



The SPIRE 2021

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 'virtual' events.



From the Rector

For the past year, we have had to balance two competing “goods.” One good is the value and importance of being together in community. We all know the pain of prolonged isolation. The other good is the health and safety of the people we love. The tension between these two “goods” has been on my mind ever since we shut down last March. In the Fall, when we resumed some in-person worship, the risk seemed less; but as the surge in new COVID cases began after Thanksgiving, health and safety had to once again come first.

With the arrival of vaccines and the drop in new cases and hospitalizations, it now seems appropriate that we can take small steps towards our “new normal.” Starting the 7th of March, we are returning to our “normal” Sunday worship times! At 8am, the Eucharist will be celebrated via Zoom and Facebook Live from inside the church with just the small team. That will be followed by a virtual Coffee Hour, and the Between the Masses group. At 10:15, we will celebrate Eucharist outside and in-person. Folks are asked to bring their own chairs. Distancing will be observed, masks will be worn, and Communion will be distributed in one kind.



Outdoor Worship

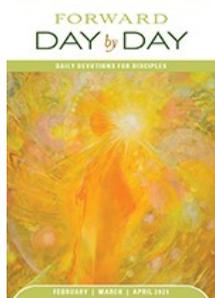


Ted Bosley and his wife Denise celebrating virtual Ash Wednesday!



I have been asked if we should “require” proof of vaccination. I don’t think that is a good idea for a number of reasons. But let me reaffirm what I have said repeatedly – if you have a chance to get the vaccine, GO FOR IT!!! Over the weeks that the vaccines have been administered, we have been reassured that they are safe and that they make a difference. Getting vaccinated is one way we can bring together the common goods of community and health and safety.

Copies of the new **Forward Movement Day by Day** booklets have been left at the front of the church. Feel free to stop by and pick up a copy.

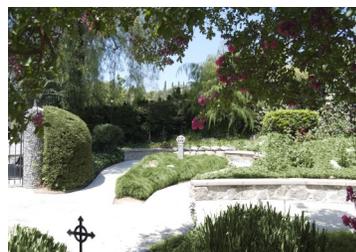


Father Michael+

Dear Fellow Members of Church of the Ascension:

It has been a long time - almost a year - since we have all been able to gather together at Ascension and share time and news with each other. I hope you are all keeping well and I want to thank so many of you who have kept us all so well informed - the Sunday Morning service has been a wonderful gift. My main reason for contacting you is on behalf of myself and Karen Lindsey, a member of Ascension. Karen has taken the lead on improving the look of our Memorial Garden. You may or may not have noticed that it needs some special care - replacement of dead or dying plants, overgrown bushes, weeds, and our beautiful water fall - designed by Lew Watanabe, who was known as the master of Stone and Light - (he passed away in 2016) - was almost completely hidden by brush. We have been working at clearing the brush and removing dead plants but would be so pleased if any of you might be interested in joining the team. If you would like to take part in this meaningful project, please call the Church Office - 626-355-1133 or Karen or myself. Thank you for listening - we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Beth Smith-Kellock - 626-355-8637 &
Karen Lindsey - kareninsocal@gmail.com



FEBRUARY 2020

Pledge Payment Snapshot



YTD Budget: \$36,833
YTD Actual: \$34,946
Difference: \$-1,887

NOTES FROM THE LOFT

This week I joined many of you in receiving my second Covid vaccination. With a grateful heart I'm looking forward to resuming some *normal* activities that I've foregone for the past year ~ things like grocery shopping, visiting the hair salon, and, yes, practicing the organ! I'm also looking forward to joining you for services when they resume. Until then Charley Noecker, Carol Rasmussen, and I will continue to offer hymns for our Zoom/Facebook services. Hymns for the month include:

3/7 ~ Lent 3: #144, CORNHILL, Lord Jesus, Sun of Righteousness

3/14 ~ Lent 4: #145, QUITTEZ, PASTEURS, Now Quit Your Care and Anxious Fear and Worry

3/21 ~ Lent 5: #495, IN BABILONE, Hail, Thou Once Despised Jesus!

