

# 60<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL MEETING

Sunday January 21, 2024

The Episcopal Church of the Ascension

10:00 AM



**Episcopal Church**  
**OF THE Ascension**

[www.ascensionmd.org](http://www.ascensionmd.org)

205 South Summit Avenue

# Agenda for the Sixtieth Annual Parish Meeting

## 10:00 a.m., January 21, 2024

*The Reverend Javier García Ocampo, Rector*

- \* Opening Prayer: Padre Javier
- \* Adoption of Agenda
- \* Minutes of Fifty-ninth Annual Meeting (January 22, 2023)
- \* Presentation of Vestry Candidates
  - Megan Evelyn Didavi
  - Diane Leach
  - Algernon Thomas
  - Mary E. Rouse
- \* Casting of Ballots
  - Three (3) three-year Vestry members
- \* Financial Presentation
- \* Open mic
- \* Voting results

### **OATH OF OFFICE:**

“We, having been duly elected to the office of Vestry Member of Ascension Parish in the city of Gaithersburg, Maryland, do declare our belief in the Christian religion, our assent to the Constitution and Canons of the General Convention of The Episcopal Church and of the Diocese of Washington and do affirm our adherence to the doctrine, discipline and worship of the said Church in the United States of America and promise to discharge faithfully the duties of a Church Vestry Member.”

- \* Next annual meeting January 19, 2025
- \* Adjournment
- \* Blessing

**EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION**  
**Minutes - 59th Annual Meeting**  
**January 22, 2023**

Call to order was made at 11:40am. The meeting opened with a prayer by Padre Javier.

A motion was made that we begin the 59th annual meeting and accept the agenda and the minutes from the 58th Annual meeting. The motion was seconded and it passed unanimously.

The candidates for vestry were presented to the congregation. They introduced themselves by saying a few words about themselves and why they want to be on the vestry. Henry has skills in Information Technology. Marcia is a scientist by training. Betsy is a manager at Shady Grove Hospital and has prior vestry experience. Fredis is a landscaper and knows the church needs a lot of landscaping. A question was asked of the candidates; how can the church draw in young people. Henry responded by saying that we need to reach out to the youth as well as their parents. Marcia has been invited to other churches and she has noticed that there were more young families attending. We may not necessarily offer what people need.

Young people are more interested in doing things related to social justice. They are also interested in being more involved in serving at the services and on committees; getting out and spreading the word, evangelism. Betsy added that we need to examine all that we do including getting the parents in - then they will bring their children. Fredis said that it is up to the parents to examine their spirituality with their kids. The way we live is an example to our neighbors. A member spoke about what we can do as a church to attract the parents so that they bring the kids. People come but do not stay and we have to find out why. Ask your neighbors why they do not go to church. If the reason is transportation (among other things), you can offer a ride.

The Treasurer referenced the report in the packet. The report shows that we are \$100,000 in the red. It has to be looked at in terms of how much we spent on the building, which is about \$220,000. That includes cutting the tree that was between the church and the chapel. The bottom line is that we can get through this and next year we will do better because of the new budget. There is a backup that is invested and we cannot access it. It is about \$400,000 and so we should not panic even though the money issue is serious.

Our investment is affected by the stock market so if it improves we gain and we lose if it goes down. A question was asked about the Facilities Reserve Fund (FRF). The Treasurer explained that we had about \$75,000 in the fund. The \$200,000 depleted it and more. A suggestion was made by a member that we inform the congregation each month as a reminder to fund the FRF again. The response to the suggestion is that there is a fund raiser in our plans for the future.

The budget for next year is even. We have a volunteer from our church, Clay Kolle, who is a CPA, and he has worked hard on our budget. The shortfall in our budget, how does that correlate with the attendance or pledging units? Not sure how that relates since it appears only a few people are missing. A member moved to accept the budget as presented and Sari seconded. It passed unanimously. Gary handed over the "keys" to Avin who is the new Treasurer.

Danielle mentioned that we did not have coffee hour during the pandemic but now that we have started back in church, we do not have any committees responsible for it. We would love to have a sign-up sheet for each Sunday and hope people sign up to sponsor coffee hour.

Padre thanked the outgoing vestry, Lisa, Susan Monty, and Gary (Treasurer). He also mentioned that we are working with a company called SciTech 2U that provides after school classes for kids.

We are working with the county to have Ascension House renovated. More information will be provided as we receive it. Ascension House is still designated as a historical landmark. A member suggested that we update the parish directory.

The Voting results were announced and for the three-year terms Marica, Betsy and Fredis were elected. Arturo was elected Delegate.

Padre closed the meeting with a prayer. The next annual meeting will be on January 21, 2024

A member moved to adjourn the annual meeting and it was seconded. It passed unanimously. The meeting ended at 1:03 pm.

## **RECTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT**

Each year I review all that has happened with an eye toward the things that we can feel proud to have accomplished – as well as the things that need attention or correction.

Naturally, I enjoy revisiting all the positive events, successful trials and generous outpouring of love, labor, and money. This is truly a magnificent congregation, and it pleases me greatly to think of all the acts of kindness and service I have observed this year.

We are most fortunate that the Ascension congregation has continued to respond to the financial needs of the Church this year, both ordinary and unexpected, This generosity has helped to relieve anxiety about the many urgent needs for repair and restoration. All the important projects got done without the need of using the Church's Endowment Fund. This is a very good thing! There is more good news on other fronts as well. Consider the following:

- \* I am pleased to note that there has been a fresh interest in prayer and spirituality.
- \* There has been a new willingness to engage in community outreach.
- \* We have had walk-about in the neighborhoods and have placed colorful invitations at the homes in the area as a soft introduction to the church. (I know that this is a new activity at Ascension. Be assured that we will never act intrusively, and the Vestry and I think that touching base with our neighbors can have many positive results.)
- \* The long-awaited rain garden is in place. It is a testament to the ever-willingness of parishioners to work with outside funders and like-minded people to reach a beautiful and environmental goal for all of us.
- \* We now have a budding children's program, full of joy and promise.



\* Finally, the columbarium has been professionally cleaned and all niches regROUTED, a fitting tribute to deceased family and friends.

There are, of course, a few matters that are less pleasant to think about, though none are devastating. Ascension's roof is leaking and cannot be ignored. You might say, "what, again?" But unfortunately, this is a new leak in one of three separate roofs of various types. I am sure we have more detailed information in the Facilities Committee Report. We knew the day would come that this roof segment would demand further attention, and it has arrived. Additionally, we also know that the air conditioner will have to be replaced soon. The last two years have been punishingly severe for the church's infrastructure, and we now have a plan for the inspection and maintenance of all relevant structural items.

As you know, Andrew Kullberg, our organist and choir director, has resigned. He brought a high level of musicality and professionalism to the position, and we wish him well. We are actively recruiting his replacement.

I have sensed a certain level of "committee fatigue" this year. I'm not sure whether committee members have wearied from serving without relief or assistance, or whether our committees need a reassessment for relevance or refreshment.

