



The SPIRE 2021

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



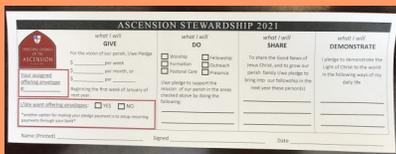
Upcoming Events

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

Please Get Your Pledge Cards In ASAP!

Just a reminder that we still need pledge cards from several members of our parish family. Please take a moment to fill out your pledge card so that we can hear from you and complete our budget for next year. To return your card to the parish, you can mail it to the church office, drop it off at the church office (call in advance), drop it in the collection plate during the Sunday morning service, or fill out an electronic pledge card on the church website (look under "Give" about halfway down the page).

Blessings to everyone,
Gordon Tomaske, Sr. Warden



From the Rector

Last year as I wrote for the December Spire, we faced uncertainty as to what Christmas was going to look like. In the year since, much has changed, and for the better. Almost all of our parishioners are vaccinated, and many have received their booster shots. We are able now to worship indoors and to sing and rejoice.

Unfortunately, the virus has changed as well. The new omicron variant is concerning, and we will just have to wait and see the degree to which it will impact our life together. As always, the health and safety of our congregation will guide decisions about how we gather. As we have since March of 2020, we will follow the direction of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health.

That said, we are planning for a glorious celebration of the Nativity of Our Lord. On Christmas Eve, we will have two services. The first, at 5pm, will be something approximating our "family service" of years past. We are not ready to hold a pageant, as some of our kids are not yet eligible to receive a vaccine. The second Christmas Eve service, at 9pm, I am billing as our New York Midnight Mass. (It will be Midnight in New York as we start our service.) On Christmas Day, we will have our usual Eucharist at 11am.

God's choice to use people who may be unlikely and perhaps ill-equipped to carry forward the plan of salvation is one of the themes of Advent and Christmas. God calls upon a young woman to bear the Christ Child. God calls upon a righteous man to stand beside her. God calls shepherds to witness to the birth. God calls wise foreigners to seek out the newborn Christ. Unlikely, and perhaps ill-equipped people, and yet God has a plan. This Advent, let us ask ourselves – "How is God calling me to live the message of hope and redemption?"

Father Michael+

ANNUAL CHRISTMAS APPEAL



Hillsides

CREATING LASTING CHANGE

"NOTHING HAPPENS IN A VACUUM"

NOVEMBER 2021 Pledge Payment Snapshot



2020 Budget \$221,000

YTD Budget: \$202,583

YTD Actual: \$188,454

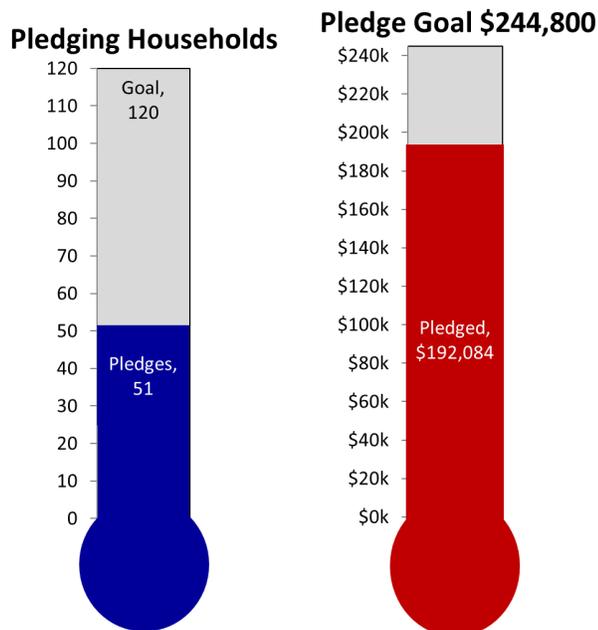
Difference: \$-14,129

In the past, Ascension has come together as a community at Christmas to make a difference in the lives of those less fortunate. As part of the Hillsides community, we have adopted families or contributed food gift cards. Again, this year we will collect food gift cards in \$25 increments from Food For Less, Ralphs, Vons, Smart & Final, and Trader Joes.

