



The SPIRE 2020

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



Upcoming Events

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

On June 25, Pastor Josh facilitated a discussion called **'Learning Lessons, Forging Paths'** with Lutheran and Episcopal Clergy. The recording of the session is available on Facebook or can be sent to you upon request. Email or call the parish office.



From the Rector

Usually when I sit down to write my mid-summer Spire article, I sometimes share my fun reading list. Or, I talk about General Convention every three years. This summer is unlike any I've ever experienced, and I believe it is unlike any you've ever experienced.

I'm learning to track metrics put out by the health authorities. As I'm writing this article, the numbers look very discouraging. One of the numbers we don't see cited very often is the "positivity rate." This rate refers to the percentage of overall Covid 19 tests returning positive. For weeks, the percentage was under 5%. In the past several days, the percentage has jumped in Los Angeles County to over 8%. We have already heard the Governor reinstating the closure of bars and nightclubs in some counties, including Los Angeles.

Hopefully, Los Angeles County will not be forced to relook at worship gatherings. Our Diocese of Los Angeles is looking closely at how churches can safely gather again. I'm afraid it will be a long time before we're back to "normal."

On Sunday, July 5th, we'll be taking an initial first step towards worshipping together. As we've become accustomed, there will be a service of the Holy Eucharist at 9am in the side chapel with our small crew live streaming on Facebook Live and Zoom. After the short Virtual Coffee Hour, two of us will invite up to ten people at a time to gather in the outside worship space to receive Eucharist (in one kind) according to the very brief ritual called Communion under Special Circumstances. (Page 396 in the Book of Common Prayer.) The service will take about five minutes. If more than ten folks show up, the remainder will be asked to wait at a distance for the first ten to receive and depart, and then the ritual will be repeated. Physical distancing will be maintained. Masks will be required for all. Family groups can be accommodated. Because it will be summer, hats are encouraged.



Outside Worship Space

On Sunday we will give more directions to be followed. I believe this ritual is a prudent and safe first step towards being together again in person. For planning purposes, it would be helpful for us to have a sense of how many people to expect at the outdoor service. If you are intending to participate, would you please let the office know – either by email or by phone message.

And by the way, I've been reading a series of mysteries set in upstate New York. The main characters are an Episcopal priest and the local chief of police. The author is Julia Spencer-Fleming.

Praying that everyone is well and staying safe.

Blessings, Father Michael+

Episcopal Relief & Development's COVID-19 Response Fund

"Join us in prayer and action. Help us be there in times of uncertainty.

Your gift enables us to prepare for emergencies around the world — including the recent outbreak of the coronavirus. With your help, we can equip our partners on the ground with crucial support to assist local communities and meet the changing needs as this crisis unfolds." Go to <https://support.episcopalrelief.org/covid19/> to contribute.



Episcopal
Relief & Development
Working Together for Lasting Change

JUNE 2020

Pledge Payment Snapshot



2020 Budget
\$221,000

YTD Budget: \$110,500
YTD Actual: \$104,470
Difference: \$-6,030

Let's Keep Ascension Moving Forward....

Please consider, as you are able, keeping your pledge current, especially during this time of Covid -19. The Church still has financial obligations in spite of our reduced capacity. You might consider signing up through your bank for auto-pay scheduled giving, or, perhaps, mailing your pledge to the parish office. You can also make a pledge payment or donation online via the church website. Go to: <https://www.ascension-sierramadre.com/give.html>.

Your gifts are fuel we use to

"...Keep Ascension Moving Forward....".

Thank You



My friend Gilbert was fond of saying “can you imagine.” These words were usually said in response to some situation or event that didn’t quite make sense.

Gil passed away almost 30 years ago. A day doesn’t go by that I don’t think about him. His rocking chair is in my study; and there I sit every morning to pray, meditate, and imagine the day ahead. Sometimes I even try to figure things out. Can you imagine?

If I had described to you last January the place in which we find ourselves today with the pandemic, you might say, “you’re crazy” and I might just reply, “maybe” or “can you imagine.”