As wonderful as Zoom has been, in some situations I am not sure that it is an optimal way to get together, to share and do the work of the church. In fact, I am beginning to think that Zoom dampens the best of all of the spiritual experience – the services, committee work, planning and especially strengthening the social bonds that hold the community together. Of course, Zoom is easy and efficient, and it is not BAD. I use it myself when I need it, but something is missing in the Zoom experience.

Here is an analogy that occurred to me.

You are hungry and want some beef stew. There is a can of Beef Stew in the pantry; and there are all the needed ingredients for stew in the fridge. You are able to cook, but you decide to use the can to "save time". The meal is adequate and fast, but not really satisfying. What did you give up? You have missed the pleasure of handling fresh ingredients, of smelling a powerfully attractive aroma, and the satisfaction of making something good. The tradeoff will not hurt you especially, but it diminishes the full experience.

Of course, Zoom is here to stay. When we simply cannot be together it can be a wonderful tool to be together virtually, and to praise God communally. We need this tool in the modern world – but like the stew analogy, something is missing on Zoom, especially for full services. We do get the substance but miss the essence. The experience is a bit flat. I fear that over time this dulling effect could lose the bonds that encourage friendship, respect, willingness to help others, compassion, and joy. We have these qualities in abundance in our community today, and it is important that we preserve them. I value your views on this.

Finally, I am your Rector, a man who cares for each of you, body and soul; a man who tends to the physical plant, finding the leaks and fixing the broken things; a man who visits the sick, encourages youth and sincerely loves God. This year, my comfortable rhythm has been challenged, my unexamined certainties blown up.

In October of 2023 parishioner Didi Smith and I went on a planned tour in the Holy Land. I was eager to walk in the path of Jesus and expected I might experience a new spirituality. Instead, I woke up on the second day of the tour to the sound of bombs and some kind of unpleasant environment. We were having breakfast when the alarms went off and we didn't know what was going on. After we followed everybody to hide, I remember asking the waiter: "Do you know why we are hiding?"

Once I knew what was happening, I was frankly terrified, and called on God for reassurance, which was given to me. I thought that nobody should live with that fear. I honestly called my family and said goodbye to them. I asked them to take care of Kuali and Hooky and to keep them together. I remembered the words of our blessing: "Life is short, and we do not have too much time to gladden the hearts of those who are travelling the way with us."

Since this episode I have watched with sorrow the death and destruction of the Holy Land. I am sick to see the misery of the people and the intransigence of the leaders. It is hard to see a way out of this terrible situation. I have been changed and humbled by the experience, and it has caused me to reflect on the fragility of life, the futility of war and the suffering of the innocent.

How has this changed me? Perhaps you may not notice it, as I will continue to stanch leaks and fix whatever is broken. I will care for you as always, but I now realize that we are all weak or broken in some way or other. Most of us soldier on bravely, grateful for the gentle support of others who understand how much life and love depends on genuine caring.

In the course of our lives we can all be upended in a moment by grace, circumstances, or internal upheaval. Who will be there for us whatever the outcome? This year I have now experienced the devastating effect of broken community. I have resolved that we will make every effort to do well all the things that keep the Church of the Ascension vibrant and thriving.

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### **REPORT FROM REV. ROSA BRIONES, DEACONESS**

It seems incredible to me how this year has gone by so fast, seeing that the date I started at the Church of the Ascension was September 15, 2022. I will tell you that I feel extremely happy with my new church family and I have always expressed that to everyone, both here in the church and outside in the different meetings I have participated in.

I participate in many zoom meetings with the different groups that exist in the church.

I participate in the monthly men's shelter lunch program making sandwiches. On Wednesdays, I participate in the WAM Reading Group and have learned a lot from them.

I have represented our church in several diocesan services I have attended at the Washington National Cathedral.

I participated in getting to know our neighborhood by being present at the City of Gaithersburg PRIDE Festival and walking around our surrounding neighborhood with members of the parish.

In addition, I have served as Miriam Felipe's deacon mentor as she prepares for her diaconal call and we hope to support her in her ordination in October of this year.

I have made several visits to the sick with Father Javier. Also, last year, we had the first Posada and about 12 people attended. We hope with God's grace, this year, we will do it and prepare much better to have more participation.

I am already preparing for Ash Wednesday, because this year, we are going to be located at both Shady Grove Metro Station access points.

For me, the focus of the past year has been to establish relationships and fellowship with my Ascension Church family and getting to know the surrounding community. Thank you all so much for the help you have given me, as it is a gift in my spiritual growth.

### **FROM THE SENIOR WARDEN**

I will remember 2023 as the year the Ascension turned up our light in our community at large. We have always been a part of our community at large through our various outreach projects such as Mobile Med, the Lord's Table, lunches for the men's shelter, and our support of Gaithersburg Help and Linkages to Learning at Summit Hall Elementary just to name a few. However, this year we started a few new activities which I hope will become traditions. In June we hosted a Health Fair sponsored by Viva Nueva. This brought health related vendors from Montgomery County to our campus and provided an opportunity for people in the community to receive free screenings and obtain information about health-related programs. In October, we had a Fall Festival which featured the Trunk or Treat event. This event brought children from the church and Sandy Ridge Academy to our campus to participate in games and trick or treating. In December, as part of our participation in the Tending Our Soil program we canvassed the area around the church and distributed several hundred door hangers that contained the times for our services on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. These were all

opportunities to welcome our neighbors, to get to know them, to learn ways that we can serve them and for them to learn more about us. It is my hope that once our neighbors learn more about us, those who are looking for a Christian community will join us. I am also looking forward to continuing to find different ways to serve our neighbors.

I am honored to be the Senior Warden at Ascension. My favorite part of the job is the opportunity to work with our fantastic staff – Padre Javier, Tracey, Jesse, Julie, and Randall. Their hard work and dedication help to make Ascension the wonderful place that it is. I also enjoy working with all of the hardworking, dedicated volunteers. Thank you to all of those with whom I serve with on Vestry, and everyone who serves on a committee for all of your hard work. Thank you to the tech team; altar guild; welcome team, including Sari for putting together the schedule; and the counters. Thank you all so much for all of your hard work. You are what makes Ascension a wonderful place to be. I am writing this after seeing the Epiphany pageant. I want to give a special thank you to Megan Didavi and everyone who helped to put the pageant together. It was great to see all of the kids having fun. There is a hymn titled, “There is a Sweet Sweet Spirit in This Place.” That was certainly true for Ascension tonight. I hope that we can continue to grow that spirit within our church community and shine our light out into our neighborhood.

Sincerely,  
Kristen Keating

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### FROM THE JUNIOR WARDEN

When I responded to the Candidate questionnaire for the Vestry in 2019, I said the "three most pressing issues" for Ascension were growing Ascension (attendance and participation, integration of members between services), maintaining the facilities, and financial stability. I addressed the facilities in my letter last year. This year, I am addressing Growing Ascension.

