



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.

Blessing of the Animals

Sunday, October 4



See
details
inside on
page 3.



Daylight Savings Ends on
Sunday, November 1.

SEPTEMBER 2020 Pledge Payment Snapshot



2020 Budget
\$221,000

YTD Budget:	\$165,750
YTD Actual:	\$148,848
Difference:	\$-16,902

Love Builds Community ~ Stewardship 2021

Finding a new church is a risky endeavor; but in 2007, I decided to take the plunge and found myself sitting in a pew at Church of the Ascension. One of the striking features of Ascension is the architecture. From the outside, it looks like a Kinkadee painting; and on the inside, the wood joinery reminds one of a fine piece of Craftsman furniture. All of these attractive visual features made Ascension an inviting place to visit; but one does not stay in a church because it looks nice; you stay for the community.

I have often joked that the Episcopal church is a place for introverts. Worship is quiet, thoughtful, and respectful. People are kind and not overbearing, and the coffee is warm. Being the new person in a small congregation makes you stand out, but in nice way; and I found the people of Ascension welcoming. Indeed, it was not long before I invited the rest of my family to attend with me, and they received the same welcome I had. 2007 was an especially important time for my children who were just beginning to make the transition to high school. We had been attending an evangelical church, which has its own charms; but my daughter had a passion for biology; and she found that evolution and fundamentalism were not mixing well. I think each of us bore some wounds from prior church experiences, but we found Ascension to be a safe place from the start.

Ascension is the first church I have attended to which I felt safe bringing my extended family. It is the place I brought my mother when my step father was dying and we needed to prepare for his memorial service. In every instance, my loved ones were treated with the same love and respect that everyone in our church receives, and my family remembers Ascension fondly.

Over the last thirteen years, I have been impressed with our community's gentle approach and concern for one another. We are not perfect, but we are decidedly genuine. In many places in our lives, there seems to be a significant gulf between how we present ourselves and who we actually are. At work, we put on a professional face and demeanor, then collapse when we get home; but at Ascension, I found with both clergy and laity that the face people wore in the pews was the same one I encountered with them in any other setting. More than almost any other church I have attended, we at Ascension are who we appear to be and I think this is good.

Needless to say, this last year has been challenging--- pandemic, economic down turn, fires, and not meeting in person as a congregation. And yet, we are learning how to maintain our community on Facebook Live and Zoom, and we are eagerly anticipating the time when we can all meet in person again. This time of challenge will become part of the story of Ascension that we will share in the years to come. From this time of learning, we eagerly anticipate building our community the way a child anticipates Christmas morning or our community anticipates sunrise service on Easter Sunday.

As we contemplate our stewardship theme of "building community," I believe one of the critical strengths we have to build on is our integrity and love for one another.



People arriving at our church for the first time or 500th time are welcomed and loved, and this interaction is how we show our love to the God who first loved us. As we enter this season of stewardship, please pray and meditate on our love for God and how that manifests in our love for each other. Remember, a carpenter can build a building; but love builds community.

Gordon Tomaske, Sr. Warden

From the Rector



Sunday, September 27
7:30am Outside Worship

Back in March when I was writing to you for the April Spire, we were anticipating an Easter like none of us had ever imagined. In that article, I held out hope that we might be able to regather by Pentecost. And here we are, coming up on eighteen Sundays after Pentecost; and we only now are starting to tentatively see each other at our 7:30 am service outside on Sundays.

I've been asking myself what have I learned during this time? I've come to realize how difficult it is to be a pastor in the midst of quarantine and "stay at home." In some respects, it seems as if our relationships are in a state of suspended animation. At our last Vestry meeting, one of the children of the parish climbed into the Zoom call. I longed to give him a fist bump. Baby Alisson McGuffie's whole relationship with her congregation is via Zoom. She's learned to wave at me through the computer camera. To be a pastor is to be involved in the lives of your parishioners, and that's very difficult at a distance.

I've learned that everything seems to take more energy. What used to be routine tasks can now be exhausting – to say nothing about the toll that exercising new skills takes from us. The anxiety around technology applications is phenomenal. A week or so ago, the power went off both at home and at the office. The frustration and upset I felt were way out of proportion because I've become so dependent on electronic connection for a sense of purpose.

I've also come to understand that emotions sometimes seem inflated. People are more excited about things that haven't been so important before the pandemic all started. Of more concern, depressions seem to be more prevalent, and in some cases deeper.

All of this is to say that my greatest learning is around the need for self-care. Take time to take stock of how you're feeling – physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Ask yourself what are you hungry for, and for what do you long? Know that you are in my prayers. Know that I long for us to be reunited. Know that I believe that this period of our lives will pass, and the familiar will reappear.