Like everyone else, I have no answers to the continuing Covid-19 chaos. This pandemic is bigger than all of us. But I do know that during this terrible time, time spent in isolation, fear, confusion, and lots of prayer, sitting in Gil’s rocking chair has reminded me of my ministry, why I care about people, and why I continue to be hopeful. And you, too, should be reminded that God calls each of us to care, to be hopeful, and to share that hope with others. We are being presented with an opportunity to have a renewed appreciation and gratitude for life itself. Can you imagine?

One of the things that’s so remarkable about the pandemic - a story we’ve all been affected by in some way - is how many other people’s stories have continued to unfold alongside it. Mundane, remarkable, heartbreaking, and unbelievable stories may or may not ever be told. It’s hard to find words to share the stories when so many people have died, and continue to. When so many frontline health workers have risked their lives for others, and continue to. And when so many people of color are literally fighting for their lives in a battle that’s long pre-dated the pandemic, and will continue to.

In its broadest sense, I think we are all being called to make sure that these stories get told. Telling these stories as best we can is prayer...talking to ourselves, to God, talking to our friends, family, and neighbors. It’s all the same; it’s prayer in one form or another. St. Anthony of Egypt reminds us: “he prays best who does not know he’s praying.”

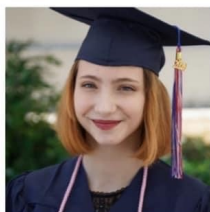
We have the opportunity to tell each other and God not just the stories, but that we recognize ourselves in the stories and in the lives of our fellow human beings – no matter how joyful, no matter how painful.



We may not have answers, but we do have the stories, and the stories give us all we need to forge forward, to be hopeful, and to be faithful to God’s call to us. The stories are our reasons why. “He who has a *why* to live can bear any *how*.” (Friedrich Nietzsche)

Be well, be blessed, imagine, tell the stories, pray.
Deacon Ed+

Congratulations to Ascension’s very own 2020 Graduates!



Forward Today: Prayer and Action June 17, 2020 [Forward Today](#), [Prayer](#), [Scott Gunn](#)

Dear friends in Christ,

To say there's a lot going on in our world would be an understatement. Between politics, the pandemic, the economy, and protests over racism, it can seem overwhelming.



On Twitter, I asked for suggestions for topics for today's Forward Today. One person responded, "It seems like calm in a time of chaos might be something readers need now." Well, yes, I think that's it. We need to know the peace that passes all understanding, especially in a world that seems unbearably chaotic.

Every now and then, I'll hear someone say, "Prayer is not enough. We need action." I reject the dichotomy. Prayer *is* action. Praying changes my heart, for sure. And I think prayer can change the world.

Sure, we need actions beyond just prayer. In the past, I have joined protests, written letters, made donations, and much more. But it is prayer that sustains me and keeps me focused on God and on God's kingdom of righteousness and justice. My hope is that, for Christians, our lives are steeped in prayer. Otherwise, we run the risk of setting our minds on earthly things rather than heavenly things.

Yesterday morning, as I said morning prayer, I was struck by the refrain in Psalm 80, "Restore us, O God of hosts; * show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved." We don't save ourselves by endless striving. God restores us. God has accomplished our salvation in Jesus Christ. Our task is to proclaim God's love, mercy, righteousness, and justice.

Last Sunday I went to a community-wide service of lament and prayer held in one of our parks. One of the speakers said this: "Our hope comes from the Lord, but we need to be people who bring hope. Christ is not coming out of the sky right now to bring us hope. You have to be the voice of hope. Do not stay silent!"

Let us pray. Let us pray every day. Let us pray every day for the wisdom, courage, and strength to be bearers of Jesus Christ's hope, mercy, and grace in the world.



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

Yours faithfully,
Scott Gunn, Executive Director

NOTES FROM THE LOFT



"The ghost of choirs past" ~ a poignant symbol of the silencing of choirs, specifically Ascension's choir, since the onset of COVID-19. Credit to Deacon Ed for the picture, which actually is my vestment hanging on the gate to the organ loft courtesy of Fr. Bamberger, patiently awaiting the day when I'll return to the loft. (The choir's cassocks and surplices remain in our vestment room, inaccessible due to the storage of pew cushions, hymnals, and prayer books.) Yes, we mourn the loss of singing in worship, yet this photo also symbolizes hope that someday singing, choirs, and organ will return. And for this I'm grateful.