2023 saw the dissemination of a few surveys to the congregation. The executive committee sought your input to a way forward with our music program, suggestions for fundraising, and insight into non-worship church activities. That final survey was published during the Ascension Expo and unfortunately didn't receive many responses. You may remember that I shared what feedback we did receive by writing a cover letter for This Week at Ascension in November. To quickly recap, you told us you are looking for Fellowship. The overwhelming response was that you want to be social with other members of Ascension and, we hope, the Gaithersburg community that Ascension calls home. Few respondents want their interaction with Ascension to be relegated to Sunday services. Not only do you want fellowship, but you want more of it to be in person instead of zoom. You'd like to come together for additional opportunities for spiritual growth and you definitely don't mind if there's food involved. With fewer than 15 respondents, this doesn't necessarily indicate the feelings of the parish. But for those who were willing to respond, we can tailor activities to support their needs.



The team for Tending Our Soil has been working diligently for the past two years towards revitalization of our Parish. I encourage you to read their report. We appreciate everyone who has supported their initiatives to be more present in the neighborhood. We did have some of our neighbors join us on Christmas Eve following the door hanger campaign. Well done team! I, for one, will continue to support your work and do my part to offer opportunities for fellowship and engagement.

To that end, I brought up the concept of a Third Place at the first candidate forum. Is it possible to create a space that is open and welcoming for members and our neighbors to be when they are not at home or at work? Third Places help promote interaction among the community. There is no agenda, no program, just open space to commune with others. We should still pursue scheduled activities such as bible study, crocheting classes, and more. But perhaps we can also offer another freeform option that brings our Parish and neighbors together.

Lay leaders and members of the congregation should feel empowered to create programs that support their needs, interests, or to fill a gap in what Ascension currently offers. This is how new ministries, like the most recently formed Green Team, are created. I pray you all heed my November call to action as I call you to it again now.

Danielle Allen

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## **MUSIC MINISTRY REPORT**

Andrew Kullberg who began as Director of Music in September 2018 resigned his position on October 29, 2023. Ascension has been fortunate to find substitute organists to fill in since Andrew left. We are fortunate to have very talented people in midst. Thank you to Melanie Mitchell for her excellent leadership in the early days of the transition. We are also grateful to Michael McMahon and Ray Valido who have stepped in to work with the choir as director/organist and pianist respectively. Thank you also to Bill Stief, former parishioner and frequent substitute organist, for providing recorded music and a lot of great advice during the early days of the transition.

We have formed an Organist/Choirmaster Search Committee. Our first step is to find an interim Organist/Choirmaster. This person will be asked to serve for 5-12 months. During which time we will look for a permanent Organist/Choirmaster. I am happy to report that we will be interviewing for the interim position in the next few weeks.

On behalf of the choir, I would like to thank the congregation for their continued support during this time of transition. We look forward to meeting, working with and learning from new people.

Kristen Keating  
Choir member

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## CHILDREN'S FORMATION

Children are welcome here!

Ascension believes in its children-their innocence, energy, joy, spirit of wonder and the honesty of their questions. We believe that children have a place equal to the youth and adults of this parish at the table in God's house.

### Sunday School:

Children's formation is held at both 10:00 and 12:00. We use Godly Play, a Montessori-based Sunday School curriculum, presenting the stories of the Bible using figures and objects within a sacred space. Children experience these stories, wonder about them, and explore the stories using the story objects or art materials. The children and teachers join the congregation for the Eucharist and closing hymn.

Children may attend either in person, or via zoom. We currently have 3-6 children who regularly attend at 10:00 (including one who attends over zoom) and 1 who regularly attends at 12:00. We have 3 trained Godly Play teachers, who take turns doing the lesson at 10:00: Kristin FitzPatrick, Michelle Wood, and Megan Didavi. Mary Rouse and Kay Kolle take turns assisting at 10:00. Megan Didavi is the only trained Godly Play teacher who does the lesson at 12:00 and Gordon Donnelly is the only helper. We trained four new people this past fall and look forward to them gradually participating more.

### Nursery care:

In summer of 2023, we received a Congregational Growth grant from the Diocese to hire a Nursery Aide. We hired 18-year-old Elise Liberty who did an excellent job working with children and helping to prepare the classroom, but unfortunately, we rarely had children needing care. We've managed to keep the nursery open with the help of dedicated volunteers: Eliane Dunn, Leslie Calloway and Kay Kolle, but they only occasionally have a toddler to care for.

### Pancake supper children's activities:

During the Mardi Gras Pancake supper, we offer children's activities such as making a Mardi Gras mask or decorating an Alleluia banner which we keep hidden until Easter when we may say Alleluia again!

### Easter Egg Hunt:

The congregation donates plastic eggs stuffed with candy or small toys and we invite children to search for them on the church grounds after the 10:00 and 12:00 services on Easter Sunday. We often invite youth group members to help hide the eggs.

### Children's Sunday:

In the spring, the children and their teachers will plan a One Ascension service. We will work with the Directors of Music to choose child-friendly songs. Children help with welcome team duties and do the readings for the day and make other contributions according to their abilities.

### Family Activities:

We plan to organize family fun activities in the spring, summer, and fall. In the past, we have held a summer bike rodeo and held a fall festival.

### Epiphany Pageant:

January 8, 2023, we performed "Wow! A Nativity Play for Kids" by Gwynne Watkins. Nine children from all three services attended several rehearsals to prepare for the performance. Five adults (Gordon Donnely, Kay Kollé, Kristin Fitzpatrick, Ruth Anna Skowronski and Megan Didavi), led by high school senior Melvin Velasquez, designed the set over several work sessions. Music Director Andrew Kohlberg accompanied the Christmas Carols on the piano. For 2024, we plan to do a more relaxed pageant which has more audience participation and improvisation. We plan to start the show at 5:00 and follow it with a potluck dinner around 5:30.

For more information, or the zoom link for Sunday School, please contact Megan Didavi at [megandidavi02@gmail.com](mailto:megandidavi02@gmail.com) or 703-626-7199.

## YOUTH GROUP

For grades 6th and up (including alumni both from local colleges or those visiting home), we gather for Ascension Youth Group typically on the second and fourth Sundays of each month from 6:00 - 8:00 pm. Since fall, we have had around seven active students, one of our smallest groups in many years. This is because we have graduated 16 students in the past 4 years. As we no longer have a Sunday morning educational component for Youth in this age group, we added formation to the evening program, when most of our students are more awake and engaged. Each Youth Group meeting consists of the three "Fs": Food, Formation, and Fun!

At the annual Mission Fair in September, we begin recruiting new students. Then our first meeting is a cookout in September where we brainstorm themes for the year ahead. We use mainly our own formation curriculum keeping the material simple and biblically based, and most importantly, relevant. Often, we pull from real-world activities to focus the discussion. We treat students as responsible young individuals who want to learn more about the Bible and its meaning in their lives.

