



The SPIRE 2021

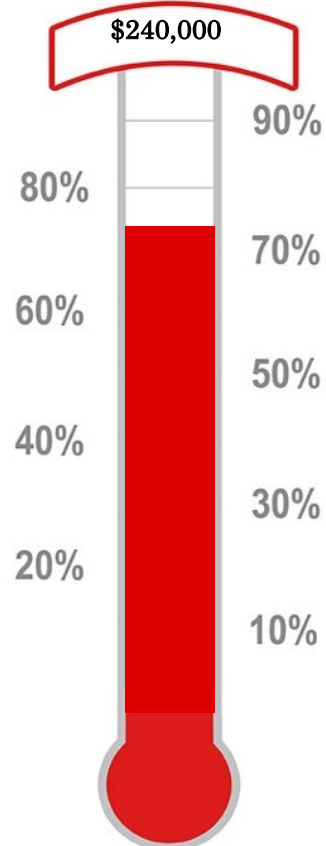
The Newsletter of the
Episcopal Church of the Ascension,
Sierra Madre, California

HAPPY NEW YEAR
2021

Upcoming Events

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

2021 Stewardship Update



DECEMBER 2020 Pledge Payment Snapshot



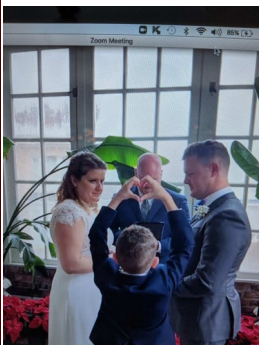
2020 Budget
\$221,000

YTD Budget:	\$221,000
YTD Actual:	\$192,715
Difference:	\$-28,285

From the Rector

I suspect all of us will be glad to say good bye to 2020. It was a year of the unusual. After March, nothing seemed normal; and we grew accustomed to the unfamiliar.

I imagine we all will have much to grieve over. I read that before Covid is a thing of the past, we all will have known someone who has died of the virus. And there are the loved ones who have died of other causes during this time of isolation. It is only right that we acknowledge our sense of loss. Normally, we offer the following prayer at the time of death and at funerals. But it seems appropriate to offer it now for ourselves and for those around us – “Almighty God, Father of mercies and giver of comfort: Deal graciously, we pray, with all who mourn; that, casting all their care on you, they may know the consolation of your love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*”



I also believe that it helps to actively be grateful for blessings both great and small. Many of you know that our son Matthew was married just before Christmas to Lyndsay. I count the addition of Lyndsay and her son James to our family as a great blessing.

I count as a small blessing some things that happened on Christmas Eve. Despite the cancellation of the Annual Candlelight Walk this year, the “Baby Jesus” (of which I am the custodian) needed to appear in the creche in Kersting Court. Nora Gorman ably carried the Baby Jesus down Baldwin Avenue. Thanks to Dr. Deb, the choir, and the techno wizardry of Charley Noecker, we had two anthems new to us on Christmas Eve and on the First Sunday of Christmas.



On the 23rd of December, we received notification from our lender that our PPP loan was forgiven by the SBA. I am grateful for the efforts of our administrator Kim Lumino, our wardens Gordon Tomaske and Ray Smith, and our treasurer Dan Hanson for their diligence in pursuing the loan back in the Spring and following through this Fall to help make our budget.

Blessings, both small and great, need to be remembered and held up. It is just one way that light shines in the darkness. May 2021 be a year of increasing light for all of us.

Love and blessings always,
MAB+

Personally, on behalf of my colleagues and myself, we're very thankful for the generosity shown to us in the “Clergy Purse.” I'm so very grateful for the diversity of gifts and talents our parishioners and staff bring to our life together.

PL PayPal Paycheck Protection P... 3:23 PM
To: Church of the Ascension >

Your PPP Loan Forgiveness Request

SBA Paycheck Protection Program Loan
brought to you by PayPal

Church of the Ascension of Sierra Madre
SBA Loan Number: 6868227308
Lender Loan Number: A00432904
PPP Original Loan Amount: \$ 40,907.00

Dear Michael Bamberger,

Congratulations! The SBA reviewed your Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) Loan Forgiveness Application and determined that you qualify for full loan forgiveness.

As a result, your PPP loan has been marked as paid in full and your loan balance has been reduced to \$0. No further action is required on your part.



