The June 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.

From the Rector

A question I'm starting to get more frequently is "What are you going to do in retirement?" Often I've said that I want to get a dog so that we can take each other on walks. I've also said that I'd like to spend some more time with my grandkids. And, of course, there is a long list of projects for our house.

In the last few days, I've been enthralled, as are many people, with activities in the eagles' nest in Big Bear. Jackie and Shadow have captured my daily attention as we are watching Sandy and Luna preparing to take flight. I have long enjoyed watching birds. I have an app on my phone to record birdcalls and then identify the species. I think in retirement, I may take up "birding" and enjoy being outside more.

Maybe I can get my grandkids into "birding" as well. They are moving very soon to Suffolk, Virginia where there is a nature preserve called The Great Dismal Swamp. Hopefully, the birds won't be dismal.

So we shall see. As I have stated earlier, I will be announcing on or around June 20th when My last Sunday will be. In the meantime, I ask your prayers for me, Debbie, and our beloved parish.

Blessings,
Father Michael+

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.

MAY 2026 Pledge Payment Snapshot

2026 Budget $165,000

YTD Budget:	$68,750
YTD Actual:	$72,200
Difference:	$+3,450

Our world changes constantly, and keeping up can feel impossible. We become distracted and lose sight of God's work in our lives and around us. We hope some person, thing, or event will bring the inner peace we long for—a book, idea, course, trip, or relationship. But as long as we wait for that moment, we keep rushing through life anxious, restless, angry, and dissatisfied.

Being satisfied and at peace with God and ourselves means having the courage to close the door on other possibilities.

Being a courageous person doesn't mean we must become a superman or some heroic character we see in movies. Courage is not the lack of fear, but the virtue of taking right action even when we feel afraid. It is the choice to move forward despite the inner voice of hesitation.

Courage means giving up short-term pleasures to build discipline. Stepping outside our comfort zones, facing fear, and entering difficult situations are part of spiritual growth. As courage grows, so do our confidence, strength, and self-knowledge. We find greater freedom and joy by choosing wisely and letting go of what does not serve our relationship with God.

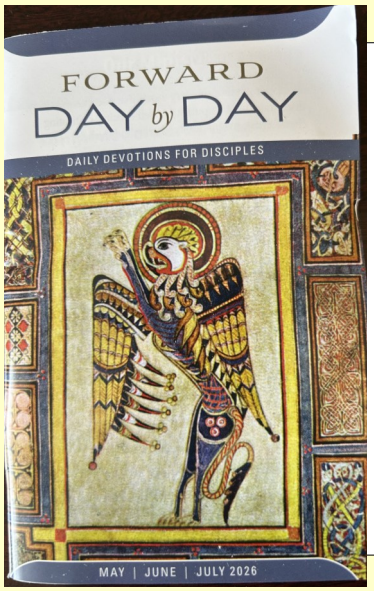
The difficulty is to choose the thing we *need*, not just the thing we *want* in the moment—to look beyond the immediate appeal and ask what aligns with our deeper goals and values.

That's where the practice of focusing on one purpose becomes so vital. It's not about magically finding the "right" path. It's about taking a single path seriously enough to learn from it. Through that experience, you get closer to understanding your true needs. You get an emotional sense of what actually fulfills you. You become closer to God and his working in your life.

Letting go means you may also have to let go of the need for other people's admiration, their opinions, and even their critiques. When you stop chasing the safety of the crowd, you gain deep, personal confidence in your abilities and the strength that only comes from disciplined commitment to your own path.

Courage is not heroic victory but moving forward despite fear. Letting go of people and possibilities we think will make us happy is hard. True peace comes when we stop chasing every option and focus our love and energy on the people and paths we truly need. That is the courage to let go: fully embracing the present without worrying about outcomes, others' opinions, or what we may be missing.

Be well, be blessed, be courageous, let go.
Deacon Ed +



Pick up a copy of the new 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.