Youth Sunday is a critically important activity for our Youth, and hopefully the entire Ascension community. The students plan and lead the service with our high school seniors presenting the homilies. Importantly, they also select music that has meaning for their lives. In the Spring of 2023, we had two seniors; both of whom had all been in the youth group since sixth grade. It

is always an emotional and amazing experience. Look for Youth Sunday this spring on April 28th, 2024, which will also be a One Ascension Sunday!

Service is a key component of the Ascension Youth program, and the Youth select the projects they undertake. This Fall they built “hygiene kits” for the immigrants being bused up from the border. They learned about this horrible process and how our local area is responding. Back in the summer of 2023, a week-long summer work camp experience supported the students from St. James School, in Philadelphia, PA. This year was the second time our youth were camp counselors at North Bay, on the northern Eastern Shore of MD, for the St. James students. It’s summer camp for St. James with all the typical activities: swimming, basketball, campfires, and zip lines. Usually, we go to the campus in Philadelphia and work at the school itself, but these last two summers our Youth truly got to know the St James students (being with them 24 hrs. a day) and build relationships with them. We had 11 youths participate, including three graduates! It was an amazing experience! Our Youth have enjoyed serving St. James students before it was an official school, for over a decade. Also, as part of the preparation, the Youth did a fundraiser for St James. The congregation was extremely generous, donating over \$6,000!

Ascension’s Youth Group is focused on forming lasting relationships through shared meals, fellowship, service, and fun. The strength of these relationships is born out of the closeness of the community. Fun games and outings include holiday parties and cookouts as annual events.

We are seeking new leaders for the Ascension Youth program. We have volunteered in this role for 15 years now and due to many circumstances, we have decided to step down after the summer of 2024. We look forward to working closely with the new leaders as they “learn the ropes” and develop new activities going forward. Please prayerfully consider volunteering for this critically important role at Ascension.

Angela and Trevor Hight Walker

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## **WORSHIP COMMITTEE**

Early in the year, Padre Javier asked the Worship Committee to use its budget to cover altar flowers, Communion supplies, and upgraded vestments, among other items. We requested \$10,000 to cover these, and set \$8,000 as a desired minimum. As is well known, the parish is faced with many financial challenges, and so the committee did not receive even half the minimum amount requested. Parishioners have been requested to donate altar flowers, and an artificial flower arrangement has been obtained to use when no flowers are donated. Alternate arrangements for Communion supplies have been made.

During Lent, the committee set up email distribution of the biographic sketches of the saints who were included in this year's "Lent Madness." These emails included each day's picture

and thought from "Living Well through Lent" from Living Compass. The emails also included a link to the Lent Madness web site so that recipients could easily access it and vote for their favorite saint each day.

We have begun planning the Stations of the Cross devotion for Good Friday 2024. We have decided that the walk around Olde Towne Gaithersburg is no longer feasible, given that some of the sites that were visited in the past are no longer there, and that the walk might be difficult for some participants. The thought being explored now is to make posters depicting the stations and to put them around the churchyard a day or so before the event. The procession would then be made around the churchyard, culminating at the church door or inside the building. We believe that this would support our efforts to be more visible around our neighborhood and would support our Tending Our Soil program. Betsy has contacted Kristin FitzPatrick about helping make posters for the 2024 Good Friday Stations of the Cross devotion. She also contacted Angie Hight-Walker about getting the youth involved in the project. Angie, in particular, seemed quite enthusiastic about the idea.

The Parish Council enacted a plan by which each of the committees and other activities (e.g., the choir) would make the coffee and provide food for coffee hours. The Worship Committee joined forces with the Green Team to do this on April 16. Ray and Doris Chin noted some improvements that needed to be made to the instructions for preparing coffee, and Doris took several photographs to clarify the steps in the process.

After the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Prayers of the People began including prayers for the people of Ukraine. Betsy Hasegawa expressed a concern that we might not be giving due attention to other parts of the world experiencing armed conflict, which might make it appear that we were favoring white Christians over people of other ethnicities. The committee recommended modifying that petition to be for all experiencing warfare and unrest, and also to include a petition for all affected by gun violence. Both recommendations were accepted.

We have obtained colored cards with an "I give online" message that people can pick up on the way into the nave and place in the offering plate as it is passed. This enables those who do pay their pledges online to place something in the plate to be presented at the altar as a symbol of their contribution. Both English- and Spanish-language cards are available.

The Vestry requested that the Worship Committee review the portions of the parish web site related to worship and provide recommendations for updates. This was done this past spring, and our recommendations were shared with the Vestry.

Early this past summer, Bishop Mariann gave permission to resume Communion by intinction, but did not require any congregation to reimplement it. In response to a request from Padre Javier, the Worship Committee recommended that Ascension keep the ban in place, which we have done.



The committee recommended that all readings by lay readers be made from the lectern, now that the microphone and reading lamp on the lectern have been fixed. The Executive Committee accepted this recommendation, noting that the lectern has fewer steps than the pulpit, and so can be accessed more safely.

Again this year, the committee put up a trifold display at Ascension Expo, and laid out sign-up sheets for the various worship support activities. Several individuals volunteered for these. While there were not as many volunteers this year as in 2022, the effort was still regarded as successful.

We have implemented email distribution of the "Living Well through Advent" pages from Living Compass. This year, we only set up distribution of the English-language pages. The Spanish-language pages are posted on Facebook. Both the English- and Spanish- language pages from "Living Well through Advent" and "Vivir un Buen Adviento en el 2023" have been posted on Facebook and Instagram.

December 24, 2023, is both the Fourth Sunday of Advent and Christmas Eve. If the regular Sunday schedule had been in place for the morning, this would have resulted in having services nearly all day and evening, and would have placed a heavy burden on the clergy. Padre Javier asked the Worship Committee for recommendations on an alternative schedule that would relieve this. The committee recommended having only one service in the morning, which would be Morning Prayer, so that no clergy would be required in the morning. The Christmas Eve services followed the same schedule as in years past.

It has come to our attention that readers who join the service online do not hear the congregational responses to the Psalms and Prayers of the People unless they use earphones or headphones. This is to avoid feedback in the sound system. We are considering asking Sari to include a note in the worship support schedule emails making readers aware of this.

Ruth Anna Skowronski was named Worship Committee co-chair with Curt Lindsay remaining as co-chair. The plan is for Ruth Anna to become chair of the committee after the 2024 annual meeting.

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## **FACILITIES COMMITTEE**

Ascension House:

Earlier this year we prepared Ascension House for the new tenants. We had to change the use designation from office to education. That request was approved by the City in June. We also had to comply with fire and safety regulations. A full inspection was performed by ARK Systems and all deficiencies were corrected. We also made repairs to the front porch railings and ADA ramp. The porch and railings were power washed and treated with a coat of water seal. In

addition, repairs were made to the exterior skirting to prevent rodent invasion and all the broken siding was replaced.