Christmas Outreach Project 2020

Thanks everyone for your contributions to the Hillsides gift card Advent project! As a parish, *we donated a total of \$375 in supermarket gift cards* that will be distributed to those in need by the Hillsides staff. They sincerely appreciated our dedication to their cause even in the most trying times.



Thank You,
Scott Callihan, Outreach Ministry Leader

Shopping 2020

We didn't have a shared shopping experience at Savor the Flavor this year - no tasting, sipping, nor visiting.

BUT, many of us still went shopping during Ascension week at the store. We helped keep our local store in business, *and together we raised \$285 for Ascension's Hospitality Fund.*

Many thanks to Maddy for contributing 10% of our purchase costs to Ascension despite all the difficulties merchants are experiencing.

I know we all hope that we will once again experience the fun of shopping and tasting together. We are already scheduled to gather the Saturday before Thanksgiving. Mark the date on your calendars.

Thank You,
Jean Rowe



Thank you to parishioners who contributed to the flower fund for Christmas. The floral decoration this year may have been simple, but it was heartfelt.

St Anne members are eagerly looking forward to this new year and eventually being able to resume our Altar Guild activities/work.

A reminder too that sign-ups for Sanctuary Candles and Sunday Flower donations are available on Sign-up Genius. Links provided on page 4.

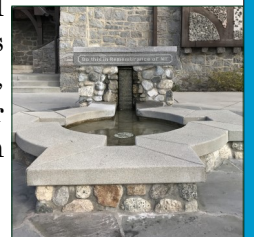
Peace and Health to all.
St. Anne's Altar Guild

thank you

"Adopt the Fountain"

Our outdoor worship space is focused around the altar and font. For the last few years, the fountain has been maintained by a generous friend, who happened to be in the pool maintenance business. Dave has retired and moved to Ventura. As a result, we are looking for someone to maintain the fountain.

Perhaps you know a person familiar with pools or fountains? Could you send them our way and see if this maintenance is something they can handle. We have funds to support this effort, but perhaps someone in the congregation would like to "adopt" the fountain and its maintenance. If you have ideas, please get in touch with the Junior Warden – Ray Smith--- or with Fr. Bamberger.



Parish Annual Meeting

At its meeting in November, your Vestry decided (after consulting the Parish Bylaws) to delay holding the Annual Meeting until the end of February at the earliest. The hope is to put off holding the meeting until a time when we can find some way to gather in person. The main work of the Annual Meeting is to elect new members of the Vestry and to receive the reports of the works of ministry. (The budget for the new year – 2021 - is passed by the Vestry in December and merely presented at the Annual Meeting.) The current Vestry members whose terms are coming to an end are willing to continue for the time being.

So... **Tentatively, the date of the Annual Meeting is set for Sunday, February 28th.**



Closing out 2020 and Welcoming 2021

It is now common to refer to 2020 as the year of catastrophe; and given the events of the prior twelve months, it is easy to see why. When I was asked to rejoin Vestry in March of 2020, I had no idea this would be the year of plague, economic distress, fire, and loss. Nevertheless, upon reflection if I had known what 2020 had in store, I would have rejoined Vestry sooner and bound myself even more tightly to our precious community.

In any given year, we or someone close to us may be subject to personal loss, economic hardship, the threat of natural disaster, or some combination of these trials; and for those impacted, these times are rightly remembered as catastrophic. What made 2020 different was that so many of us were affected at the same time by crises that were at once personal and universal. However, if 2020 was a time of greater hardship, then it was also the time that we bound ourselves closer to God and each other.

As the disasters of 2020 compounded one upon the other, I worried about how our church would weather the storms. Would collections drop causing a financial crisis? Would not worshiping at church stress our community to the breaking point? Would our clergy be overwhelmed by the toll of each successive crisis? These are the mundane worries of lay volunteers, and I for one excel at worrying.

