The May 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

It seems the month of May will be a time of change and anticipation of change for me, my family, and our congregation. On Monday, May 4th, after a few great years at the British Home here in Sierra Madre, Debbie's mom – Fay Owen – will be moving to the Regency Park Oak Knoll in Pasadena. Visiting her won't be a matter of just four blocks, but it isn't that far away, and we anticipate her being able to come regularly to church on Sundays. (Getting her neighbor Mimi to church will become a community effort.)

On Tuesday, May 19th, Debbie and I have an appointment to enroll in Social Security. I realize that enrolling is an event that many in our congregation have experienced, but it is a clear reminder that my retirement is coming up onto the horizon. At our May Vestry meeting, a committee will be formed of Vestry members and parishioners to begin considering the process of transition. Adela Gomez reminded us to be especially prayerful during this time. Not only should the members of the Vestry be asking for guidance from God, but she is encouraging every member of the congregation to be particularly attentive to where God may be leading us.

This May will also be a time of transition for young people in my life. David Kassabian is graduating from high school and is headed to Pomona College in the fall. Our niece Sarah is getting married, and there will be a celebration in Bakersfield. Our great-niece Abigail is graduating from Chapman University and is headed eventually to become a physician's assistant. Our daughter-in-law Lyndsay and our grand kids are preparing to move to Suffolk, Virginia to join our son Matt who is now stationed aboard the USS Harry S. Truman.

Changes bring possibilities and some uncertainty. I invite your prayers for each of us and for all of us.

Blessings,
Father Michael+

APRIL 2026 Pledge Payment Snapshot

2026 Budget $165,000

YTD Budget:	$55,000
YTD Actual:	$59,085
Difference:	$+4,085

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.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

This Easter season began as we gathered in darkness and the new fire was lit, symbolizing the Light of Christ. The light grew and spread to enlighten the whole world. During the Easter Vigil, we heard in scripture and song the story of our salvation, how the Israelites were brought out of bondage in Egypt and led through the Red Sea to dry land. We heard the prophets' words of hope for the world, and we heard how Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the tomb at dawn and how the earth shook and the stone was rolled away and the angel said, "*Do not be afraid... He is not here; for he has been raised.*"

Our Easter celebration is not confined to a single day, nor even to the great 50 day feast of Eastertide. But rather Easter is a perpetual celebration which we commemorate each and every Sunday. "*Christ has died, Christ is Risen. Christ will come again.*"

And Easter is not only about what happened to Jesus that first Easter morning long ago, but it is also about what is happening, even now, to us and to all of creation. Violence and sin and death no longer have the last word. And resurrection is not just something we celebrate; it is the great mystery we are ever being called into.

St. Gregory of Nyssa wrote that the Christian life is a continual movement from death to life, from sin to grace, from fear to love. He wrote that salvation is not a single moment, but an ongoing transformation, a continual growing into God. And through our baptism, we are brought into this mystery of dying and rising, letting go and being made new. All throughout our lives God is always bringing new life out of what seems lost or broken.

Resurrection doesn't mean that bad things don't happen. It means that the bad things that do happen are never the end of the story. Easter tells us that the end of the story is not destruction but transformation. The end of the story is not fear and death, but life and love.

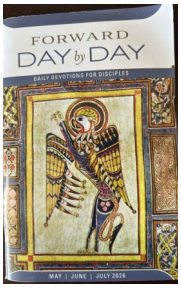
St. Athanasius in the fourth century wrote that "*Christ became what we are so that we might become what he is.*" This "becoming what he is" is the journey of the Christian life. As we continue to celebrate this Easter season and beyond, let us remember that the resurrection is not just something that happened a long time ago; but that it is the very pattern of our lives, the very pattern of the world and of God's love.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Submitted by Mother Robin Kassabian

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.