Chapel;

The new fire panel in the Chapel had to be replaced due to a lightning strike. Our insurance company paid \$7,300 of the \$8,300 cost to replace. I also had the phone lines converted to a cellular dialer at an annual savings of \$1,000. The red front door was replaced in May at a final cost of \$3,260. The exterior of the Chapel was power-washed.

Sanctuary and Education Wing:

The UPS (battery pack) was replaced at the fire panel in April at a cost of \$1,760. There have been other minor repairs throughout the year but nothing major. Our biggest increase in the budget has been in utility costs and the added expense of preparing Ascension House.

Grounds:

There was one grounds issue that was the result of a Sandy Ridge patron that accidentally drove through the playground fence. The fence, landscaping timbers and one piece of playground equipment was restored and paid for by the car owner's insurance. We had new wood chips added to the playgrounds. Most of the underbrush was removed from around our main electrical transformer. All mowing, trimming and leaf removal was completed on a timely schedule throughout the Summer and Fall months.

The Facilities Committee was also involved in two other projects in a supportive role - the addition of the pollinator / rain garden and the restoration of the Columbarium.

Looking ahead to the future there are two major challenges that will need our attention. First is the roof replacement; the other is the replacement of our rooftop HVAC units for the Educational wing.

Overall I feel we are doing well at keeping up with our scheduled maintenance and have been able to make the necessary repairs as they come up. I genuinely believe the overall condition of our buildings has improved this year.

Respectfully submitted,  
Randall Adams

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## **COLUMBARIUM COMMITTEE**

The Columbarium Committee, with the approval of the Vestry and assistance from Facilities Management, undertook a complete restoration of the Columbarium façade. It took two workers nine days to remove each niche cover slate, clean and reinstall with new grout, at a cost of \$11,000. The appearance is greatly improved. This is the first major improvement undertaken since the Columbarium was dedicated in 1991.

Funding for these improvements, as well as materials and maintenance, comes from subscription fees to the Columbarium.

We have received several new applications for the right to interment in the Columbarium, including that from Father Javier. This is such a powerful statement of his belief in our Church and community.

Kathryn Froelich, Columbarium Custodian

Email: [columbarium@ascensionmd.org](mailto:columbarium@ascensionmd.org)

## OUTREACH COMMITTEE

The Outreach Committee serves as a bridge between the Church of the Ascension and its surrounding geographical and spiritual communities.

As representatives of Christ, we seek to understand the needs of our neighbors and coordinate outreach activities of the parish.

We actively seek out and create opportunities for our church members to interact with the greater community, sharing what our church has to offer.

In 2023, we continued with several of our ongoing activities:

Men's shelter (third Sunday of each month. coord: Edith Sekasi)

Volunteers in the congregation make approximately 60-100 bag lunches. We meet in the undercroft and assemble sandwiches, snacks, and drinks between the 8 and 10 am services, so that they can be delivered before noon.

Lord's Table soup kitchen (coord: Michelle Wood)

During the fall, winter, and spring, we continued to support the Lord's Table soup kitchen, based at Church of the Redeemer in Gaithersburg. Our stalwart volunteers prepare and serve dinners on the 3rd Monday of the month.

Mobile Med (coord: Michelle Wood)

We provide Mobile Med a place to park and restroom facilities, and can have available volunteers to help patients with forms.

Linkages to Learning- backpacks (coord: Kristen Keating)

We provided 38 backpacks this year for "Linkages to Learning"- members of the congregation donated backpack contents as per the Summit Hall Elementary School's back to school Supply Lists. Volunteers assembled backpacks for each grade, and we delivered them to the school in late August.

### Yard Sale (June)

We held a community "pay what you will" yard sale in June of 2023.

In conjunction with the Equity and Justice Committee:

### Rockville Pride (June)

In conjunction with the E&J Committee, we hosted a booth at Rockville Pride, welcoming any passersby, handing out information about Ascension, and providing materials to make pride bracelets. In addition, the congregation collected clothing for the closet for Montgomery Pride's Pride Prom, for students who may not have family support or resources for prom outfits. Three members of the congregation also volunteered as chaperones for the prom.

### Giving Tree (coords: Kristen Keating, Laurie Yelle)

For Advent, we sponsored the Giving Tree project, in which parishioners provide a gift needed in the community and/or provide prayers.

### Comfort Cases (coord: Laurie Yelle)

We maintain a tub in the entranceway for donations for Comfort Cases, a local group that provides backpacks with pajamas, blankets, and toiletries for foster children.

## GREEN TEAM COMMITTEE

Welcome to the Green Team! We came together as a team in February 2022 and had our first meeting on March 15, 2022. Our mission is to protect the natural environment we live in, which includes plants, animals, water, soil, and air. We need to protect the environment we live in for ourselves and most importantly for our future generations. In order for us to carry out our mission, we educate others about the importance of preserving our natural resources and informing others about clean choices for our daily lives. We inform people about the harmful effects of air, water, and land pollution caused by oil and plastics. All of this includes protecting the Chesapeake Bay watershed, our shared living space. The Green Team has worked along with the Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake (IPC) to reach our environmental goals. You can find more information about IPC on their website: <https://www.interfaithchesapeake.org/>.

Our team meets the 2nd Monday of every month at 7:00 pm, via hybrid/zoom. The Green Team has started meeting at members' houses for a dinner and meeting afterwards. The current members are Kay Kolle (chair), Gail Unterberger (co-chair), Randall Adams, Megan Didavi, Diane Leach, Padre Javier Ocampo, and Linda Waters. I thank the members of our team for their contributions and a special thanks to Randall for his church grounds expertise, advice, and service for the team. We welcome all who would like to join us to take a stand in protecting our natural environment. We welcome everyone who shares concerns about our environmental future with the increase of global warming and pollution. We welcome anyone who would like to learn about preserving actions we can take and about environmental degradation that is currently taking place. United we can make our mark in the preservation of our natural world. We can follow God's call to care for the earth person by person, church by church, and

community by community. For more information about our team and the zoom link to our meetings contact us at [ascensionmdgreen@gmail.com](mailto:ascensionmdgreen@gmail.com) or Kay at [marykolle1@verizon.net](mailto:marykolle1@verizon.net).

### **What Have We Done This Year?**

January: Through the generous donations of our church members, our church is now using coffee mugs for the coffee hour following the church services. Using the mugs enables us to reduce the paper and Styrofoam waste.

The Green Team posted an article in our church bulletin about three environmental bills which would be voted upon in the upcoming legislative session. The article included links for each bill which gave information and an opportunity for one to sign a petition.

February: The Green Team organized an excursion to Josiah Henson Museum & Park to visit the museum and attend the Program “When the Stars Align.” The members of our church who attended gained insight to Josiah Henson’s life and achievements, an enslaved African American from Maryland who used the Underground Railroad to access his freedom into Canada.