Please place your gift cards in an envelope marked Hillsides and place them in the collection plate or drop them off at the parish office. **All donations must be received by December 19, 2021.** Deacon Ed will deliver the gift cards to Hillsides to ensure that as many families as possible can have a memorable holiday meal. Your generosity is greatly appreciated and a blessing to those in need.

2022 Pledge Update

The numbers as of November 30, 2021



First Wednesdays Lunch Group

Please Note: For the month of December, the First Wednesday's Lunch Group will meet on the 2nd Wednesday of the month—December 8th. Please RSVP to Father Michael. Location TBD.

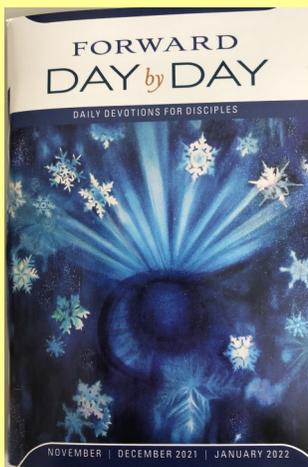


An Opportunity for Giving

Please consider making a contribution to our music program for the special music we enjoy here at Ascension.

Donation envelopes are available at the back of the church and on the reception table in Hawks Hall.

For names to be included in the Christmas bulletins, donations must be received by Sunday, December 19th.



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.

All Ages Sunday School meets weekly!

We gather at the front door of the church and depart for outdoor class time at 10:15 AM.

Students return to worship for Communion.



Mark Your Calendar for Sunday School Faith In Action Sundays!

Coming UP...

December 12
Christmas Decorations & Toy Drive

VESTRY NOMINATIONS DUE NOW

Each year at our annual meeting, we elect three new members of the Vestry, the body within the congregation that, with the Rector, leads the parish. Vestry members are elected for three year terms. Vestry meets once a month throughout the year. Additional meetings (and committee meetings) are held as needed. A Vestry member must be willing to accept the responsibility of regular attendance and be willing to serve on one or more committees.

Now is the time for the parish to nominate next year's Vestry candidates. According to the Diocesan guidelines, a Vestry nominee must be 16 years of age or older and be a confirmed communicant in good standing in the Episcopal Church. He or she must also attend church services at Ascension regularly and be a pledging contributor to the parish. A member of the Vestry may not be a member of any other church.

Names of nominees should be submitted to Father Michael or any Vestry member **by December 25th.**

The annual meeting is currently scheduled for **Sunday, February, 27th.**

A Message from St. Anne's Altar Guild ~ Christmas Flowers



Believe it or not we are at that time of the year again where your help and contributions allow the Altar Guild to decorate our beautiful space. We count on your generosity to make this happen. Remember during Advent there are no flowers except for the third Sunday.

Envelopes are available at the back of the church and on the reception table in Hawks Hall. Thanking you in advance for your making this another beautiful Christmas season.

For names to be included in the Christmas bulletins, donations must be received by Sunday, December 19th.

St. Anne's Altar Guild

NEW and **IMPROVED** flower and candle sign-ups for 2021!!!!!!!

Beginning January 2021, sign-ups for Flower Donations and sign-ups for the Sanctuary Candle will be available on Sign-Up Genius (online) as well as in person at the back of the church.

****Payment will continue to be made by mailing a CHECK (\$40.00 (flowers) and \$15.00 (Sanctuary candle) -- **now payable to Church of the Ascension.** **** Please include a note giving the date that you signed up for and any dedication. Click on the links below to sign-up.