During this time of pandemic, we're beset by many emotions such as loneliness, fear, and anger. I've found it helpful to center my mind on the grace and peace of God, knowing that our times are in his hand and that he will carry us through. I recommend to you John Rutter's *The Peace of God*, sung by The Cambridge Singers and conducted by Rutter, found at:

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=the+peace+of+god+rutter&&view=detail&mid=4C346A56EC24154AE5874C346A56EC24154AE587&&FORM=VRDGAR&ru=%2Fvideos%2Fsearch%3Fq%3Dthe%2Bpeace%2Bof%2Bgod%2Btrutter%26%26FORM%3DVDVXX>

God's peace be with you all ~

*At the still point of the universe, all that is not silence is song,
and all creation, hearing it, dances for joy.
The song of the universe is the song of life, its rhythms defined by the cadence of time,
its beauty in its holy harmony.
The song is sung best when sung by the heart.*

~Alfred V. Fedak



Debora Huffman, Director of Music and Organist



2020-2021 Back-to-School Backpack & School Supply Drive

Dear Friends,

It has been a strange 2020 to say the least. We've all been greatly affected by the coronavirus, but perhaps not as much as our young people and their 2019-2020 school year. The year basically stopped. At least in the physical sense. No going to class every day. No end of school year parties. No graduations or programs of promotion in the way we are all accustomed too.

Now, summer is upon us and we don't really know how the new school year will unfold. It will happen and the plan is for kids to return to the classroom, in person. But that is still a few months away and we can't be sure of what to expect between now and then. Our families, in the Friends In Deed community, already face issues of making ends meet every month. Bring on a new school year (which means supplies, clothes & shoes, school fees, etc.) and our current uncertainty, and a family's stress level and financial concerns increase.

That makes our 2020-2021 "Back To School" event even more important. In times of uncertainty for our young people, it is a comfort to have as much normal as possible. And with school, that can mean a new backpack and school supplies.

Of course, we aren't able to make this happen all by ourselves. Every year, we come to you, our Friends In Deed supporters and family, to make the Back-to-School Backpack & School Supply Drive one of which we can all be proud. In 2019, we distributed more than 375 backpacks, full of supplies, to our Friends In Deed school-aged children. And we expect that this year the number will be higher due to the coronavirus and how it has affected our community.

Over the course of two consecutive Saturdays in August, 1st and 8th, we will be distributing backpacks and supplies to our community. We ask that all donations be dropped off/sent to Friends In Deed during the week of July 21 to July 24. Our address is 444 E. Washington Blvd., Pasadena, CA 91104. We hope that you will join us in this effort!

If you would like to help out, here are some things to consider:

1. **Please avoid all red and all blue backpacks. This is very important to us.**
2. Backpacks should be sturdy enough to handle the rigors of a student's day and the crazy amount of books they heft around, especially for our high school students.
3. The supplies needed are recommended by the Pasadena/Altadena area schools and the list is attached.
4. **Please deliver empty backpacks and school supplies *to Friends In Deed*, by Friday, July 24, 2020 at the latest.**

If you have any questions, contact Tim, via email, pantry@friendsindeedpas.org, or Stacey, pantryassociate@friendsindeedpas.org. Or give them a call at 626-797-6072. Thank you for helping us to make sure the students in our community kick off the upcoming school year on the right foot.

In service and with gratitude,

Rabbi Joshua Levine Grater, Executive Director

Tim Nistler, Food Pantry Director

Friends In Deed is a DBA of the Ecumenical Council of Pasadena Area Congregations, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Donations are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. Tax ID: 95-1644608. We respect your privacy.