Blessings,
Fr. Michael+

Meet our new Diocesan Discerner, Keiichi Matsumoto

I was born in Tokyo, Japan; and I grew up in Yokohama, Japan and Sierra Madre, California. I am fluent in both English and Japanese, and I have a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political and Historical Studies from Chaminade University of Honolulu, Hawai'i and a Master of Divinity degree with an emphasis in Islamic Studies from Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.

I belonged to the Japanese Free Methodist Church for the majority of my life where three generations of my family were active members of the community. After visiting the Holy Land and the Middle East in the summer of 2011, I felt a distinct calling to understand the historical traditions of my faith as well as engaging in greater interfaith activism and began attending All Saint Episcopal Church in Pasadena, California. In 2013, I was confirmed in the Episcopal Church by Bishop Mary Glasspool, and I also began serving as a chaplain in the Los Angeles County Jails through PRISM, the diocesan restorative justice ministry. My sponsoring parish is Holy Nativity Episcopal Church in Westchester, Los Angeles, where I attended with my family for the last five years. At Holy Nativity, I served as a member of the vestry, altar guild, and as a Fire Master for the Westchester Community Oven.

My wife Michaela and I are Oblate Postulants in the order of Saint Benedict with the Community of Divine Love in San Gabriel. She served as a Sunday school teacher during our time at Holy Nativity and also works as a college administrator at Otis College of Art & Design in Westchester. Our children, Isami (9) and Erena (6) are students at The Gooden School. We recently moved to Alhambra from El Segundo. Prior to attending Fuller Seminary, I had a professional mixed martial arts career with an undefeated record. In my spare time I enjoy roasting coffee, baking sourdough bread, woodworking, gardening, tea, incense, and reading books. I am grateful for the opportunity to worship along with the Church of the Ascension community and learn under Fr. Michael.



A Note on Financial Stewardship

You know that your financial pledge is essential to keeping the Church of the Ascension supportive and strong. It allows us to budget for the coming year and helps us determine our priorities. But you may not be aware of the many ways you can provide financial support to our parish. First off, you should be getting a pledge card in the mail or you can pick one up at church. Return the card to us in the offering plate at the 7:30 am service or drop it off at the parish office. You can also make your pledge on the parish website by going to <https://www.ascension-sierramadre.com/give.html>.

When fulfilling your pledge by check or cash, make sure your name and envelope/account number are clearly marked. To get your offering to church you can:

- ◇ Drop an envelope with cash or a check into the offering plate during the service
- ◇ Call the office and drop a donation off with Kim Lumino at any time during the week (except Wednesdays)
- ◇ Arrange on your bank's website for Ascension to receive automatic payments from your checking or savings account in the amount you designate. Simply add "Church of the Ascension, 25 E. Laurel Avenue, Sierra Madre, CA 91024" as an automatic payee in the amount and frequency you choose. When prompted for an account number, you can use your Ascension envelope/account number.



In addition, you can donate outside of your pledge by donating:

- ◇ A financial gift to support a parish project like the roof replacement or other maintenance
- ◇ Appreciated Stock. If you have appreciated stock, you may donate that to the parish and get a tax deduction while avoiding capital gains. Check with the parish office for more information and your accountant for details on the tax implications
- ◇ A car. Over the last few years, Ascension has accepted cars as donations with approximately 70% of the proceeds going to the church. Call the parish office for details
- ◇ Planned giving. When creating your will or trust, please remember your parish family in your arrangements.

From all of us at Ascension, thank you for your time, talent, and treasure. God's peace.

Gordon Tomaske, Sr. Warden



Blessing of the Animals

Sunday, October 4

10:30 am in the Outdoor Worship Area

drive-up curbside blessings will be available after the service

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

**All of God's
creatures are
welcome!**





This One Word is Enough

September 19, 2020 By Cara Meredith

I didn't wake up until 7:36 this morning.

While this may not seem all that out of the ordinary to every reader, for someone who normally wakes up with the sun, when the sun didn't come out this morning, my body didn't

wake up either.

"The sun must be sad today, Mama," my younger son said to me a couple minutes later when all four of us eventually rolled out of bed.

"Yes, it really must be sad," I replied. With late summer wildfires having consumed millions of acres up and down the west coast, it wasn't a surprise (at least not to meteorologists) that residents in California and Oregon woke to apocalyptic orange skies on a seemingly random Wednesday morning.

But for me, I take note of the myriad emotions pulsing through my body.

What I yearn to feel is curiosity—curiosity for a phenomenon of nature I've never experienced before in my life. I am reminded of the time the sky went black a couple of summers ago, when the moon blocked the light of the sun for a couple of holy minutes. Along with my parents and my sons, an eclectic group of neighbors came together, front lawns dotted with lawn chairs and blankets and free solar eclipse glasses from the local fire department.