Sanctuary Candles: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/20f0e44a4a628a7f94-sanctuary>

Altar Flowers: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/20f0e44a4a628a7f94-altar>



13th Annual Women's Room Thanksgiving Luncheon Monday, November 22, 2021

A great big thank you to everyone who participated in this year's Thanksgiving Luncheon for The Women's Room. Thanks to your generosity, we were able to serve about 20 people with enough food left over for lunch the following day. In addition to food, we received donations of makeup, personal care items, water bottles, warm socks, gloves and hats, holiday cards, candy and more. The items were packed in mini-backpacks that we were able to give to each woman as a holiday gift. Everyone had a wonderful time. **Nicole Hanson**

Thank You to Nicole Hanson for the pictures!



NOTES FROM THE LOFT

On December 5 the choir continues our celebration of Advent by singing the gentle prayer, *O Come, Divine Messiah*, by Godfrey Ridout. Opening and closing voluntaries will be settings of *VOM HIMMEL HOCH* by Johann Pachelbel.

Advent 3, December 12, will feature Paul Manz' hauntingly beautiful *E'en So, Lord Jesus, Quickly Come*. The offertory hymn will be the lively *BEREDEN VAG FOR HERRAN, Prepare the Way, O Zion*; a version of the same will be played as the closing voluntary.

On the final Sunday of Advent, Richard Shepherd's *Song of Mary* will be presented ~ an alternate setting of the *Magnificat*. This selection will be followed by the congregational hymn, *VENI, VENI, EMMANUEL, O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* ~ yes, all eight verses!

I experienced last Christmas Eve with Father Bamberger and Keichi in a very surreal, dimly candlelit sanctuary surrounded by a few poinsettias. Stunningly beautiful and spiritual, yet missing the vital elements of congregation and choir. This year, with gratitude to God for the vaccines which make it possible for us to assemble, we return to our annual tradition of seasonal music and worship. Our festival choir, composed of our resident choristers, will be joined by the Noecker-Rasmussen daughters and a guest quartet. Enjoy singing the familiar carols and listening to the following anthems:

Hodie Christus Natus Est – Healey Willan
Nativity Carol – John Rutter
Go Tell It On the Mountain – John Abdenour
What Sweeter Music – John Rutter

On December 26 the choir will present *Masters in this Hall*, arranged by my late husband, Hughes.

A very blessed Advent and joyous Christmas to you and those you love!

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!



Debora Huffman, Director of Music and Organist



As we enter Advent, this season of expectation, I pray, Lord, that you draw us together in unity so that our praise and worship might echo through our lives.

In this Advent of expectation, draw us together in mission so that the hope within might be the song we sing and the melody of our lives.

In this Advent of expectation, draw us together in service so that the path we follow might lead us from a stable to a glimpse of eternity.

During this season of Advent, Lord, we pray that you let your compassion for others shine forth from the depths of our hearts.

Every year we find ourselves amidst the holiday décor months before the festivities. For most of us, this season is an incredibly joyous time, filled with family celebrations, cherished traditions, special meals, and the spirit of giving. For the 14,000 children, youth, and families served by Hillsides, it's often a reminder of how little they have, particularly at this time of year.

Hillsides, an Institution of our Diocese, is on the front lines with so many families who are suffering from illness and loss of income due to the pandemic. Families who are already going without regular meals or warm clothes can't afford to give their children presents or provide them with a special meal. Children in foster care with a history of loss and trauma feel the extra pain of not having any family to celebrate with. And youth leaving the foster care system – many who are homeless and without any resources - feel more alone than ever during this time of year.

But you can help! Remember that change never happens in a vacuum; it only happens when we come together in community, step up our compassionate hearts, and think of those less fortunate as family. Your generous holiday giving will help Hillsides to provide hearty meals and fun-filled celebrations that will sustain those less fortunate beyond the holiday season. During this continued time of uncertainty, your support is needed more than ever.