But as the year progressed, my mundane worries became answered prayers:

- Our congregation remained faithful, and Ascension remained solvent. Indeed, our modest PPP loan was forgiven and will show as income on our 2020 books. Special thanks to Kim Lumino for not only maintaining the books, but also shepherding the PPP loan through approval and forgiveness.
- We discovered that we could share our services with the community online through Facebook Live and Zoom, and later in the year we were able to hold carefully planned and socially distanced outdoor services. Special thanks to Raymond Smith and Charlie Noecker for figuring out the technical side of online worship.
- We are also thankful to Raymond for overseeing our buildings and grounds and keeping the fountain running.
- Our altar guild remained on the job, ensuring our worship continued to meet the high standards they have historically set for vesting our clergy and the church. Special thanks to Lynne Holl and her team.
- Finally, no matter what happened, we had music. Dr. Deb, Charlie Noecker, and the choir innovated, used technology, and delivered the music that elevates our worship and stirs the soul.

Now, as for overwhelming our clergy, I will let them speak to that; but I will say, I am astounded by and grateful for their love and dedicated service. Deacon Ed made it a point to visit the housebound and reach out to our youth, ensuring that no one was forgotten. Pastor Josh not only led us on Sunday mornings, but he and Jobi also gave us special mini-advent candles that allowed our parish families to enjoy Advent safely at home. Finally, thanks to Fr. Michael for shepherding our little flock through fire, flood, plague, and heartfelt losses. If Ascension is a boat, then 2020 was a hurricane; and in the midst of all of it, Fr. Michael calmly and confidently sailed a modest craft as only a seasoned skipper can.

I have no idea what 2021 has in store, but I do know that as a community we are stronger, smarter, and more resourceful than I had ever imagined; and it is also clear that we share a common love community and a faith in a God who is faithful to us. Given what we learned about our church and our faith in 2020, I am much more optimistic than ever about 2021.

Gordon Tomaske, Senior Warden

REAL LIFE 2021 REAL FAITH

Real Life/Real Faith...ain't that the truth!

For the first time in a few weeks, I'm feeling well enough to be sitting at my desk and writing a new Spire article. I thought about letting the deadline go for the first time, but there are several things that I want to share. Besides, I always have something to say as you all well know.

2021 marks the beginning of my 10th year as your deacon. It's been an honor and blessing to be with you and to share together our joys, sorrows, and all the things we take for granted on a daily basis. It's there in those things we take for granted as we live our Real Lives as it were, that events demand our best Real Faith.

2020 was a year none of us expected and without a doubt will be remembered not only in history books, but also etched deep in our hearts and souls. Each of us has experienced it in our own unique way, but what got us through it is the same...our faith and the power of prayer.

God comes disguised in our lives. We may not always realize it, but he's there. God is always in the middle of it all with a guiding hand and a love that runs deep even though we don't always get it. That doesn't matter because despite our best efforts to ignore God's grace in our lives, it's always there...like it or not!

As we move into the New Year, remember the things that happened. It's important that we don't forget, and it's important that we carry forward the lessons learned lest we forget how blessed we are and that living our real life in 2020 required real faith and the knowledge that God is in the midst of it all.

My prayer for each of us is that we be blessed with the vision of the shepherds who rejoiced at the birth of Jesus.

Be well, be blessed, and embrace your shepherd vision.

Deacon Ed+

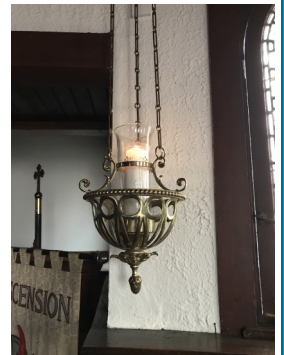
NEW and IMPROVED flower and candle sign-ups for 2021!!!!!!!

Beginning January 2021, sign-ups for Flower Donations and sign-ups for the Sanctuary Candle will be available on Sign-Up Genius (online) as well as in person in the hallway going into HAWKS HALL.

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

We are looking forward to being able to offer this new way to sign up for flowers and candles and hope it will make donations more convenient for you.

In Christ,
St. Anne's Altar Guild



Here are the sign-up genius links:

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

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



12th Annual Women's Room Thanksgiving Luncheon

The Thanksgiving lunch that Ascension puts on for the women who frequent The Women's Room at Friends in Deed, though much different this year, was still a resounding success.

In October, we began discussing how we might be able to serve a warm Thanksgiving meal to The Women's Room and still maintain COVID-19 safety protocols. Marlene, the director at TWR, suggested we keep it small and only serve the 12-15 women who drop in most frequently. The women were very relieved to hear that they would get to eat a traditional meal. Though we were not allowed to stay and serve the

meal, we received reports of thanks and very full bellies.