Kay also shared with the team an opportunity to apply for a grant, “Trees for Sacred Places” through the National Forest Service. This would enable trees to be planted on our church grounds. The team agreed we should go forward with the application. More information about this program can be found at Trees for Sacred Places. <https://www.interfaithchesapeake.org/resources>.

March: Randall shared with the team his research for the possibility for future solar power for our church. We are especially interested in the solar PPA option where the church would only pay for the power we use.

The Green Team posted in the church bulletin information about Earth Day Celebrations in and around our community open for all to attend.

April: Church of the Ascension was awarded \$5000.00 mini grant from the Chesapeake Bay Trust for the installation of a rain garden. The team decided together that the name of the rain garden would be “Piscataway Rain Garden” in honor of the Piscataway People who once lived on the grounds where our church stands now. Kay applied for a Creation Care grant through the Episcopal church that would support the balance of the Rain Garden cost.

May and June: Chesapeake Bay Grant - Kay met with Michael Wyande (City of Gaithersburg) and Danielle Hamilton (Chesapeake Bay Trust) to go over the parameters of the grant. Kay submitted a three-year maintenance report and submitted a plant replacement for a native plant (Sweet Pepperbush – *Clethra Alinifolia*) on May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Randall contacted Eco Green to install our rain garden on the second week of June.



Kay shared pictures of the “Piscataway Rain Garden” with Church of the Ascension and the Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake. She also posed the idea of holding a future Earth Day event at our church.

August and September: Kay applied for free native plants through the National Wildlife Federation and the partners for Sacred Grounds. The native plants would be for use on church grounds, to give away to congregants and to educate the community.

The Green Team organized a poster for the “Ministries Fair” being held on September 10th to show photographs of the activities and accomplishments over the year. This poster also outlined future plans.

Trees For Sacred Places - The Green Team met with Liam Ulsevich (urban forester) to look at our church grounds for tree placement. Kay showed our church landscape plans to Liam, which included tree planting. The Green Team decided to use Serviceberry and River Birch trees to be planted on the side of the church facing the high school.

October and November: The team discussed arranging a time for a clean-up of the rain garden. Randall made the arrangements.

The Green Team and the Ascension’s Equity and Justice Committee (AEJC) decided to view a webinar which was being hosted by IPC. The webinar was called “Decolonizing Our Relationship to the Land” and was hosted on November 2<sup>nd</sup>. The team advertised the webinar on our church bulletin to invite all congregants. During this webinar Kay invited Jessica Swann and Chief Swann of the Piscataway Canoy Tribe to come to our dedication ceremony for our “Piscataway Rain Garden” which will be held in the spring of 2024.

December: The Green Team agreed on the language for the rain garden sign.

### **Piscataway Rain Garden**

**This rain garden is dedicated to the Piscataway People, who inhabited this land for thousands of years.**

**Dedicated on June 9<sup>th</sup> 2024**

Kay shared with the team her idea of purchasing silverware for our congregation to use during our 1A services and luncheons. This would be used in place of the single use plastics. Kay has already purchased utensil bins with lids to store the silverware.

### **Future Green Team Plans**

- To apply for a solar grant, so that our church would be powered by solar panels and reduce our impact on the environment. This would be done after the roof is replaced.
- Or we would obtain solar by “Power Purchase Agreements” (PPA’s). This is a third party who owns the panels and sells the congregation the power at a discount.

- Working with a partner congregation Green Team, St. Martin's in Gaithersburg, with joint activities and projects.
- Working with St. Martin's youth and Church of the Ascension's youth in educating the benefits of rain gardens and planting native plants.
- Church members working in a local community garden to help support food needs in the community.

Kay Kolle

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## **ASCENSION INVENTORY COMMITTEE**

### **Ascension Inventory Committee Members:**

Cathy Oliveri (chair)  
Berenice Rodriguez  
Ruth Anna Skowronski

In 2023, the Ascension Inventory Committee resumed the process of taking inventory of personal property items in the Church of Ascension and Ascension House. The Inventory Committee seeks to fulfill our obligation of being good stewards of Ascension's resources, and to give us insight into what we need based on the resources we already have, while listing the value of our belongings for insurance purposes.

During this past year, efforts continued to enhance access to Ascension's extensive lending library. Cathy used LibraryThing, a free library-quality on-line book tracker and catalog, and TinyCat, a website that gives everyone access to our book catalog. So now Ascension's collection is organized - labels and all! While library patrons will still have to come to the church to check out material, they will be able to use their web browser to see what's available. Our next step will be to invite Ascension members to an open house in early 2024 to introduce readers to the wonderful collection and the new format for checking out and returning resources.

In 2024, we will continue the inventory of all the resources that contribute to life at Ascension in case we ever need to file an insurance claim.

Ruth Anna Skowronski

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## **TENDING OUR SOIL**

The Tending Our Soil (TOS) Ascension committee is participating in the diocesan program "to cultivate the changed soil of our congregations so that God's love might grow in our time and place." This year was a busy one for TOS Ascension. Under instruction from the larger Tending Our Soil curriculum, we constructed a timeline and solicited feedback from the congregation to populate it. Members generously contributed their experiences to help us build a visual history of Ascension. Even today, the timeline in the back hallway receives new entries—please stop by and read—and maybe add your piece of Ascension history!

Our next project was to collect information about the values, beliefs, and practices by asking our members to write their thoughts on index cards that are still hanging in the Undercroft. We are a diverse community and yet, like a tapestry, share many common threads. Our views emphasize community, service, and prayer, among other sentiments.

One TOS initiative is to discern an understanding of the people in the neighborhood around Ascension. Therefore, TOS Ascension organized a walkabout of two circuits of roads near Ascension. Eighteen members strolled the nearby neighborhoods, learned about the locations of other small churches, parks, and greeted neighbors in English and Spanish. Each person left with a better sense of the people who live around us, even though most current members drive to Ascension from outside the circuits walked.

Leading up to the 2023 Christmas season, we decided to revisit the neighborhoods and share Ascension information about Christmas and general services. Special thanks to Fredis Diaz who designed doorhangers to distribute. Padre Javier graciously shared his funds to produce them, and participants walked in teams on both sides of Route 355 to hang the doorhangers on as many homes as possible. On Christmas Eve, there were neighborhood families who attended the children's service because of receiving the doorhanger.

The Diocese has organized five learning labs for participating congregations in our cohort. The first year was mostly homework and completing tasks to get to know Ascension as it is. The second year has been more open-ended, taking what was learned in the previous year and applying it in ways that fulfill our mission and vision through strategic goals.

In addition, Padre Javier and Elizabeth Baker (team lead) have participated in special monthly coaching sessions with a coach provided by the diocese. This provides a space to bounce questions off people higher in the Church hierarchy and benefit from a broader lens.

The Learning Labs have taught TOS Ascension strategies for organizing projects, utilizing public data to inform our work, and incorporating methods of evangelism that support us in telling people how wonderful Ascension is. Next year, we hope to launch new ministries, reassess, and recalibrate, and continue growing. Please join us!