Hillsides mission is to create lasting change in the lives of those they serve, and that change can begin with a hearty, happy holiday meal. Hillsides.org

Be well, be blessed, be of Advent hearts!
Deacon Ed+

Annual Holiday Shopping Party at Savor the Flavor

Saturday, November 20, 2021

Thank You to Jobi Harrell for the pictures!



Advent Wreath Liturgy and Prayers for Church



“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

-Romans 15:13

Advent Wreath Customs at Church

Many churches place an Advent wreath at the front of the sanctuary during the season of Advent. There are different customs and practices, depending on the community. Some wreaths are suspended by a chain or wire; some are placed on a stand. Some churches use blue candles; some use violet or red; and many churches include one rose (pink) candle. The presence of a center Christ Candle also varies.

As for lighting the candles of the Advent wreath, there are different customs. Some churches light the candles before the service, while others create a separate liturgical moment at the beginning of worship. Some churches have acolytes or worship assistants light the candles; other churches invite a parishioner or family to come forward.

What is the Official Tradition?

Speaking from the Episcopal tradition, there is no “official” version of where, when, and how to light an Advent wreath in church. The Episcopal *Book of Occasional Services* actually proposes a minimalist approach: “The Advent wreath is a visual symbol marking the progress of the season of Advent. When it is used in the church, no special prayers or ceremonial elaboration... is desirable. At morning services the appropriate number of candles is lighted before the service begins” (page 30).

So according to the B.O.S., they recommend that you just light the candles before the service, thereby removing the necessity for any Advent wreath prayers or readings. With due respect to this recommendation, I find it quite nice to light the Advent wreath candles during the service. And when that is the case, a short prayer or liturgy is helpful. See below.

Meaning of Each Candle

The tradition that each candle of the Advent wreath has a meaning is likewise not official. The rose candle has always been connected with joy, because the third Sunday of Advent is Gaudete Sunday (*gaudete* means rejoice in Latin). As for the other candles, their meanings are somewhat up for grabs. That said: Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love are excellent themes for Advent, and these meanings are used in many churches of various denominations.

Featured image: “Advent Wreath” by Christine McIntosh via Flickr ([CC BY-NC 2.0](#))

buildingfaith

A Ministry of Virginia Theological Seminary

<https://buildfaith.org/advent-wreath-prayers-liturgy-church-home/>



Running for Christ with Saint Andrew November 30, 2021, by Tim Gavin

I have been a runner for over 45 years. In college, I was the 5th runner on my cross-country team. My primary responsibility focused on crossing the finish line before the other team's 5th runner. As you can reason, I never finished first in a race. That fact has never bothered me; I run simply because I love it.

Our society places tons of emphasis on finishing first. Many people remember the name of the first person who broke the 4-minute mile, but few remember the second person. Consequently, I have found in all my years of teaching and coaching that when finishing first becomes the primary emphasis of either academics or sports, the joy for the students is lost. In our culture, being number 1 means one has no place else to go. Maintaining or falling from the number 1 position may lead to anxiety, stress, and discontent.

However, not so with Christ. Saint Andrew provides us a matrix to follow when it comes to being first. According to John's Gospel, Saint Andrew is Jesus' first follower, however, he refuses to take the limelight that often comes with being first. As soon as John the Baptizer points out Jesus "the Lamb of God" to Andrew, Andrew follows Jesus. Jesus invites Andrew "come and see," but before Andrew goes any farther, "he first found his brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah.'" He then brings Simon to Jesus.

For Saint Andrew being first was not about pointing to himself and expecting accolades. For Saint Andrew, being the first was about pointing to Jesus and bringing others to him so that the Gospel of Christ could unfold and fill the hearts of others. He slides quietly into the background during Jesus' ministry, while Peter enters the forefront and becomes the rock on which Jesus builds his church. Andrew later steps forward as a servant of faith when he brings the young boy to Jesus and says, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish." Again, Andrew puts the focus on Christ as he brings the boy to Jesus. Consequently, he realizes all things are possible with God including five loaves and two fish feeding 5,000 people. His humility, faith, and commitment provide for us a proven way to follow Christ.