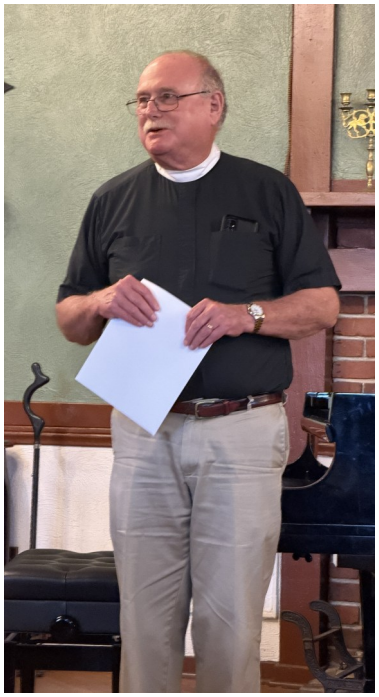
From Your Vestry

Father Michael has announced that he will share important news about his retirement plans around June 20th, the 45th anniversary of his ordination as a priest.

While this announcement saddens all of us, it can also be viewed as an opportunity to thank Father Michael and to celebrate his years of pastoral care, support, and dedication to all the individuals who have made Church of the Ascension their place of worship since 1986.

It is hard to imagine Church of the Ascension without Father Michael. He has been our spiritual leader as well as a teacher, a friend, and the voice of reason during troubled times for hundreds of parishioners and community members for 40 years. However, the Episcopal Church requires that priests retire by age 72.

The Diocese of Los Angeles has guidelines that local parishes are encouraged to follow as they look for a new Rector. This procedure is not considered a job search or hiring process. It is a discernment process that includes several stages with a strong focus on prayer, reflection, and input on the part of the congregation. This process will guide us toward calling a new rector, one who will be a fit for our church.



Part of this process includes appointing a Transition Committee that will work with our parishioners and the diocese to find the right person to lead Church of the Ascension. The vestry recently asked Gordon Tomaske to lead the Transition Committee which will include 3-4 members from the vestry and 3-4 parishioners who do not serve on the vestry.

In one of his recent sermons, Father Michael shared a biblical reference that included the theme of sticking together. We should take this message to heart while discussing our priorities as a religious community. By praying and working together, we will make the right choices. There will be plenty of opportunities for input on the transition process. In the meantime, feel free to share your feelings with me.

Walker Williams
Senior Warden
wgwilliams757@gmail.com

"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.

THANK YOU!
By Dr. Stephen Marshall

The last couple of months have been filled with music at Ascension! From Holy Week and Easter to all the music our choir members have shared, and to the joy of our concert just a couple weeks ago – each part and person has delivered great joy through musical expression.

I express a special "Thank You" to everyone who helped to make the concert with Benny Yi Bing Chu and me such a great success! Being part of a faith community that supports and celebrates its music and musicians is a gift. Great generosity was displayed as we worked together to raise over $3000 at this concert, ensuring more music to come! Thank you everyone who contributed to this entire experience!

As May 31 is our choir's final Sunday of the choir season, I take this opportunity to thank our "fearless four": Colette, Alexandra, Diane, and Lavette! Others, like Gail and Brett, have joined for special occasions as able, in addition to our professional singers singing for Christmas Eve and Easter. I am grateful for each one – and especially call out the amazing commitment of the fearless four! They bring great joy to our worshiping experience every week!

As a side note, IF you have an interest in sharing your musical gifts during the summer months (while our choir is on break), please contact me. I would like to hear from you.

I end this, my first choir season at Ascension, with great joy and gratitude for having the opportunity to serve and minister together with each one of you.

UPDATE: LENTEN OUTREACH PROJECT

Our Lenten Outreach project was very successful, raising $3,300 for Friends in Deed. The staff purchased 2 new EZ-Ups and a new cover for their largest EZ-Up. They are excited to be able to use these in the coming months whether for sun or rain. (See pictures below).

Our food donations continue to be appreciated. Food is delivered about every two weeks by John Holl. Many thanks to him for this ministry. (See picture).