## **Report from the Ascension Equity and Justice Committee (AEJC) for the Church of Ascension Annual Report 2024**

The Ascension Equity and Justice Committee (AEJC) at the Episcopal Church of the Ascension Gaithersburg was formed in June 2020 in response to the social unrest and ongoing, systemic inequities in our country. For the past 3½ years, we have dedicated ourselves to promoting justice and dismantling inequity and injustice in our church, community, and country. Our work involves spiritual growth, education, and advocacy. Each year we have continued to grow spiritually and to educate ourselves as we step more fully into the advocacy role.

Our committee is open to anyone feeling a call to action around issues of equity and justice. We have 28 members. Several people are members of other Episcopal churches. Eight or so

members attend nearly all meetings and are very active in organizing and participating in committee activities. Others attend meetings when they can and participate in activities of particular interest to them. Others attend few or no meetings but keep up with issues of interest by reading the committee's communications. Others simply pray for the committee and our mission. Since the beginning, we have welcomed any level of participation. We generally meet on the first Thursday of each month at 7:00 pm, currently via Zoom. For further information and the Zoom link to our meetings, contact [AscensionAEJC@gmail.com](mailto:AscensionAEJC@gmail.com).

**Accomplishments in 2023:** Since its inception, our committee has celebrated the diversity of our parish and our community by:

- Acknowledging and respecting the inherent dignity of every human being and celebrating our differences.
- Bonding with one another in prayer and fellowship.
- Rooting our mission in Scripture by presenting and discussing scripture, prose, or prayer at our meetings.
- Listening carefully to each other's thoughtful presentations about our experiences with equity and justice and offering support.
- Examining inequalities and injustices and considering how we can live into our interconnectedness using our God-given talents to lift up every member of our human family.
- Educating ourselves by reading news clips, books, and articles; watching films and programs; attending presentations; participating in training sessions; walking in marches; discussing issues of equity and justice with one another; following events and information from the national Episcopal Church and the Episcopal Diocese of Washington (EDOW); and interacting with religious and community leaders.
- Conducting advocacy for causes that promote equity and justice.
- Partnering with like-minded organizations such as the Pine Ridge Reconciliation Center, Pine Ridge, South Dakota.
- Exploring topics relating to societal and religious diversity as well as equity and justice.

## ACTIVITIES IN 2023

### Events Held in 2023

Reverend Ann Moczydlowski spoke via Zoom on "Hope for American Criminal Justice Reform: Ending Torture, Dismantling Racism, and Developing Restorative Alternatives" on January 23 via Zoom. She described her volunteer work with the [Interfaith Action Center for Human Rights](#) (IAHR). Hollis King and James Black moderated.

Ascension's own Diane Leach spoke by Zoom on "European Colonization's Impact on American Indians Along the Mid-Atlantic Seaboard: A Story of Population Loss, Cultural Degradation, and Forced Removal" on February 16. Michelle Wood and James Black moderated. Technology genius Danielle Allen produced these two events flawlessly.

We arranged for Rob Scheer, CEO and Founder of Comfort Cases, Rockville, Maryland, to give the sermons on Sunday, August 27. He described the mission of Comfort Cases and how it has impacted more than 200,000 children in the foster care system in the USA since 2013. We presented five bins of donations that parishioners made to Comfort Cases. Collection for Comfort Cases is ongoing.

Our line item in the Ascension budget for a partnership with Pastor Dan Johnson and the Pine Ridge Reconciliation Center (PRRC) in Pine Ridge, South Dakota, was granted. We helped PRRC and residents of Pine Ridge meet their financial needs through the Giving Tree project.

On November 2 we held a joint event with the Green Team to view the Interfaith Partners of the Chesapeake (IPC) webinar on *Decolonizing Our Relationship to the Land*, about the Indigenous Peoples of the Chesapeake Bay region, with a 30–45 minute Zoom discussion afterward.

### **Excursions Held in 2023**

We took an excursion to the National Museum of American History, on the National Mall, on March 25 to visit “Presente! A Latino History of the United States” and other exhibits..

On April 29 we took a walking tour of historic Georgetown, with highlights of African American history, led by Ascension’s own Scott Smiley, a certified professional tour guide.

### **Communications and Social Media in 2023**

Danielle Allen posted equity & justice content on Ascension’s social media sites all year long. She updated the committee’s website information, created sophisticated registration systems for our events, and skillfully produced all AEJC events.

James Black prepared comprehensive news briefs of relevant local, state, national, and international issues, events, and legislation for every AEJC meeting. He also produced newsletters for the congregation on various topics related to equity & justice.

### **Collaboration with Other Episcopal Churches in 2023**

On June 22 the AEJC held a Zoom call with Rob Hartmann, Co-chair of St. John’s of Norwood, Bethesda, 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration, and Lisa Raisner, Leader of St. John’s Social Justice Advocacy Committee, to discuss ways of sharing equity & justice information and working together. Ascension helped St. John’s with its plans for the Day of the Dead, and St. John’s invited Ascension congregants to its 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration.

On October 26 we had a Zoom call with the Reverend Tim Carr, Rector of Christ Episcopal Church Rockville to get acquainted, discuss ways to learn from each other, and collaborate on equity & justice and other issues. Father Tim described the ways Christ Church has increased its attendance by 30% since he arrived in spring of 2023. He also discussed his welcoming initiatives, particularly to the LGBTQIA+ community, and his vision for Christ Church. We invited Christ Church to participate in our equity & justice activities and excursions.



## Outreach in 2023

AEJC members participated in, and helped organize, Ascension's outreach activities, including Mobile Med and the Lord's Table (coordinated by Michelle Wood), the men's shelter lunch project, the Ascension Yard Sale, the Montgomery County Pride Prom event, the Rockville Pride event, the Ascension Coffee Hour, and the Giving Tree project.

At our May 25 meeting, Aileen Geraghty, a friend of Mary Rouse, spoke about her experience living in a neighborhood amidst unhoused people and those with substance use disorders.

At our December 7 meeting, Randall Adams discussed his neighbors' recent loss of their young son to gun violence, and we considered ways to combat this epidemic and help community members affected by it.

The AEJC donated Black Lives Matter and Pride banners for Ascension's front entrance.

## PLANS FOR 2024

The AEJC's plans for 2024 include:

- Holding congregation-wide events for viewing and discussing films on equity and justice issues every two to three months.
- Taking excursions every two to three months.
- Holding speaker events every three to four months.
- Holding prayer vigils.
- Assisting in other Ascension outreach activities.
- Assisting the Ascension Green Team in environmental activities such as the inauguration of Ascension's Piscataway Pollinator Garden.
- Preparing/updating for the congregation a resource list of books, articles, films and programs, organizations, and websites relating to equity and justice.
- Preparing comprehensive news briefs of relevant local, state, national, and international issues, events, and legislation for AEJC meetings and offering them to the congregation.
- Helping to ensure that Ascension is fully accommodating to persons with disabilities.
- Interacting with community leaders and organizations.
- Advocating for policies and laws to achieve equality and justice.
- Partnering with other Episcopal churches and other faith communities.

