The October 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.

IT'S HALLOWEEN TIME!!!!

Once again we will be distributing Halloween Candy on October 31!!!!!

Please bring candy donations (large bags of individually wrapped pieces) to church and they will be safely stored until the ghoulish night... thank you

From the Rector

In this penultimate article from me for the Spire, I am taking some time to look back.

I checked my Spire article from twenty years ago. In October of 2006, I wrote about "the best seats in the house." I wrote about our particularities as to where we prefer to sit in church. I commented that many of the families with young children preferred to sit to the rear. Oh, that we still would have that situation.

Going back forty years, I'm not sure what I wrote in 1986. All our electronic files were saved on 5 and a quarter inch floppy-drives. (I am amazed at how far we have come in our church technology in forty years.)

In October of 1986, I was the newly installed Rector; and it had been a momentous summer. In June, my predecessor Father Behm had retired up to Lake Arrowhead. In July, our then Bishop, Robert Rusack, died in office unexpectedly. (For some unknown reason, I was designated to serve on the committee to plan his funeral and burial. Being a relatively young and unknown priest, I was quickly sidelined by the seasoned older clergy.) In August of 1986, I was instituted as Rector by Bishop Garver. In September, we moved into the Rectory – now the Parish House. I suspect that in that October, I was still figuring out what my job entailed.

We certainly have come a long way in these 41 years together. I look forward to seeing many of you on November first.

Blessings,
Father Michael+

SEPTEMBER 2026 Pledge Payment Snapshot

2026 Budget $165,000

YTD Budget:	$123,750
YTD Actual:	$120,435
Difference:	$-3,315

Blessing of the Animals

Sunday, October 4th

11:45 am in the outdoor worship area

Blessing of the Animals is conducted in commemoration of the October 4th Feast Day of St. Francis of Assisi. St. Francis, arguably the most beloved of the named Saints, was particularly fond of animals of all breeds. The community is invited to bring your animals, no matter how big or small, breed or religion. Some animals may require a leash or a container, so keep that in mind.

All of God's creatures are welcome!

The Sanctification of Time

Fr. Robert J. Gaestel

A few Sundays back, Deacon Ed in making the announcements mentioned how, for him, the month of September felt more like the beginning of the year instead of the turn toward year's end. The school calendar's beginning in September, and in some places even in August, plays a significant role in our culture.

Our culture marks time in many ways like the annual enrollment for medical insurance, set seasons for different sports, due dates for taxes, dates for national holidays, extended periods like Christmas and New Year's, and vacation times from Memorial Day to Labor Day.

The Christian Faith has its own way of marking time called the Church Year during which the church sees itself as enveloping, encompassing, blessing and sanctifying all of human activities and endeavors. The Jesuit priest and poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins in his poem *As Kingfishers Catch Fire*, puts it this way.

Christ—for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's faces

This measurement of the year leads Christian people moving through the rhythms of time and the change of seasons to call to mind and live the mysteries of our salvation.

Alan Watts in his book Myth and Ritual in Christianity writes of his wonder when as a child he was taken to the British Museum and looked upon illuminated manuscripts called The Books of Hours, showing scenes of ploughing in spring-time, gardens bright in summer, autumn harvesting, logging in winter. He writes: "I could see that these books were somehow connected with the wonderful recurrence of interesting seasons with strange names: Advent. Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Whitsun (now called Pentecost), Trinity, Michaelmas, names which marked the rotation of the calendar and left a kind of form and music to simple succession of days."

The Church Year can be divided into two parts. From Advent to Pentecost is the **life of Christ**. From Pentecost back to Advent is our **life in Christ**. We hear about the two parts in the Lectionary, an ordered set of Scripture readings for both Sundays and Weekdays. The Lectionary for Sundays rotates every three years, and the lectionary for Weekdays rotates every two years.

In the second half of the Church Year, one of the ways our life in Christ comes into view is through reading the Acts of the Apostles, the story of the very first Christians. Found in both years of the two-year cycle, coming early or late, the Acts of the Apostles is read in its entirety.