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

On Sunday, May 17th,

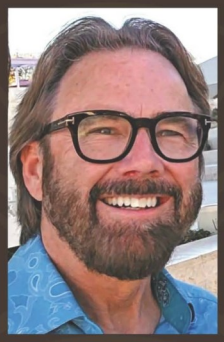
there will ONLY be

ONE service at 9:30am.

The Episcopal Church of the Ascension

PRESENTS

Benny Yi-Bing Chu, Cellist



Stephen Marshall, Pianist

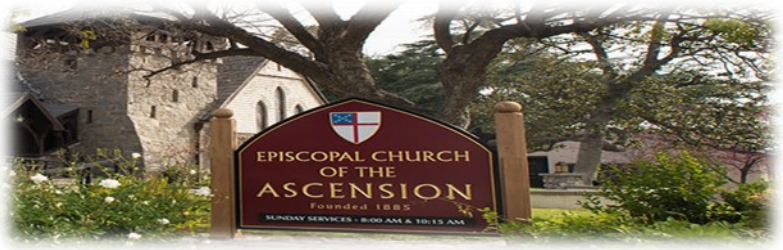
CONCERT

featuring the music of
Bach, Dvořák, Debussy, Fauré, Rachmaninov, and Beethoven

Sunday, May 17, 2026
4:00 PM
Generous Donations greatly appreciated
to benefit the Parish Music Fund

TheParish Hall
25 E Laurel Avenue
Sierra Madre, CA 91024
626.355.1133

The Episcopal Church of the Ascension



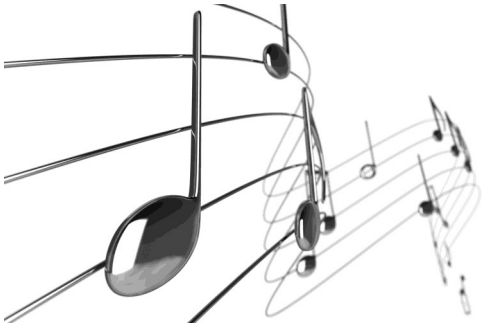
Presents

Benny Yi-Bing Chu, Cellist

&

And, our very own Director of Music,

Stephen Marshall



A CONCERT TO REMEMBER

Featuring the music of

Bach, Dvorak, Debussy, Faure, Rachmaninov, and Beethoven

Sunday, May 17, 2026 at 4:00 pm in Hawks Hall

Appetizers and beverages will be served.

There is a sign-up sheet on the bulletin board in Hawks Hall. Please sign and include how many guests will be attending to ensure that we have enough enjoyable tidbits for all.

Generous Donations greatly appreciated to benefit the Parish Music Fund.

Forward Today: Opening up our prayers

February 15, 2023 Forward Today, scott gunn

Dear friends in Christ,

Some time ago, I was convicted by the teaching of Jesus we read in Matthew 5:43-45:
"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous."

I've never really been persecuted in a serious way, and I don't think of myself as having enemies. But Jesus' teaching made me reflect on who I was praying for. So I decided to open up my prayer list.

Photo by **Jametlene Reskp** on **Unsplash**

Every day, I say morning and evening prayer. Near the end of the daily office, there is a place to add our own intercessions to the prayers offered in the liturgy. I now pray and give thanks in four categories:

- Friends
- Enemies
- Strangers
- Thanksgiving

Most of the time, I had found myself praying for friends, for people I know or particularly care about. There's nothing wrong with that! But I decided to add "enemies" to my prayer list. As I said, I don't really have declared enemies, but I pray for people I don't like, people I'm afraid of, and people who might wish me harm. My list includes regular people, politicians, and others.

A few weeks ago, I added "strangers" to my list. These are people I might have met on the street or in a shop, people whose names and stories I don't really know, but who might need prayers. On cold nights, I pray for people who must sleep outside.

Lastly, over the last few months, I also realized I didn't have a formal practice of offering thanks to God for the many blessings of this life. So I added this to my prayers. It's already strengthened my life to remember twice each day all the ways that God has blessed me or blessed others in my sight.