Several AEJC members will attend the Social Justice Day on January 20, 2024, a joint effort by the Maryland Episcopal Public Policy Network (MEPPN), the Diocese of Maryland Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), and the Delaware-Maryland Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. They will worship and reflect on the Gospel imperatives as they relate to our activity in the public arena.

**We welcome suggestions for activities and excursions  
from all parishioners!  
Email us at AscensionAEJC@gmail.com.**

### OUR MISSION STATEMENT

**My commandment is this: Love each other as I have loved you.  
John 15:12**

**Mission:** *As our Lord commands and to which we commit in our Baptismal covenant, our mission is to take active and deliberate measures to assure that the inherent dignity of all peoples is acknowledged, respected, and protected. By all peoples, we mean every adult and child of every race, ethnicity, nationality, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, physical ability, religious background, and socioeconomic status under God's creation. We do not overlook but rather respect and celebrate our differences as God intended. We remember and live into our interconnectedness, knowing that we are only as strong, healthy, happy, and satisfied as the least of our human family. We use our God-given talents to lift up every member of our human family.*

We will achieve this through active and deliberate measures such as:

- *Creating a safe space to discuss inequities within our church and in our community*
- *Becoming a Beloved Community by moving from an inclusive congregation to a connected congregation where all feel they belong*
- *Encouraging members to work toward actively eliminating injustice*
- *Participating with activities/organizations that are already working to bring equity (e.g., Habitat for Humanity; Identity, Inc., Gaithersburg; and 3GDC).*
- *Providing educational opportunities for the congregation and community on issues of social justice, race, and inequity that empower them to speak up and speak out against instances of injustice*

How:

- *Celebrate culturally important days/activities that are present in our community.*
- *Make use of national and diocesan programs such as the Episcopal Diocese of Washington's Sacred Ground dialogue series and the national Episcopal Church's initiative "Becoming a Beloved Community," which includes the "From Many, One" project.*
- *Host seminars, town hall-style meetings, vigils, film viewings, lectures, discussions, and service projects for our congregation and the community, including other faith groups.*

- *Encourage the sharing of stories and experiences.*
- *Recommend media (films, books, articles, lectures, workshops, seminars) that provide diverse perspectives.*
- *Conduct a racial audit: research and write up Ascension's history with regard to race and other aspects of its diverse history.*

### **ASCENSION'S CHRONIC ILLNESS SUPPORT GROUP**

For people dealing with a chronic illness, Ascension offers a way to receive support and spiritual sustenance from a caring community. Those individuals and their family members and/or caregivers are invited to join Ascension's Chronic Illness Support Group. We have traditionally met monthly to pray together, offer one another upliftment and camaraderie, and share ways to continue living our lives to the fullest. We also pray for those on Ascension's extended prayer list.

Some people come to the meetings only during the course of their treatment, and others remain in the group even after they have regained their health. Many enjoy continuing to bond and offering support to others. All that is shared in the group is kept strictly confidential.

Traditionally we have met on the 2nd Monday of each month in Ascension's Room 1 from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Participants have brought a bag lunch.

In spring of 2020, we suspended our meetings because of the pandemic.

In 2024 we will hold meetings in person or via Zoom if there is sufficient interest. Even one participant is enough. If you would like to participate, call Father Javier at the Church Office (301-948-0122).

Respectfully submitted by Laurie Yelle 1/19/2024

## Church of the Ascension

### Treasurer's Report Cash and Reserve Funds

December 2023 *(unaudited)*

#### Cash Account Balance Per Balance Sheet

BOA Checking	\$125,783.60
BOA Savings	\$2,539.35
BOA Columbarium Account	\$44,768.90
Rector's Discretionary Fund	\$11,785.30
M&T Endowment Account	\$432,087.18
<b>Total Cash</b>	<b>\$616,964.33</b>

#### Cash Totals by Cash Classification

Unrestricted Reserves	\$128,746.93
Restricted Reserves	\$488,217.40
<b>Total Cash</b>	<b>\$616,964.33</b>

#### Cash Balance by Fund Category

1) <b>Unrestricted Reserves</b>	\$128,746.93
2) <b>Endowment Fund</b> <i>Held in an account with M&amp;T Bank, Managed through the Diocese of Washington</i>	\$432,087.18
3) <b>Facilities Restoration Fund (FRF)</b>	\$60,655.88
4) <b>Memorial/Worship Fund</b>	\$4,778.37
5) <b>Columbarium Fund</b>	\$44,768.90
6) <b>Other Restricted Funds (Special Offerings)</b>	\$27,141.34

## Ascension's 2024 Budget

## EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION

INCOME	2021	2022	2023 <i>budgeted</i>	2023 <i>realized</i>	BUDGET 2024
Plate	28,858	30,749	34,382	32,045	32,500
Pledge	379,340	369,251	369,251	372,778	372,000
Facilities Use Donations (rental income)	42,278	43,000	62,505	69,093	75,000
Facilities Management Donations				10,000	0
Trusts/Endowments	10,235	11,000	9,122	10,158	10,000
All other income	32,214	32,000	44,598	12,781	12,900
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>492,925</b>	<b>486,000</b>	<b>519,858</b>	<b>506,854</b>	<b>502,400</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>					
Salaries & Benefits	263,259	267,984	329,085	329,414	329,000
Mortgage Interest	7,760	7,160	6,000	9,478	9,500
Diocesan Pledge	30,250	30,350	30,000	29,990	30,000
Utilities	37,021	41,006	60,970	68,671	74,164
Accounting	11,067	9,000	500	0	0
Ministry/Outreach/Education	11,182	12,079	12,569	8,300	8,750
Music			3,000	3,912	5,000
Office/General Expense	8,501	8,670	6,000	13,413	13,000
Facilities	91,212	93,327	69,234	93,651	95,812
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>460,252</b>	<b>469,576</b>	<b>517,358</b>	<b>556,829</b>	<b>565,226</b>
<b>NET REVENUE</b>	<b>32,673</b>	<b>16,424</b>	<b>2,500</b>	<b>-49,974</b>	<b>-62,826</b>

## Randall Adam's Utilities and Facilities Budget

<u>Utilities # 55220</u>	<u>2023 budgeted</u>	<u>2024 budgeted</u>
telephone	9950	6045
WSSC water	3670	5263
Electricity Pepco	36550	48966
Wash Gas	4300	2690
Trash and Recycle	6500	11200
<b>total</b>	<b>60970</b>	<b>74164</b>
<u>Facilities # 56899</u>		
Property taxes	5378	4500
Maintenance contracts	17021	18709
Grounds and Landscaping		
Services	13650	17800
Repairs	16700	25250
Facilities management	3000	7800
Insurance	13485	21753
<b>total</b>	<b>69234</b>	<b>95812</b>