And while the rhythms of time and seasons, both Christian and all the others as well, is a continuous rotation going round and round, all is moving forward toward the hope of the Lord Jesus's Advent at the end of time, marked at the last Sunday before Advent called Christ the King, pointing us to when the mystery of our salvation is finally revealed.

From St. Michael and All Angels on September 29 to Christ the King, the Sunday readings convey a change of tone, an increasing sense of urgency about the need to prepare, not for what might be, but for what absolutely will be and no other. Jesus speaks of this coming time in the Gospels in such parables as the Ten Bridesmaids. This parable is a figure of speech for salvation or its opposite, and the question personally facing each and all is having become fully who I am, am I ready for this coming of the bridegroom or am I not?

All the other rhythms of time and changes of seasons of our culture operate in the very same way and ask of us the very same question: are we ready for what is coming or not? And we can see all around us the different ways people answer that question and the results for good or ill.

Still in all, *To Christ who was, who is, and who is to come, Lord of time, all of it and all of history, be endless praise for ever and ever.*

From Your Vestry

As I reflect on our future, I realize there is already so much to be thankful for as parishioners of the Church of the Ascension. We are blessed with a dedicated and supportive clergy, a hard-working staff, skilled volunteers, beautiful historical facilities and grounds, an amazing music program, and parishioners who support the church and care for each other.

The goal of your vestry is to maintain and build on these strengths, programs, and services that make our parish such a special place to worship. But we need your continued support to make this happen.

As we plan for 2027 and beyond, while also successfully navigating the transition process in the search for our new Rector, there will be opportunities for you to continue to support the many attributes that make Ascension both unique and special to all of us.

The transition process and upcoming stewardship campaign will provide time for us to have a family conversation about what we love about our church, and how we can support, grow, and energize Ascension. I encourage you to take advantage of these opportunities. Your clergy and vestry want to hear from you, especially during this time of change.

Feel free to contact me at wgwilliams757@gmail.com. Or share your thoughts, feelings, and wisdom with the other members of your vestry.

Marie Prentice, Junior Warden
Dan Hanson, Treasurer
Adela Gomez, Clerk
David Kassabian
Lynne Holl
Niall Dalton
Jean Rowe

Let us use the upcoming months to pray, celebrate, and explore ways to strengthen our church so that future generations will benefit from our legacy of worship in the Episcopal tradition.

Walker Williams,
Senior Warden

LOOKING FORWARD FROM YOUR TRANSITION COMMITTEE:

Thank you to everyone who filled out and submitted your survey. Your input is valuable information for the committee. The compiled data will be used to fill in the Parish Profile, the next step in the process. After December 31, 2026, Father Michael's official retirement date, the profile will be posted by the Diocese to a special website accessible only to Clergy.

During the months of November and December, we will have what will be called "Supply" priests. They will come in to only celebrate at Sunday services and Masses on Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Eve, and Christmas Day.

After January 1, 2027, we will call an "Interim" priest. This individual will work approximately 20 hours/week including Sunday services. The Deacon will continue to take care of Pastoral Care for the Parish.

Know that your transition/search committee is moving the process along. We meet every 2 weeks and can assure you that Sunday services will go on as normal after November 1 and that we will have a joyous and Holy Holiday season.

Respectfully,
Lynne Holl, Chair

MUSIC MINISTRY – A TRAJECTORY

Presented by Dr. Stephen Marshall

Hopefully, you have already read the exciting article in this issue of THE SPIRE about Ascension's new organ. You might assume that I am excited about the success and imminence of this project. You are correct! I am "over the moon"! We first need to recognize and give thanks for the two anonymous parishioners whose donations allowed us to purchase the organ. I am also extremely grateful to the leadership of Father Michael and the vestry for helping to bring this opportunity to its full fruition. Thank you all!

At this point, as Ascension's Organist, I want to make a few things clear:

- This is not an arrival point that now allows us to sit back and simply fall in love with our new instrument.
- This is the starting point! The Organ is not "the end." It is the foundation upon which we can build a solid ministry. It is the "beginning" – the launching pad.
- As Ascension faces obvious transitions, this instrument affords us tremendous opportunities. From this foundation, we can use the legacies of the past and this current new legacy (the new organ) to build new visions for the future of Ascension.