GROW CHRISTIANS
Cultivating Children's Faith in Community

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: a qualitative not quantitative union

By Tim Gavin / June 12, 2022

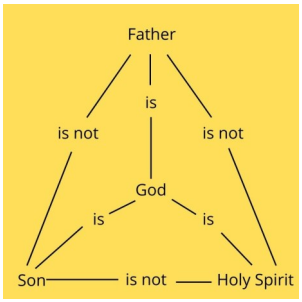
What I remember most about learning my catechism as a child is memorizing facts about why God loved me. Each year, we learned more facts. Finally, with the culmination of our initiation into the Church, we received the sacrament of Confirmation. However, before welcoming the bishop to our church, we had to memorize more facts about the doctrines of the Church.

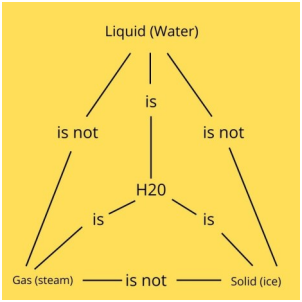
I remember raising my hand one time during our writing and reciting the various facts. Mrs. Finnegan called on me, and I said, "I have a few questions." She nodded her head with approval. You could hear the other students gasp as I questioned the facts. I asked, "How was it possible that Jesus could be 100% human and 100% God at the same time?" She responded, "It's a mystery of the Church. Do you have another question?" I said, "Yes, how can we have three persons in one God? I don't understand the Trinity." She rolled her eyes and said, "You don't need to understand. You just need to have faith in the mystery. So, Mr. Gavin, if you don't have faith to believe, then maybe you aren't ready to receive your Confirmation. Should I inform your parents?" I sheepishly shook my head *no.* She said, "Very well. Let's continue."

As an adult, I am willing to enter into the mystery of many things. The things I don't completely understand, I find hold a certain poetic quality that may seem to live outside the realm of logic. Nevertheless, I like to work out my understanding of the world and God not only through logic but through prayer and reflection. Also, as a teacher in the oldest independent Episcopal school in the country, I like being able to provide my students with some answers to these profound questions. Consequently, I have found that analogy and metaphor, although imperfect, often provide a lens through which to view the great mysteries of Christian doctrine.

As for Christ being 100% human and 100% divine, I have discovered that the nature of Christ is not a quantitative but a qualitative reality. For example, I ask my students if they have siblings. When they respond that they do, I say, "So you are a sister, correct?" The student will nod. I add, "You are a daughter, too, I presume?" They respond affirmatively. "So what percentage are you of each?" Are you 25% sister and 75% daughter." The student will laugh and say, "I am 100% a sister and 100% a daughter." I then move onto the mystery of the Trinity. This is much more complicated. The *imperfect* analogy I use relies on nature.

I draw the following illustration to explain the basic elements of the Trinity:





These two illustrations make the point that nature itself possesses elements that are of one substance and contain three forms. I acknowledge this as a faulty analogy because the form of H_2O changes due to temperature. The three persons of the Trinity remain distinct yet remain as one. As a result, the Trinity holds a mystery beyond human comprehension. Nevertheless, the analogy allows students to see how three distinct forms still share the same substance of H_2O just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are of the same substance.

I acknowledge the imperfection of the analogy. Therefore, I teach them we need to embrace the mystery by contemplating the relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as a qualitative union not a quantitative union. The Trinity is never compartmentalized in which God stops being the Son in order to be the Father or the Holy Spirit. The Trinity is unified by one will.

The Trinity is united by one *will* that exists outside of time and matter while working within the boundaries of time and matter. The will of the Trinity is based on agape love. In the end, no matter how intelligent we seem to be, we need to realize that prayer and faith become the foundation by which we understand God because God is beyond any concept we can imagine.

In the end, I ask my students, "Are humans so intelligent that we can create something that even we can't comprehend?"

The students ponder this question, and they always respond, "No."

GROW CHRISTIANS
Cultivating Children's Faith in Community

Loving and Forgiving with Peter and Paul

By Raymond Capo / June 29, 2025

Although Saint Peter is remembered within our Church calendar on January 18 by his confession of Christ, and the conversion of Saint Paul is commemorated a week later on January 25, it is on this day, June 29, that we commemorate the martyrdom of both saints together.