3/28 ~ Palm/Passion Sunday: #474, ROCKINGHAM, When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

Continued Lenten blessings to each of you ~

*O God, whom saints and angels delight to worship in heaven:
Be with us, we beseech thee, as we seek to perfect the praises of thy children on earth;
and grant to us even now such glimpses of thy beauty
that we may be made worthy at length to behold it unveiled for evermore;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

~ The Royal School of Church Music



Debora Huffman, Director of Music and Organist



**Forward
Movement**
inspire disciples. empower evangelists.

Forward Today: We are sorrowful, yet always rejoicing

February 17, 2021 Ash Wednesday, Forward Today, Lent, scott gunn

Dear friends in Christ,

Did you ever play hide and seek as a child? I did! One of the rules was that the seeker had to yell out, "ready or not, here I come!" before the search began. I feel like our liturgical year is saying to us, "ready or not, here Lent comes!"

As Fr. Tim Schenck and I wrote in our annual Ash Wednesday reflection over on Lent Madness, it may seem like it's always Lent and never Easter, to echo C. S. Lewis. But we know that, regardless of our state of mind, the tomb was empty on Easter morning, and Jesus Christ is raised from the dead.

Still, it's hard for many of us to wrap our minds around this Lenten season. We're in the midst of a pandemic, in which many thousands of people have died. At the moment, thousands of people are without electricity and suffering from extreme winter weather. We've all seen political turmoil. Most of us are deprived of our usual church gatherings and rituals.

How can we go about our usual Lenten disciplines? Should we?

This is a year to remember the essential core of Lent. It is not, primarily, a season of deprivation. It is not, fundamentally, a season of programs and familiar habits. It is, instead, a season in which we reorient our lives toward Jesus.



Perhaps in the midst of a pandemic, simply getting through the days and weeks is enough. We can't be disciples if we are missing basic human needs. Perhaps in a time when we are deprived of so much, this is a time to savor what we have. I'm not telling you fasting is bad! Far from it. But I am saying this won't be the usual Lent for any of us.

St. Paul knew plenty about suffering and deprivation. Allow me to quote at length a bit from today's assigned epistle reading from 2 Corinthians.

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute.

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We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and yet see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

This Lent, let us remember that even as we sorrow, we can rejoice in the mighty power of God. The Spirit abides with us. Jesus has offered us all his saving grace.

Yours faithfully, Scott Gunn, Executive Director



Lent, the pandemic and rethinking compassion...

Recently, someone said to me: I am a good, kind, and ethical person; but I feel that I sometimes lack compassion. Maybe that's because in the family I grew up in, we were not taught to think of others. I would like to know how I can become a more compassionate person.

The question made me think of a safety instruction anyone who flies has heard many times: "In case of a loss of pressure on the plane, put your oxygen mask on first, then assist others." If you try to be a hero to the people around you without first ensuring your own oxygen flow, you will quickly pass out. Then you'll be in real trouble and unavailable to help others.

What does this instruction have to do with becoming more compassionate? Growing up, I was taught that the highest ethical guide is *love your neighbor as yourself*. The emphasis was always on expanding our perception of who is our neighbor. We were to be sources of love, and presumably compassion, for every other human being. As important as that is, though, no one taught me how to put my self-compassion mask on first. Self-compassion was never discussed because we were supposed to be other-centered, not self-centered.

In his book *Compassion*, the late Jesuit Henri Nouwen said he knew few people interested in becoming more compassionate. He said the reason was because becoming capable of suffering with others requires that we have stood in the fire of our own suffering. There aren't lots of people lining up to suffer so that they can be better at helping others who suffer. We may think that being a "positive person" who does not dwell on current or past suffering is more important than letting our suffering transform into compassion.

We don't have to go looking for dramatic new experiences of suffering to become more compassionate human beings. "Compassion" comes from two Latin roots: *passio* (suffering, as in the passion of Christ) and *com* (with). *Pati*, the root word of *passio*, means to endure, undergo, or experience. So even if we're not sure we've gone through anything we would call intense suffering, it's likely we've all endured, undergone, or experienced something challenging in life. The last year of our lives has been suffering we've endured in common.