Back to School Supply List

- College ruled notebook paper (this is used more commonly than the "Wide-ruled" paper)
- Wide ruled notebook paper (early grades will use this)
- Spiral notebooks
- Composition Notebooks, hardcover
- Pens; red, blue and black
- Pencils, including #2 yellow 6-sided for younger grades; mechanical pencils Erasers
- Pencil-top Erasers
- Copy paper (for printing on computer)
- Zipper pouch for pens and pencils (3 holed to go in binders)
- Dry Erase Markers
- Colored Markers (NO Sharpies or Permanent Markers)
- Highlighters, all colors
- Colored Pencils



Back to School Supply List Continued...

- Sharpener for colored pencils (must hold shavings)
- 24 Colors Crayons (prefer Crayola Brand)
- 2 Pocket Folders (prefer poly folders)
- Student scissors (such as Fiskar)
- Rulers (metric & customary)
- 3" x 5" index cards
- **Glue Sticks (many schools prefer the sticks to bottles of glue)**
- 3 Ring Binders - 1"- 3" (Prefer with Clear View pocket on front)
- Tab Dividers for Binders
- Tissue/Kleenex – small little packages that can easily fit into the backpack or school desk



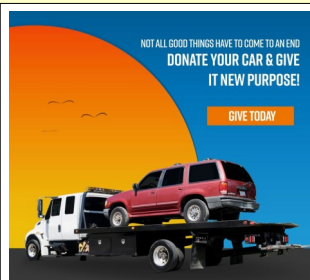
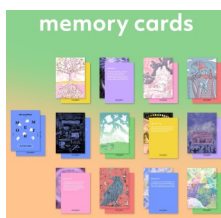
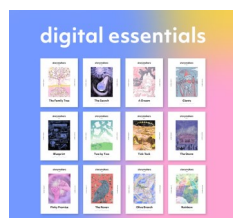
As you can see, school start-up is an expensive proposition for low income families. Thank you for easing that burden and assuring that all students get an equal start on their critical journey of education. www.friendsindeedpas.org

CHECK IT OUT:

Online materials for summer family formation available for free from **StoryMakers**. This innovative online curriculum hopes to equip families to be able to share the Gospel in a meaningful way through videos, magazines and vibrant visuals. Other options are available for purchase or by subscription.

[https://www.storymakersnyc.com/videos?](https://www.storymakersnyc.com/videos?ss_source=sscampaigns&ss_campaign_id=5ef0ca8a5c619965a01a2504&ss_email_id=5ef0d90389972270f259787d&ss_campaign_name=Free+Summer+Fun&ss_campaign_sent_date=2020-06-22T16%3A15%3A30Z)

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"Here's a unique way to support our parish!"

If you have a car, truck, boat or other vehicle that's become a nuisance, you can now donate that vehicle to Ascension. You'll be able to write the value of the vehicle off as a tax deduction and Ascension will benefit from the proceeds of its sale. Simply call **855-500-RIDE** or visit <http://www.careasy.org/nonprofit/the-episcopal-church-of-the-ascension> to schedule a free pickup. All you need is the vehicle's title-- the CARS service will handle the rest."

CARS is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based out of San Diego, California.

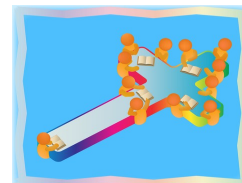


"Between the Masses" Discussion Group

Did you know that the Between the Masses Discussion Group is still meeting every Sunday via Zoom call (*after the 9am service and coffee hour*)? The group meets for spiritual (and perhaps "spirited") discussion of pre-assigned readings (usually brief!) on a wide variety of Christian themes. Reading selections are determined by the group itself. Please feel free to join the group even if you have not read the week's reading selection.

To get the reading selection emailed to you, please email Gordon and Diane Tomaske at gdtomaske@sbcglobal.net.

The Zoom invitation is the same one that is used for Sunday worship.





John the Baptist, Byzantine Christian Orthodox icon

A Word to the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles

By John Harvey Taylor · June 3, 2020 · Uncategorized

My siblings in Christ:

In the life of nations, moments come when the person of faith must ask: “What am I to do?”