No doubt my prayer list will continue to evolve over time. But I wanted to pass my current practice along, in case it's helpful in your life of prayer. If you don't have a daily prayer practice, it's never too late to start. You can just think of one or more of the categories on my list and pray in the shower, on a walk, on your commute to work, or in a quiet moment of your day.

Let us pray.

Yours faithfully,

Scott Gunn, Executive Director

GROW CHRISTIANS
Cultivating Children's Faith in Community

I pray on the porch (even in the wintertime).

By Rachel Jones / February 1, 2017

My little house is located at the bottom of one of the prettiest little hollers in northern Kentucky. We're surrounded by 90 acres of woods, rolling hills, and there's a little running stream that I can hear when we leave the bedroom windows open.

The house is in a little quiet spot—I can hear the train rolling like it's about to come through the yard even though we're ten miles from the track. Songbirds were the norm in the summer, but lately I've only seen hawks and buzzards flying around. There's a warren of rabbits in the field in front of the barn, and the little bunnies like to play in the middle of the road, which is pretty safe because a heavy traffic day in our neighborhood means that the mail carrier, UPS, and the school bus all drove by at least once.

I've imagined what it would be like to put up a little shrine in the corner of our room that faces the stream, or in the music room. I've even thought about what items I might like to have included in it. But I haven't made any moves to start shaping it. This isn't because I'm not praying at home—it's because I keep getting stuck on my porch.

As someone who feels a little extra prickly and tired during the winter months, I know I need to spend some time outside every day, even on cold days, to feel as good as I can. This is also true about my prayer life—the crazier things are in the world or just inside my head, the more I talk to Jesus.

The porch is a good place to do that, especially on days when the fields are too muddy for a walk. At first blush, you'd probably be fooled into thinking there's nothing much to see but the barn, the mailbox, the old tractor we have designs to fix up, my husband's woodshop, the black walnut tree, and the spot where the chicken palace used to sit.

But on days when I can let myself be quiet (inside and out) enough to hear the wind whispering like angels' wings, I can see the Kingdom of God spread out before me. I have lost track of time out there, in my blue canvas lawn chair—and that is a rare and wonderful gift, to lose time staring off into space, watching the clouds roll out or in or just change shape.

I keep summertime pictures on my phone to look at, here lately—I'm sharing a few of them with you, just in case you need a little reminder of green and growing things. There's nothing green in the yard right now—I can see hills and geographic features in the wintertime that are usually covered up with foliage in the spring and summer.

There's a spare quality to the winter landscape that is beautiful, prayerful even, but I've had a hard time taking a good picture in the overcast, gray weather we've been having for a few weeks. It's been as low as -4 degrees on the porch this winter, and as warm as 62. When it's super-cold, I layer up and put my sweatpants on top of my jeans, on top of my tights, and wear my big coat on top of a fleece vest on top of a thin running jacket, and sometimes I wrap up in a blanket, just to be sure. I sit on my porch and pray, waiting for spring or a word from Jesus or for the sun to peek out from the clouds.

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Praying on the porch is different than the way I pray in church, or when I wake up, or when I go to sleep, or when I'm in the middle of my day. It is a more quiet kind of prayer—the kind that is mostly me listening, not telling or reporting or talking or complaining or asking for forgiveness or the grace to offer it.

On the porch, I feel like God and I are companions in a way that stills my soul. It's not a dissimilar feeling to having my first cup of coffee with someone who knows and loves me well—there's a lot of quietness because it takes me at least 45 minutes to wake all the way up every single morning. Oh, I can get ready and get things moving in the right direction, but as far as conversation or executing major executive functions…that is not my area of ministry. But time on the porch is a blessed reminder that I don't always have to be up and running, don't always have to be watching the clock, or making the bacon, or whatever else I've told myself must happen today.

When I am still and quiet, when I can allow myself the grace and space to sit and lose track of time and train of thought, small and beautiful and powerful things find their way into my hands and heart. I was always a praying girl, but the porch is where I learned to look and listen. Thanks be to God.