As Christians, Saint Andrew reminds us that following Christ requires us to surrender our need for notoriety and acclaim. Saint Andrew reminds us we must instead continually point to Christ. That is our charge.

Our culture has grown more and more secular, almost resisting the draw to Christ. Therefore, Saint Andrew offers us a way, as Christians, to follow Christ quietly, humbly, and lovingly. We can offer invitations to our friends and colleagues to join us in a church function or parish service project. Perhaps once they see our church living its faith out in the world, then they may desire to see more. This quiet invitation can lead others to Christ just as Saint Andrew lead Peter to Christ.

It may also require us to allow the person we bring to Christ to have a primary role in the church. Our call may be to step aside for another to take the lead. Notice Andrew didn't desire supremacy or a top position among the disciples.

Public Domain via [Pixabay](#)

He simply desired to follow Christ. As he handed Jesus the five loaves and two fish provided by a young boy, he waited and let the miracle unfold. Afterward he blended in with the twelve who distributed the loaves and fishes and collected the leftovers.

Perhaps we have never run a cross-country or road race, but we are running in a race that has no winner or loser. Saint Andrew reminds us, as he leaves his fishing nets and brings Peter to Jesus, we don't need to fear our secular culture, nor do we need to pursue it; we don't need to fear power nor pursue it; we don't need to fear worldly ambition nor pursue it. In our pursuit of Christ, we run as Christians. We run with Christ. We run for his honor and Glory just as Saint Andrew did.

<https://www.growchristians.org/2021/11/30/running-for-christ-with-saint-andrew/#more-10253>

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

DECEMBER 2021

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1 8:30am Yoga/Hall 5:30pm Yoga/Hall 12pm—6pm Blood Drive in Hawks Hall	2 8:15am Mass 9am Rector's Forum 10:30am Staff Mtg 1:10pm Gooden Chapel 2pm-5pm Organist Rehearsal	3	4
5 8am Indoor Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live* 9am Between the Masses Discussion Group 10:15am Indoor Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live*	6 8:30am Yoga/Hall 1pm Gooden Drama Class/Hall Fr. Michael out of office/Clergy Support Group	7 11am Gooden Chapel 1:15pm Gooden Chapel 12:30-3pm Gooden Drama Classes/Hall	8 8:30am Yoga/Hall 5:30pm Yoga/Hall Men's Group Luncheon @ Noon	9 9am Rector's Forum 1:10pm Gooden Chapel 2pm-5pm Organist Rehearsal	10	11 Church Greening
12 8am Indoor Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live* 9am Between the Masses Discussion Group 10:15am Indoor Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live*	13 8:30am Yoga/Hall 1pm Gooden Drama Class/Hall	14 11am Gooden Chapel 1:15pm Gooden Chapel 12:30-3pm Gooden Drama Classes/Hall	15 8:30am Yoga/Hall 5:30pm Yoga/Hall	16 9am Rector's Forum 10:30am Staff Mtg 1:10pm Gooden Chapel 2pm-5pm Organist Rehearsal	17	18
19 8am Indoor Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live* 9am Between the Masses Discussion Group 10:15am Indoor Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live*	20 8:30am Yoga/Hall	21 7:30pm Vestry Meeting Hall	22 8:30am Yoga/Hall 5:30pm Yoga/Hall	23 9am Rector's Forum 2pm-5pm Organist Rehearsal	24 Christmas Eve Services: 5pm & 9pm	25 Christmas Day Service: 11am
26 8am Indoor Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live* 9am Between the Masses Discussion Group 10:15am Indoor Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live*	27 8:30am Yoga/Hall	28	29 8:30am Yoga/Hall 5:30pm Yoga/Hall	30 9am Rector's Forum 2pm-5pm Organist Rehearsal	31	
Deacon Ed Out of Town/Vacation						