The orange sky over our driveway.
Image Credit: Cara Meredith

The day felt jovial. We sang a capella choruses of "Total Eclipse of the Heart," and chatted with my parents' neighbors, some new, some old. As the solar eclipse neared, an eerie silence fell over us. We knew not to talk, not to whisper, not to even try and breathe; we knew that holding a peak view of this moment was something we'd never again see in our lifetime.

Today feels different, though. Instead of curiosity, I feel sadness. Instead of joy, an air of lament fills the air around me.

I gather not with my neighbors, for together we choose to keep our distance—the space between us a gift of justice to one another. When we mingle at the grocery store or the post office, I hope they see my smiling eyes, a head nod here, eye contact there, a raise of friendly eyebrows from me to them.

But now, alone in my office, I stare at a staged backdrop of burnt orange sky and am rendered mute to any sort of response.

When civil unrest continues to beat down upon Black and brown lives in our country, when the pending election feels more divisive (and critical) than ever before; when beastly fires devour acre upon acre in the only places I've ever called home, and when darkness doesn't seem like it's ever going to let an ounce of light in, there's nothing left for me to say. It doesn't feel like there's anything left for me to pray.

But if I stumble my way through *an ancient collect*, does that count for something?

*We praise you, God,
that the light of Christ shines in our darkness
and is never overcome.
show us the way we must go to eternal day;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

I say the words aloud. I chew images of light and darkness around in my mouth, wrestling with the phrases like gristle on a bone.

Sometimes a paragraph feels like too much for a single day, though.

My mind wanders back to a passage in *The Silver Chair*. Perhaps not unlike today, when the Queen of the Underland tried to convince the children, the prince and the marsh-wiggle that the sun was but a tale, Jill mustered all her strength to utter two words:

Continued on next page..

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“There’s Aslan.”

And with that name, the spell stopped working. The travelers reminded one another of truth and came together as a team, once again. Together, they began to climb their way out of darkness.

Could it be the same for me, for you, for us?

God, I say.

God, God, God, I breathe in and out. I imagine the hot breath of God-in-me breaking through glass window panes, smearing new life onto the ash-covered patio and garden in the backyard below.

For now, this single name is all I can say. But as I stare into hellish sepia skies, I think maybe, just maybe, this one word is enough.

Submitted by Jean Rowe

Link to article: <https://www.growchristians.org/2020/09/19/this-one-word-is-enough/>

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NOTES FROM THE LOFT

Hymns for October include:

4 – #518, WESTMINSTER ABBEY, *Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation*

11 – #645, ST. COLUMBA, *The King of Love My Shepherd Is*

18 – #372, LEONI, *Praise to the Living God*

Then we come to the 25th, the last Sunday of October, which presents an abundance of musical riches to draw upon ~ for both All Hallows’ Eve (Halloween) and Reformation Sunday. While the Episcopal church doesn’t formally observe Reformation Sunday, it is a tradition in greater Christendom, appropriate for us to celebrate. Of course, then, our hymn for this Sunday is #688, EIN FESTE BURG, *A Mighty Fortress*, written by Martin Luther. If we were holding regular services, additional hymns would include ST. ELIZABETH, *Fairest Lord Jesus*, and LOBE DEN HERREN, *Praise to the Lord the Almighty*.

It’s always challenging to narrow down appropriate anthem selections for this day. Last year we presented Robert Turner’s *Nicae Te Deum*. Many additional composers have set the *Te Deum* ~ one of my favorites is that by Benjamin Britten. An anthem during communion might be Mendelssohn’s lush *Lord In Thy Mercy*, text by Martin Luther.

What about organ service music? An opening voluntary might include Johann Walther’s setting of LOBE DEN HERREN, *Praise to the Lord*, and any setting of *Fairest Lord Jesus*. For the closing voluntary it’s always hard to decide between a setting of EIN FESTE BURG, *A Mighty Fortress* (Johann Walther and Johann Pachelbel come to mind), Bach’s *Toccatina and Fugue in D Minor* (for whatever reason, it’s become associated with Halloween), and Boellmann’s *Suite Gothique: Toccatina*.

I encourage you to be creative with YouTube to bring some Reformation/All Hallows’ Eve music into your life this year. And I look forward to the time when we can all sing together *A Mighty Fortress* supported by our Harris organ, before it resounds with the Bach *Toccatina*. Maybe next year?

*Lord, in thy mercy grant us peace throughout all generations;
Thou art alone our sword and shield, Lord who dost guide the nations.
Defend us, O God, we pray thee.
Martin Luther*



Debora Huffman, Director of Music and Organist



"In a real sense all life is inter-related. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny." (**Dr. Martin Luther King, Christmas Sermon, 1967**)

As I write, the Bobcat Fire is encroaching on Mt. Wilson and a large part of our foothill communities are evacuated or prepared to do so. Two weeks ago, we experienced the highest temperatures recorded in Los Angeles County. Something is happening. Nevertheless, by the time this article is published in two weeks, there's a good chance that the news cycle will

have changed and we will have moved on, forgetting that these things have happened.