Over the next weeks and months, I will begin sharing with you visions of just how exciting the opportunities will become. Please watch for my upcoming articles in coming issues of THE SPIRE.

Please note, as well, that Benny (our Cellist-in-Residence) and I will be giving another concert on October 25 at 4:00pm. The program is a lovely presentation of the music of J.S. Bach, Peter Tchaikovsky, and Franz Schubert. Please invite your family, friends, and neighbors to enjoy an afternoon of wonderful music.

CASSEROLES

FRUIT

POTLUCK COFFEE HOUR

SUNDAY, NOV. 1

SALADS- ANY KIND

PASTRIES

BRING WHATEVER YOU'D LIKE TO—

NO DESSERTS PLEASE- THERE WILL BE CAKE!!!!!!!!!

The Episcopal Church of the Ascension

PRESENTS

Benny Yi-Bing Chu, Cellist

Stephen Marshall, Pianist

CONCERT

Sunday, October 25, 2026 4:00PM

featuring the music of
J. S. Bach, Tchaikovsky, and Schubert

The Parish Hall
25 E Laurel Avenue - Sierra Madre, CA 91024 - 626.355.1133

Generous Donations greatly appreciated to benefit the Parish Music Fund

NEW ORGAN FOR ASCENSION

This article is jointly written and presented by Dr. Stephen Marshall, Minister of Music & Organist and Walker Williams, Senior Warden of the Vestry.

Since before Dr. Deborah Huffman retired, the current pipe organ at Ascension (built in 1983 by David Harris) has been the subject of significant conversations about how best to deal with the challenges it presents.

The HISTORY and CHALLENGES:

The current Harris organ was a great acquisition in 1983 and has faithfully served the Ascension community for many decades. To save the church a great deal of money when building the organ, Mr. Harris creatively invented a one-of-a-kind electrical system within the organ. But that system is now aging, presents limitations, and needs significant repair. The parts he invented are unique and, therefore, not repairable. The system has been failing and is now doing so at an increasing rate. Sometimes notes play and sometimes they do not play; sometimes the memory system works and sometimes it does not work. The console (the actual keyboards and controls of the organ) was simple and cost-saving from the beginning. The action of the keyboards and stop systems are now loud and unpredictable. The organ was built as a valiant attempt to cram a real pipe organ into a very small space, making ongoing maintenance challenging.

THE RESEARCH:

Upon his arrival at Ascension one year ago, Stephen Marshall began to work with Ryan Ballantyne, the caretaker of Ascension's organ, and educated himself about what might be the best solution for Ascension. Strong consideration was given to finding a replacement pipe organ – from building a new one (not nearly enough space and at great cost) to finding a slightly used pipe organ. While a few used pipe organs (representing some cost-savings) were found across the country, they would always seem forced into a space for which they were not designed. This situation ultimately led Dr. Marshall to the same conclusions as Dr. Deb and others from years ago had reached: we need to strongly consider what state-of-the-art digital technologies would afford us. As a result, Stephen began looking into these technologies and entertained presentations from each of the leading digital organ representatives, including such companies from England.

THE SOLUTION:

A few weeks ago, an opportunity was dropped into our lap: Ryan Ballantyle acquired a 2023 Allen Digital organ of significant size and capability (perfect for Ascension) and made it available to Ascension at a fraction of its full price. This opportunity is, by a significant margin, the largest organ we would consider while it is also, by a significant margin, much less expensive than any option considered.

Dr. Marshall immediately presented this option to the Vestry. Vestry members responded with enthusiastic support to this proposal and gave permission to seek some initial funding to determine if enough financial support would be garnered. Within a few days, two extremely generous anonymous donors from within the Ascension community responded and 100% of the money needed for the organ and the reconfiguring of the current case to house the new organ speakers had been received. It is with great excitement that the Vestry is moving forward with this project.