Forward Movement
inspire disciples. empower evangelists.

Forward Today: Fearless faith

May 1 2024 Forward Today, scott gunn

Dear friends in Christ,

Last weekend, I visited the Diocese of Northern California to speak about evangelism at their revival, Fearless Faith. The name of the revival got me thinking.

Fearless faith could suggest that we practice our faith without fear. It's tempting to find ourselves limiting how we practice our faith, as individuals or congregations, out of fear. We might worry about money, or what people will think of us, or whether some new ministry will succeed or fail.

What if we practiced our faith boldly? There's no reason not to invite people to our churches. There's often more money available than we think. Even if some new ministry doesn't take off, we will learn something—so there's rarely a total failure. Fearless faith is closer to the adventure that the Gospels suggest when we choose to follow Jesus.

But there's another way to read that title, Fearless Faith. As we just heard last Sunday in the epistle, perfect love casts out fear. Our culture is bombarded by messages peddling fear. "Be afraid of those people." "Be afraid of that place." "Be afraid that you might not have enough money." "Be afraid that your appearance is not sufficiently beautiful." It's non-sense, and it's antithetical to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In faith, we will realize we don't need to be afraid of anyone or any place. We will realize there is enough. We will realize that we don't need to "look more beautiful" because we are all made in the image and likeness of God, and nothing could be more beautiful than that!

So if we fill our hearts in faith with the love of Jesus Christ, we will immunize ourselves against the bombardment of fear.

I am always working on practicing and believing a fearless faith. I hope you are, too. Be not afraid!

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

MAY 2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					1	2
3 8am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live* 9am Choir Rehearsal 10:15am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live*	4 8:15am-9:45am Gooden Chapel 8:30am Yoga/Hall Fr. Michael Out of Office-Clergy Support Grp	5 10am-10:30am Gooden Chapel	6 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 SMCofC Meeting 3pm-9pm/Hall	7 8:15am Mass 9am Rector's Forum 10:30am Staff Mtg	8	9 10am-8pm Private Birthday Party/Hall/ Palfrey
10 MOTHER'S DAY 8am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live* 9am Choir Rehearsal 10:15am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live*	11 8:15am-9:45am Gooden Chapel 8:30am Yoga/Hall	12 10am-10:30am Gooden Chapel	13 8:15am-9:00am Gooden Chapel 8:30am Yoga/Hall 5:30pm Yoga/Hal 6Pm-Wed Night Dinner Group Meets	14 8:15am Mass 9am Rector's Forum	15	16 1:00pm Funeral, Interment and Reception for Ben Smith/Church & Hall
17 ASCENSION SUNDAY 9:30am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live* 4pm-Concert in Hawks Hall/Please RSVP	18 8:15am-9:45am Gooden Chapel 8:30am Yoga/Hall	19 10am-10:30am Gooden Chapel 7pm Vestry Meeting/Hall	20 8:15am-9:00am Gooden Chapel 8:30am Yoga/Hall 5:30pm Yoga/Hal 6Pm-Wed Night Dinner Group Meets	21 8:15am Mass 9am Rector's Forum 10:30am Staff Mtg	22	23 11am-3pm Music Recital/ Hall/Private/ Stacey
24 8am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live* 9am Choir Rehearsal 10:15am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live*	25 MEMORIAL DAY 8:30am Yoga/Hall Parish Office Closed	26 10am-10:30am Gooden Chapel Noon Clericus Mtg Hall	27 8:15am-9:00am Gooden Chapel 8:30am Yoga/Hall 5:30pm Yoga/Hal 6Pm-Wed Night Dinner Group Meets	28 8:15am Mass 9am Rector's Forum	29	30 1pm-5pm Music Recital/ Hall/Private/ Friedl
31 8am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live* 9am Choir Rehearsal 10:15am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live*						

Spire Creator: Kim Lumino, Parish Administrator