Let’s go back to the 15th year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius. His proconsul, Pontius Pilate, ruled Judea, and his puppet, Herod, was king in Galilee. As we learn in the third chapter of Luke’s gospel, this was when John the Baptist came onto the scene, calling on the crowds to “bear fruits worthy of repentance.”

The crowds wanted him to be more specific. They said, “What then should we do?” John’s first answer was about personal ethics. He said that those who had a second coat or extra food should share them, making manifest their love of their neighbor.

The next two answers were to officials who lorded their power over oppressed people. In John’s time, the people coming down to see him at the Jordan River had neither constitution nor franchise. All they had was a prophet promising that God would punish tax collectors and soldiers who abused their authority.

Luke identifies these and John’s other exhortations as “good news,” which is to say gospel. After Herod killed John, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ built his ministry on the framework the Baptist had built.

Opposition to the unjust use of power lies at the heart of our formation as Christians.

When any in authority abuse their power, the Christian cries out. When a culture and state institutionalize any prejudice, including racism, the Christian cries out. When a police officer, soldier, or tax collector abuses their power, the Christian cries out.

This doesn’t mean, and it can never mean, that all in authority are abusers. It would be a sin to say so. This doesn’t mean, and it can never mean, that those who loot and destroy should not be held accountable by civil authorities. It would be a sin to say so.

It does mean that, as Christ did, the body of Christ must exhibit unique sensitivity toward the powerless, the marginalized, and the oppressed, especially when they are victimized by systems of power and privilege.

This isn’t politics. This is the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. When the Christian keeps talking about the brutal murder of George Floyd when there are so many dedicated police officers who risk their lives daily, remember John the Baptist. When the Christian keeps talking about white supremacy and institutionalized racism without mentioning looters and violent protestors as often as some might like, remember the gospel’s abhorrence of unjust state power, such as that which killed Jesus.

In recent days, followers of the Prince of Peace have had the additional challenge of applying gospel values to the use of federal power. I join with Presiding Bishop Michael Curry and Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde of the Diocese of Washington in opposition to President Trump’s photo opportunity Monday night at St. John’s Episcopal Church, especially because potentially lethal force was used to clear his way. By the same token, sending military forces into our cities, as the president has threatened, would only add to the chaos in neighborhoods already convulsed with rage and unrest.

Others will come to their own conclusions about the president’s actions. Whatever Christians may decide, decide they must. Questions about the just use of state power are foundational to Christian faith and practice. We can imagine that it was important to John and our Lord because they realized that there was no one else to hold power accountable. They also understood, as we do in our time, that abuses of power most often afflict the powerless, marginalized, oppressed, and scapegoated as well as those who are the victims of institutional racism and other prejudices.

These were those with whom Jesus spent most of his time. The Christian also thinks of them first, lifts them up, walks with them, and even puts them ahead of ourselves as inheritors of the earth and the kingdom of God (Matt. 5:3-12) — by our preaching and teaching, advocacy before our political leaders, peaceful demonstrations, and encouragement of voting and voting rights.

We do this work nationally, regionally, locally, and personally. We proclaim the gospel wherever we are. The rain may fall equally on the good and wicked. But the effects of the pandemic and institutional racism are falling far harder on the less privileged. As a result, our work is plentiful.

Continued on next page...

A Word to the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles (CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE)

Remembering Jesus and John's preference for the unheard, I might call a relative or friend living in a nursing home who may be feeling especially isolated in quarantine. I might support legislation to help undocumented essential workers, who are at greater risk of infection, helping feed us all, and yet silenced and powerless, lacking in rights and representation.

In church, I might wonder about unheard neighbors in my midst and speak up for offering worship and fellowship in all the languages being spoken in my neighborhood. Remembering our 40 million unemployed nationwide, I might make an additional donation to the church food pantry and or speak up for the unhoused at a city council meeting.

The gospel equips us well to look after one another in this way, especially our siblings who are most at risk. As St. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, which was experiencing an episode of factionalism, of people divided against one another over preference and precedence, "The body does not consist of one member but of many."

