red letter day in the Book of Common Prayer. It's a Major Feast day, and churches are meant to have celebrations of the Holy Eucharist on this day. Our prayer book provides a couple of prayers and a set of readings for the occasion. There's another prayer I quite like, a prayer that we might all say on or near Independence Day. It's not specific to the United States, so readers from other nations might use it also.

Almighty God, who hast given us this good land for our heritage: We humbly beseech thee that we may always prove ourselves a people mindful of thy favor and glad to do thy will. Bless our land with honorable industry, sound learning, and pure manners. Save us from violence, discord, and confusion; from pride and arrogance, and from every evil way. Defend our liberties, and fashion into one united people the multitudes brought hither out of many kindreds and tongues. Endue with the spirit of wisdom those to whom in thy Name we entrust the authority of government, that there may be justice and peace at home, and that, through obedience to thy law, we may show forth thy praise among the nations of the earth. In the time of prosperity, fill our hearts with thankfulness, and in the day of trouble, suffer not our trust in thee to fail; all which we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer, page 820)

This prayer reminds us - both as citizens and as people of faith - that we must remember both our rights and blessings and our duties and obligations. In particular, we have a sacred duty to look out for the lost, the least, and the last. As Emma Lazarus wrote for the Statue of Liberty, "Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Ours is a nation of people yearning to be free. Let us all seek to make a nation where all are free. And when we see that oppression and captivity are preventing freedom, let us open our hearts and the doors of our churches to give sanctuary to those in need of protection and safety.

This Independence Day, let us indeed celebrate our many blessings. But let us also remember that righteousness and justice demand constant vigilance.

Yours faithfully,

Scott Gunn, Executive Director

*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

JULY 2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1 8:30am Yoga/Hall 5:30pm Yoga/Hal Men's Group Luncheon Nano Café Noon—RSVP to Fr. Michael 6Pm-Wed Night Dinner Group Meets	**2** 8:15am Mass 9am Rector's Forum 10:30am Staff Mtg	**3** Parish Office Closed for the 4th of July Holiday	**4**
5 8am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live* 10:15am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live*	**6** 8:30am Yoga/Hall Fr. Michael Out of Office-Clergy Support Grp	**7**	**8** 8:30am Yoga/Hall 5:30pm Yoga/Hal 6Pm-Wed Night Dinner Group Meets	**9** 8:15am Mass 9am Rector's Forum	**10**	**11** 10am-Consecration of new bishop Antonio Gallardo at All Saints Church. In-person attendance will be by invitation only. It will be complemented by community watch parties screening the livestream.
12 8am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live* 10:15am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live*	**13** 8:30am Yoga/Hall	**14**	**15** 8:30am Yoga/Hall 5:30pm Yoga/Hal 6Pm-Wed Night Dinner Group Meets	**16** 8:15am Mass 9am Rector's Forum 10:30am Staff Mtg	**17** 11am—4pm Funeral & Reception for Joseph Pergola Church/Hall	**18** 11am— 4pm Interment & Reception for John Rosema Church/Hall
19 8am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live* 10:15am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live*	**20** 8:30am Yoga/Hall	**21** 7pm Vestry Meeting/Hall	**22** 8:30am Yoga/Hall 5:30pm Yoga/Hal 6Pm-Wed Night Dinner Group Meets	**23** 8:15am Mass 9am Rector's Forum	**24**	**25**
26 8am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live* 10:15am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live*	**27** 8:30am Yoga/Hall	**28**	**29** 8:30am Yoga/Hall 5:30pm Yoga/Hal 6Pm-Wed Night Dinner Group Meets	**30** 8:15am Mass 9am Rector's Forum	**31**	

Spire Creator: Kim Lumino, Parish Administrator