Thanks to Elizabeth Callihan who spearheaded the collection of a HUGE assortment of goodies and gifts to give to the women (including socks, scarves, beauty products, inspirational messages, hand-painted rock art, treats, and more). And thanks to everyone who donated food, time, and money to help make the small but beautiful event a success: Jessica Meehan & Charlotte Fontenot, Richelle Duffy, the Gorman family, Virginia Ramirez, Lisa Wagner, Jessica Cardenas, Maggie Outhouse, Meg Cox, Lynne Holl, Elizabeth Cundiff, Marilyn Siemon-Burgeson, & Colette Ostrye.



NOTES FROM THE LOFT

I'd like to begin by thanking the choir for coming together virtually to present two of the Alfred Burt Carols on Christmas Eve and December 27 ~ you were wonderful! A very special thanks to Charley Noecker for engineering the project ~ we couldn't have done it without you! Charley also brought a reprise of some of last year's Christmas Eve services to our Zoom/Facebook services, allowing us to experience the organ, full congregational singing, and our festival chorus. In spite of the pandemic, Christmas worship was alive!

Looking toward the new year, hymns for January include:

1/3 – in recognition of Epiphany, #128, THREE KINGS OF ORIENT, We Three Kings

1/10 – the baptism of Christ, #116, THIS ENDRIS NIGHT, "I Come," The Great Redeemer Cries

1/17 – #7, RATISBON, Christ, Whose Glory Fills the Skies

1/24 - #660 – MARYTON, O Master, Let Me Walk With Thee

May 2021 be a year of peace, restoration, and healing; and may the joy of music fill your hearts and souls throughout all of its days ~

*Come, let us anew our journey pursue,
Roll round with the year, and never stand still, till the Master appear;
His adorable will let us gladly fulfill,
And our talents improve by the patience of hope, and the labour of love.*
~Charles Wesley



Debora Huffman, Director of Music and Organist



The Verdant Greening of Joy

September 17, 2020 By Erin Jean Warde

"The Word is living, being, spirit, all verdant greening, all creativity. This Word manifests itself in every creature. All living creatures are sparks from the radiation of God's brilliance, emerging from God like the rays of the sun."

— Hildegard of Bingen

Today we celebrate the commemoration of Saint Hildegard of Bingen, a woman offering so many gifts to the church that they are hard to list. Writer, composer, mystic, and saint. In thinking about her myriad accomplishments, and the beauty of her full scope of identity, I was struck by how joyful her pursuits seemed, especially her deep love for music, all of which came out of a life marked by illness and difficult living conditions.

Hildegard, adding even more to her list of identities, was an herbalist and healer. Even down to the sprout, she saw the verdant greening as a life bearing witness to the presence of God. Maybe it's that I don't feel safe entering buildings, but I've recently been drawn into a deeper fascination with the earth. I've become a bit of an armchair herbalist, wondering how much healing might be hidden in leaves. I'm remembering the buds and blossoms more frequently in my prayers, looking out the window searching for green, nurturing my very own plant with fear and wonder.

Right now, we are likely putting one foot in front of the other to get by; I say this because I don't know anyone who isn't just trying to make it from a present moment to any future. And there is nothing wrong with that. But Hildegard knew something we'd be wise to learn: joy is a part of survival. In the midst of illness, in the midst of challenge, in a time of famine, joy is not optional. Joy is the presence of hope during suffering, not the cherry on top of something already sought after. The reason joy is not optional is because it carries some of the energy we need to complete the journey from present moment to any future. Joy is also, and maybe most importantly, never as far away from us as we imagine. Even down to the sprout, we are shown the verdant greening that is an invitation into joy.

This is not meant to diminish pain, it is meant to offer hope in the midst of it. Joy as hope means it is less a hobby and more a prayer. Joy does not diminish pain; joy shows up as a balm to begin the healing process. I say joy is not optional, because we cannot opt out of the invitation from Jesus Christ to be given, even when it feels like the world is crashing down, the gift of a verdant green earth to receive the crashing.



*Garden of Gethsemane,
photographed by Erin Jean Warde*

I have experienced profound joy in two places known to Jesus: the Sea of Galilee and the Garden of Gethsemane. The Sea of Galilee held the cool, watered hope of calling, of vocation, of being drawn into the very chaos out of which God created order. The Garden of Gethsemane held the heavy, dense weight of waiting for death, but in that same truth, the hope that waiting for death means waiting for resurrection. Both were joy and neither were diminished by the other.