On August 20-21, 2020, I participated in a webinar presented by the Deacons of the Diocese of Arizona entitled "Our Fragile Island: Protecting God's Creation. And yes, something is happening "climate change." Dr. Katharine Hayhoe, noted atmospheric scientist and one of the featured speakers, studies climate change and doesn't accept global warming on faith: she crunches the data, analyzes the models, and helps engineers, city managers, and ecologists to quantify the impacts. At the webinar Dr. Hayhoe was abundantly clear that climate change affects not just the environment, but also people and society, particularly the poorest among us.

The current tragedy we are experiencing bears this evidence out, and it's obvious that we are all interconnected with nature. We all share the same single garment of destiny – each other and the environment. We must all be intentional about climate change and, more importantly, intentional with God in protecting our fragile island home.

We are beginning to take climate change more seriously. Hurricane season and fires in the West are longer and more severe. Warmer ocean temperatures and drought across the planet are happening across our fragile island home. We can no longer disregard this evidence.

Just as our lives interrelated, so too are the Covid19 pandemic and climate change. Both are very real threats to our health and safety. We need to apply the same fervor to ending climate change as we are to eradicating the pandemic. It's easy to say "it's bigger than me, what can I do?" There's plenty.

Bishop Marc Andrus, Diocese of California, says that changing the climate begins in our hearts. Our first action should be sking ourselves "what do I treasure?" Just as we treasure life during the pandemic, we need to treasure and nourish that within us that is beloved. Inevitably that includes our fragile island home and without exception "all" its residents. It's where we need to start.

I hope that I've aroused your curiosity at least a little about climate change and the fact that there are actions each of us can take to make a difference. I encourage you to find out more about climate change, how it affects us, and what each of us can do to be good stewards of God's creation and good neighbors on our fragile island home. You can refer to www.climate.nasa.gov and www.diocal.org (Creation Care Resources) as a place to begin.

A Prayer on Climate Change

Creator God, this earth is miraculous and beautiful. Forgive our confusion and inaction as we confront the challenges of climate change. In the light of your truth, seen so clearly in the life and teaching of Jesus, help us to re-examine ourselves and our lifestyle choices and see clearly the implications of how we live on all that sustains life on this earth. May we follow your lead in caring for every aspect of this precious world, which you made, and love. Throughout history you have moved people to do amazing things for the sake of their neighbors. Inspire us now to work together, as your people, to change priorities in the way we live, so that we build a fair and safe world for all your creation; a world where your will is done as it is in heaven. Amen.

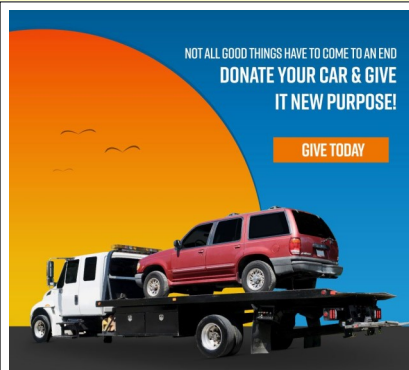
Be well, be blessed, be aware, **Deacon Ed+**

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



"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."

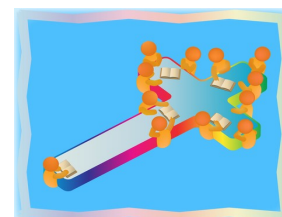
CARS is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based out of San Diego, California.



"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.



FLOWERS.....FLOWERS....FLOWERS....FLOWERS....FLOWERS

Just a reminder- if you have signed up for Altar Flowers and have already paid for them(\$40), there will be flowers on that Sunday. However, if you have signed up but NOT paid for them, there will not be flowers...prices have gone up considerably because of COVID, and Altar Guild is not in a position to cover the cost. If you do wish to pay for flowers, checks can be sent to:

St. Anne's Altar Guild
c/o Ascension Church
25 E. Laurel Ave.
Sierra Madre, CA 91024

or to

St. Anne's Altar Guild
c/o Lynne Holl
85 Suffolk Ave.
Sierra Madre, CA 91024

Hoping all are well... Thank you, **St. Anne's Altar Guild**



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

WORSHIP, FORMATION, PASTORAL CARE, FELLOWSHIP, OUTREACH, PRESENCE
25 E. Laurel Avenue, Sierra Madre, CA 91024 ~ 626-355-1133 www.ascension-sierramadre.com

OCTOBER 2020

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