Becoming more compassionate begins with looking deeply into our acquaintance with suffering at each stage of life. When I was studying to be a Spiritual Director, my training supervisor said, "No one gets out of childhood without some wounds." The same is true of marriage, parenting, and even friendship. All of us can ask ourselves how we relate to our experience of suffering. Do we compare or minimize it? Were we taught to "suck it up," to not be weak? Do we ruminate on it, perhaps heaping on repeated doses of self-judgment and criticism? Do we convert a certainty that we're beyond weakness into judgment of others who struggle with sexuality, mental health problems, self-doubt, or other problems? Or maybe we have learned to accept that suffering can "ferment and season you as few human or divine ingredients can." (Hafiz, as translated by Daniel Ladinsky)

If we have learned to tap into a source of compassion larger than our small selves—call it Compassion, Love, Source, God—that abundant energy wants to fill us and spill over to others. This energy allows us to give a compassionate presence, not from depletion or self-sacrifice, but from continual replenishment. We become not just the mask, but the oxygen tank too.

Compassion is like any other great virtue. If we announce that we're going to share our abundant supply of it with others, we've already lost it. Every genuine virtue that flows through our lives is grounded in humility. So how do we know if we are growing in our capacity for compassion? As we practice self-compassion, we might ask less, "Am I becoming more compassionate?" and focus more on noticing a waning of self-judgment, which results in a reduced tendency to judge others. Most people judge themselves more harshly than anyone else on the planet, so working on increasing self-compassion is much the same as decreasing self-judgment.

I don't think we ever get past the need to practice self-compassion any more than we ever get beyond the need to breathe.

Without the constant inspiration of self-compassion, the soul begins turning blue.

Be well, be blessed, be compassionate.

Deacon Ed+

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

MARCH 2021

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1	2 Communion under Special Circumstances 8:30am—10am *By Appointment Only*	3 Communion under Special Circumstances 8:30am—10am *By Appointment Only*	4 9am Forum Zoom Call	5	6
7 <u>8am Virtual Worship</u> Facebook Live & Zoom Call <u>Virtual Coffee Hour after service</u> *Zoom Call* <u>Between the Masses Discussion Group after coffee hour</u> *Zoom Call* <u>10:15am Outdoor Worship w/Eucharist</u> *Facebook Live*	8	9 Communion under Special Circumstances 8:30am—10am *By Appointment Only*	10 Communion under Special Circumstances 8:30am—10am *By Appointment Only*	11 9am Forum Zoom Call 10:30am Staff Mtg Zoom Call	12	13
14 <u>8am Virtual Worship</u> Facebook Live & Zoom Call <u>Virtual Coffee Hour after service</u> *Zoom Call* <u>Between the Masses Discussion Group after coffee hour</u> *Zoom Call* <u>10:15am Outdoor Worship w/Eucharist</u> *Facebook Live*	15	16 Communion under Special Circumstances 8:30am—10am *By Appointment Only*	17 Communion under Special Circumstances 8:30am—10am *By Appointment Only*	18 9am Forum Zoom Call	19	20
	Parish Administrator 'Maybe' Out of Office—Potential Jury Duty					
	Father Bamberger Out of Office—Vacation					
21 <u>8am Virtual Worship</u> Facebook Live & Zoom Call <u>Virtual Coffee Hour after service</u> *Zoom Call* <u>Between the Masses Discussion Group after coffee hour</u> *Zoom Call* <u>10:15am Outdoor Worship w/Eucharist</u> *Facebook Live*	22	23 Communion under Special Circumstances 8:30am—10am *By Appointment Only* Vestry Meeting 7:30pm Zoom Call	24 Communion under Special Circumstances 8:30am—10am *By Appointment Only*	25 9am Forum Zoom Call 10:30am Staff Mtg Zoom Call	26	27
28 <u>8am Virtual Worship</u> Facebook Live & Zoom Call <u>Virtual Coffee Hour after service</u> *Zoom Call* <u>Between the Masses Discussion Group after coffee hour</u> *Zoom Call* <u>10:15am Outdoor Worship w/Eucharist</u> *Facebook Live*	29	30	31			