Hildegard knew joy in the midst of challenge; she wrote songs throughout illness. She gifts us with an invitation into joy that does not compete with our pain.



News and Inspiration from Forward Movement

Dear friends in Christ,

Published August 26, 2020

What is the church? There are a lot of answers to this question. A building. An institutional structure. A gathered group of Christians. Over the years and centuries, the church in all its forms has looked different in varied times and places.

During this time of pandemic, the church looks different. I take comfort in knowing that the church has always been on a bit of a journey. So it need not shock us that things look different now.

Of course, this doesn't take away our grief at missing things that we cannot now have. I dearly miss receiving Holy Communion. And I yearn for the day when I can belt out a hymn with a full congregation. Still, we know that Jesus Christ is present in the church, even when the church looks different from what we are used to or what we prefer. Thanks be to God.

I've been thinking about all this. How can we carry on the essential aspects of church life even when we can't gather—or when we can only gather in very limited ways?



Photo: Christ Church Charlotte

Worship is surely a more satisfying experience in a full church, but we can worship in our homes. We can tune into a webcast, but we can also just grab our prayer book and offer our prayers and praises individually or with others in our household.

We can offer our daily prayers and we can read scripture on our own, or with an online group. We can support mission outreach and social justice work with our financial gifts or in other ways, even if we can't get together with our usual team at church.

In other words, the church can thrive now. Many congregations have discovered this, and they have adapted to our present reality. It's possible that we won't ever go back to the way things were in 2019. Maybe online daily prayers are here to stay. Maybe online bible studies are going to stick around. Time will tell.

But we also have to be mindful of all the ways we are leaving people out. Are we supporting people in worship who do not have internet access? Are we using online tools to support worship and learning in life-giving ways? We at Forward Movement have been looking for gaps—places where local churches might need help. We think we found one, and we have an answer.

A new offering called “This is NOT Sunday School” will launch in mid-September. Hosted by ChurchNext and taught by our friends at Forma, this is a new online, weekly, free, and intergenerational way to learn together. Your family—whatever your ages—can gather and learn some of the great stories of the Bible together. [Learn more and sign up at the ChurchNext website.](#)

This is one example of a creative solution to how we need to grow into this new time. I wonder what other needs you see? Are there ways in which the church can thrive in ways it has never grown?

We're watching, listening, and praying here at Forward Movement. We want to inspire disciples and empower evangelists now as ever.

Yours faithfully,

Scott Gunn, Executive Director

Our vision is that *The Episcopal Church of the Ascension* serves Christ today for those who will come to know Christ tomorrow.

WORSHIP, FORMATION, PASTORAL CARE, FELLOWSHIP, OUTREACH, PRESENCE

25 E. Laurel Avenue, Sierra Madre, CA 91024 ~ 626-355-1133 www.ascension-sierramadre.com

JANUARY 2021

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					1 	2
3 <u>9am Sunday Worship-Rite II</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*	4	5 Communion under Special Circumstances 8:30am—10am *By Appointment Only*	6 Communion under Special Circumstances 8:30am—10am *By Appointment Only*	7 9am Forum Zoom Call 10:30am Staff Mtg Zoom Call	8	9
10 <u>9am Sunday Worship-Rite II</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*	11	12 Communion under Special Circumstances 8:30am—10am *By Appointment Only*	13 Communion under Special Circumstances 8:30am—10am *By Appointment Only*	14 9am Forum Zoom Call	15	16
17 <u>9am Sunday Worship-Rite II</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*	18  	19 Communion under Special Circumstances 8:30am—10am *By Appointment Only* Vestry Meeting 7:30pm Zoom Call	20 Communion under Special Circumstances 8:30am—10am *By Appointment Only*	21 9am Forum Zoom Call 10:30am Staff Mtg Zoom Call	22	23
24 <u>9am Sunday Worship-Rite II</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*	25	26 Communion under Special Circumstances 8:30am—10am *By Appointment Only*	27 Communion under Special Circumstances 8:30am—10am *By Appointment Only*	28 9am Forum Zoom Call	29	30
31 <u>9am Sunday Worship-Rite II</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*						

Spire Creator: Kim Lumino, Parish Administrator