We are the people who put others' wishes, needs, and safety first. The people who say that the last shall be first and the first shall be last. The people who give up our seats at the table for the sake of the stranger and outcast. The people who follow him who sacrificed all he had to save the world. The people who faithfully, even cheerfully, take up their crosses every day to follow Jesus along the way of love.

As you think about the events of these days and decide about how soon you wish to be physically present during worship once again, Bishop Bruce, Canon McCarthy, all your servants at St. Paul's Commons, and I will keep you in our daily prayers. In the meantime, please join me in saying this prayer for guidance:

Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with your most gracious favor, and further us with your continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in you, we may glorify your holy Name, and finally, by your mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



Episcopal Diocese
of Los Angeles

Yours in Christ's love,

The Rt. Rev. John Harvey Taylor, VII Bishop of Los Angeles

Workshop on Desert Spirituality

The Reverend Brad Karelius and Steve Bruce will be presenting a workshop on Desert Spirituality from the Center for Spiritual Development of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange on **Saturday, July 25th, from 9am to noon.**

The workshop, *Journey in the Desert: A Spiritual Treasure Map* will be offered through Zoom. Reverend Karelius offered this workshop last summer for men. He has reworked the presentation for everyone and will share details about safe desert retreats in the Owens Valley/Eastern Sierra, Joshua Tree, and Monument Valley, Utah. There will be breakout groups for sharing and reflection.

Here is the link for more information and registration:

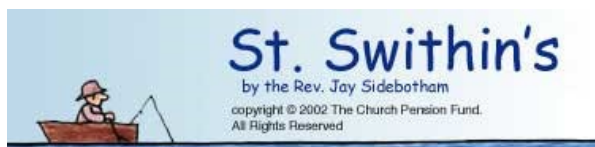
<https://www.thecsd.org/events/journey-in-the-desert-a-spiritual-treasure-map-2/?fbclid=IwAR2zh3BhTgVhCHTQvY99D7kzrdh-gWiWZLt5M-aAIDW-sSFQgeeQr14KH5M>

A little humor to share as we continue to worship via Facebook Live and Zoom calls during the Covid-19 crisis.

If you would like to join us via Zoom, please contact the parish office to receive the access information. Office hours are M, T, R, F from 9am—2pm.

Facebook Live: <https://www.facebook.com/Sierra-Madre-Episcopal-Church-of-the-Ascension-103773916383329/>

See you online!



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

JULY 2020

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1	2	1 Evening Prayer 5:45pm Facebook Live	2 9am Forum Zoom Call 10:15am Staff Mtg Zoom Call	3 PARISH OFFICE CLOSED	4 
5 9am Sunday Worship Facebook Live & Zoom Call Virtual Coffee Hour after service *Zoom Call* 10am Communion under Special Circumstances Outdoor Worship Area Between the Masses Discussion Group after coffee hour *Zoom Call*	6	7	8 Evening Prayer 5:45pm Facebook Live	9 9am Forum Zoom Call	10	11
12 9am Sunday Worship Facebook Live & Zoom Call Virtual Coffee Hour after service *Zoom Call* 10am Communion under Special Circumstances Outdoor Worship Area Between the Masses Discussion Group after coffee hour *Zoom Call*	13	14	15 Evening Prayer 5:45pm Facebook Live	16 9am Forum Zoom Call 10:15am Staff Mtg Zoom Call	17	18
19 9am Sunday Worship Facebook Live & Zoom Call Virtual Coffee Hour after service *Zoom Call* 10am Communion under Special Circumstances Outdoor Worship Area Between the Masses Discussion Group after coffee hour *Zoom Call*	20	21 Vestry Meeting 7:30pm Zoom Call	22 Evening Prayer 5:45pm Facebook Live	23 9am Forum Zoom Call	24	25
26 9am Sunday Worship Facebook Live & Zoom Call Virtual Coffee Hour after service *Zoom Call* 10am Communion under Special Circumstances Outdoor Worship Area Between the Masses Discussion Group after coffee hour *Zoom Call*	27	28	29	30	31	