Church tradition teaches that both Peter and Paul were martyred at the command of Emperor Nero, as Nero blamed Christians for the Great Fire of Rome occurring in 64 C.E. It is believed that Peter requested to be crucified upside down so as not to be crucified in the same manner as Jesus. Tradition teaches that Paul was beheaded in 67 C.E. The commemoration of the martyrdom of Peter and Paul was first observed on June 29, 258 C.E., upon the relocation of their remains at that time in safekeeping from Emperor Valerian, who revoked the legal protection for deceased Christians.

Though today's lectionary readings emphasize the sacrifices Peter and Paul made—Paul declaring that he has "fought the good fight" and "finished the race," and Jesus foretelling the manner of Peter's death, saying he will be taken where he does not wish to go—the Gospel reading opens with a different focus: Jesus commissioning Peter to care for his flock. I particularly like the version of this passage found in the Aramaic Peshitta, the Scripture of the Mar Thoma Church, which is in full communion with all the churches of the Anglican Communion. In this version, Christ charges Peter three times—first to feed his lambs, then his sheep, and finally, his ewes.

As we engage in Christian formation, we do so through the lens of Christ's commendation to Peter, to tend to *ALL* of Christ's flock, inclusive of their genders and ages.

This day presents us with opportune ways to engage *all* persons within our homes and Church formation groups. Not only can we recall the roles of early Christians who gave all for the Gospel of Christ, including their lives, but the very lives of Peter and Paul provide examples of their shared experiences in Christian growth.

When I think of Peter and Paul, together, I always think of their quarrel. Yet Paul's confrontation with Peter—as described in Acts 15 and Galatians 2—and their eventual reconciliation can serve as a powerful example of spiritual growth, even among the apostles. Peter and Paul's story teaches us how we might respond to differing perspectives and practices within our own communities, how to reconcile despite disagreements, and how to grow in Christ's love for one another. Their lives testify to that growth—evident in the words they later wrote. Paul declares, "Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant" (1 Corinthians 13:4, NRSVue), and Peter urges, "Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind" (1 Peter 3:8, NRSVue).

The image within the icon of Saints Peter and Paul reveals this truth. Though martyred by an oppressive regime, they exemplified the love of Christ, forgiving one another, as well as forgiving their oppressors, teaching *all* of us, whether ewes, sheep, and lambs, to do likewise.

MUSIC CONCERT
May 17, 2026

Thank You to

Walker Williams for the photos.

*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

JUNE 2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1 8:15am-9:45am Gooden Chapel 8:30am Yoga/Hall Fr. Michael Out of Office-Clergy Support Grp	**2** 10am-10:30am Gooden Chapel	**3** 8:15am-9:00am Gooden Chapel 8:30am Yoga/Hall Men's Group Luncheon Nano Café Noon—RSVP to Fr. Michael 6Pm-Wed Night Dinner Group Meets	**4** 8:15am Mass 9am Rector's Forum 10:30am Staff Mtg	**5**	**6** 11am-8pm Music Recital/ Hall/Private/ Sierra Madre Music
7 8am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live* 10:15am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live*	**8** 8:15am-9:45am Gooden Chapel 8:30am Yoga/Hall	**9** Gooden Graduation Practice/ Church/All Day	**10** 8:30am Yoga/Hall 6Pm-Wed Night Dinner Group Meets	**11** Gooden Promotion Ceremonies/ Church/All Day 9am Rector's Forum	**12**	**13**
14 8am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live* 10:15am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live*	**15** 8:30am Yoga/Hall	**16** 7pm Vestry Meeting/Hall	**17** 8:30am Yoga/Hall 5:30pm Yoga/Hal 6Pm-Wed Night Dinner Group Meets	**18** 8:15am Mass 9am Rector's Forum 10:30am Staff Mtg	**19** Juneteenth Parish Office Closed	**20**
21 FATHER'S DAY 8am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live* 10:15am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live*	**22** 8:30am Yoga/Hall	**23**	**24** 8:30am Yoga/Hall 5:30pm Yoga/Hal 6Pm-Wed Night Dinner Group Meets	**25** 8:15am Mass 9am Rector's Forum Noon Clericus Mtg Hall	**26**	**27**
28 8am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live* 10:15am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live*	**29** 8:30am Yoga/Hall	**30**				

Spire Creator: Kim Lumino, Parish Administrator