THE REQUEST:

While the organ itself is fully funded, additional funding is needed to complete the project as follows:

1. To prepare the current loft for the new instrument and for expanded choir space – including appropriate new flooring.

2. To update the lighting for the entire loft area.

(See Stephen Marshall's separate article about the exciting vision for how the acquisition of this wonderful instrument can help to create opportunities for growth through music ministry endeavors.)

If you would like to be part of this exciting project, please contact either Walker Williams, Senior Warden of the Vestry or Dr. Stephen Marshall, Director of Music & Organist.

SAVE THE DATE

NOVEMBER 1, 2026

9:30 EUCHARIST W/ CONFIRMATION

POTLUCK COFFEE HOUR

RECEPTION HONORING FR. MICHAEL & DEBBIE

2-5PM IN HAWKS HALL

(LOOK FOR INVITATION IN MAIL)

Save the Date

Saturday, November 21, 2026

Put it on your calendar!

Plan to come to Ascension's Holiday Shopping Party

At Savor the Flavor

More information to follow in the November Spire

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.

"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.

*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

OCTOBER 2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1 8:15am Mass 9am Rector's Forum	**2**	**3**
			Deacon Ed Vacation through October 10th			
4 8am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live* 9am Choir Rehearsal 10:15am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live* BLESSING OF THE ANIMALS 11:45AM	**5** 8:15am-9:45am Gooden Chapel 8:30am Yoga/Hall Fr. Michael Out of Office-Clergy Support Grp	**6** 10:50am-11:20 Gooden Chapel for Pre-K	**7** 8:15am-9am Gooden Chapel 8:30am Yoga/Hall 5:30pm Yoga/Hal Men's Group Monthly Luncheon/Noon Nano's Café RSVP to Fr. Michael 3-4:30pm-Organ Practice/Church 6Pm-Wed Night Dinner Grp Meets	**8** 8:15am Mass 9am Rector's Forum 10:30am Staff Mtg 3:30-4:30pm Organ Practice/ Church	**9**	**10**
Deacon Ed Vacation through October 10th						
11 8am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live* 9am Choir Rehearsal 10:15am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live*	**12** 8:15am-9:45am Gooden Chapel 8:30am Yoga/Hall	**13** 10:50am-11:20 Gooden Chapel for Pre-K	**14** 8:15am-9am Gooden Chapel 8:30am Yoga/Hall 5:30pm Yoga/Hal 3-4:30pm-Organ Practice/Church 6Pm-Wed Night Dinner Group Meets	**15** 8:15am Mass 9am Rector's Forum 10:30am Staff Mtg 3:30-4:30pm Organ Practice/ Church	**16** 5pm—Tomaske Wedding Rehearsal/ Church	**17** 10am—Tomaske Wedding & Reception/ Church and Hall
18 8am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live* 9am Choir Rehearsal 10:15am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live*	**19** 8:15am-9:45am Gooden Chapel 8:30am Yoga/Hall	**20** 10:50am-11:20 Gooden Chapel for Pre-K 7pm Vestry Meeting/Hall	**21** 8:15am-9am Gooden Chapel 8:30am Yoga/Hall 5:30pm Yoga/Hal 3-4:30pm-Organ Practice/Church 6Pm-Wed Night Dinner Group Meets	**22** 8:15am Mass 9am Rector's Forum 10:30am Staff Mtg 3:30-4:30pm Organ Practice/ Church	**23**	**24** Funeral & Reception for Hal Ryerson TBD
25 8am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live* 9am Choir Rehearsal 10:15am Worship w/Eucharist *Facebook Live* 4pm—Concert in Hawks Hall	**26** 8:15am-9:45am Gooden Chapel 8:30am Yoga/Hall	**27** 10:50am-11:20 Gooden Chapel for Pre-K	**28** 8:15am-9am Gooden Chapel 8:30am Yoga/Hall 5:30pm Yoga/Hal 3-4:30pm-Organ Practice/Church 6Pm-Wed Night Dinner Group Meets	**29** 8:15am Mass 9am Rector's Forum 10:30am Staff Mtg 3:30-4:30pm Organ Practice/ Church	**30**	**31** HALLOWEEN Trick or Treating at Ascension Approx. 5pm

Spire Creator: Kim Lumino, Parish Administrator