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# Church of the Ascension 2024 Parish Profile



**Church of the Ascension**  
4729 Ellsworth Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15213  
[ascensionpittsburgh.org](http://ascensionpittsburgh.org)

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## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	3
History .....	3
Local Context .....	7
Vision & Mission .....	8
Leadership .....	9
Worship, Ministries & Programs.....	11
Local Active Body .....	15
Financial Health .....	17
Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities .....	20
Rector Profile .....	22
Summary .....	25

## Members of Rector Search Committee

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## Contact

*Letter of Interest, Resume, and links to three Sermons to be sent to:*

Church of the Ascension

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## Introduction

This document touches on Church of the Ascension's long history before discussing in detail the last two decades, the current fulcrum moment, our people, ministries, facilities, finances, and the leader we seek to serve God's purposes here with us. Church of the Ascension (Ascension) is a robust, Bible-believing Anglican parish built on a strong trajectory of recent history and poised for more ministry opportunities. The church plays a significant role in the diocese. The Rector's transition happens to follow several other recent staff transitions, but the leadership and congregation remain strong. We seek a new Rector at the same moment that we open a renovated and expanded physical plant designed to offer a more welcoming presence within the community and more flexible, usable space.

## History

### First 116 years (1887 – 2003)

Ascension was established in 1887. Born from a desire for a 'local' place of worship, the congregation grew rapidly, and by 1897-98 what was originally a small wooden building at the corner of Ellsworth and Neville Avenues gave way to the large Gothic Revival structure that serves as the anchor of the current facilities. Over the ensuing years, through more than 17 rectorships, Ascension has seen periods of growth and decline. Through the ebb and flow of the decades Ascension involved itself in activities and concerns appropriate to a particular moment in time: During World War I, the children of the parish conducted a "Melting Pot" drive in which they brought in items of gold, silver and lead which were melted down, the metals sold and the proceeds given for famine relief among Armenian and Syrian children; in 1934, an endowment fund was begun; in the early 1940s more than 40 members served overseas in the military; the first woman participated in an every member canvass in 1957; in the 1970s, Ascension's Director of Christian Education became the first female Episcopal deacon in Southwestern Pennsylvania; and, for a number of years, a local radio station broadcasted the 10:30 am service. Still today, we often retell a favorite story from the 1970s and 1980s of a prayer group that formed asking that the halls of Ascension be filled with children. Happily, today, we see the answers to those prayers in a robust and growing children's ministry.

In 1990, the Reverend Dr. J. Douglas McGlynn was installed as Rector. Under his leadership the Church experienced steady growth in attendance and giving. In 2000, the *Growing to Serve* capital campaign enabled a major expansion of facilities with the addition of an education building. Dr. McGlynn's ministry set the tone for more than a decade during which many came to a deeper understanding of their faith. With the close of Dr. McGlynn's rectorship, dark clouds were forming on the horizon for Ascension and other like-minded churches. The next season would bring significant challenges as Ascension, along with other churches and the diocese more generally, considered their relationship with the Episcopal Church (TEC).

### The Rectorship of Jonathan Millard (2004 – 2024)

#### Steering the Ship

In January 2004 The Reverend Jonathan N. Millard was installed as Rector. He frequently referred to Ascension as a large aircraft carrier with planes coming and going and which must be turned slowly and deliberately in a desired direction. The initial years of his rectorship focused on the mission of the church as well as financial health. Fr. Jonathan led the church vestry and staff on a re-visioning journey resulting in the adoption of a new mission statement: "A Worshiping Community; Equipping God's People; Sharing Christ's Healing with a Broken World." Facing debt which had accrued because the

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revenues of the *Growing to Serve* capital campaign fell short of construction expenses, parish leadership chose to pay it off by drawing on the general endowment. Assisted by a finance team which has been consistently strong for many years, Rev. Millard encouraged faithful financial stewardship and the necessity of weaning church operational income from reliance on endowments.

### **A Church Plant and a Second Service**

In December 2006, Ascension retired a 5:00 pm Saturday service with declining attendance. Soon after, in 2007, the parish planted a church: Jonah's Call. It met in Ascension's Nave at 5:00 pm on Sundays. A decade later, Jonah's Call "left home" and moved to a rented facility a few miles away. In 2013, the church transitioned from a large 10:30 am principal service which was "full" to two main Sunday Services, one at 9:00 am and one at 11:00 am. The 8:00 am Sunday Rite I service, which had run for decades, moved to 7:30 am to accommodate the new service times. It was retired in Advent 2016 due to low attendance.

### **Realignment: The formation of the ACNA and Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh**

Ascension clergy and lay leaders spent an enormous amount of energy navigating the issues with TEC. For many months Ascension hosted a group, "The Coalition for Realignment," which carefully planned the realignment of the diocese, with Fr. Jonathan serving as the spokesperson for the Coalition. In November 2007, the Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh voted to amend its constitution to realign the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh with the Province of the Southern Cone. Constitutional change required votes at two successive annual conventions. In October 2008, therefore, a second vote was taken at the Annual Convention affirming the amendment, with a clear majority of the Convention supporting the motion. In November of that year at a Special Convention, Bishop Robert Duncan was reinstated as Diocesan Bishop. Subsequently, the Anglican Church in North America came into being. In June 2009 Bishop Duncan was named its inaugural Archbishop. Ascension has been a constituent parish of the ACNA since that time. Archbishop Duncan and his wife Nara, a member of Ascension, are well known in the parish and attend Ascension as they are able.

### **Property Settlement with the Episcopal Church**

Dueling dioceses of Pittsburgh emerged post-realignment: the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh and the Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh. Both claimed to be the valid successor to the undivided diocese, and they both continued to use the same name until October 2009. At that time, the Commonwealth Court ruled that all diocesan property belonged to the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh that was part of the Episcopal Church (TEC). Many parishes with physical assets deeded to the diocese lost their property. The Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh had to surrender its endowment.

Some twelve parishes including Ascension were exceptions to the above because their property deeds were in the names of the respective churches and not in the name of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh. Jonathan Millard led this group of parishes in a mediation with TEC which ultimately led to a Settlement Agreement to which nine parishes were parties. The critical paragraphs of the agreement read as follows: "The Parties affirm through this agreement that each of the Parishes owns the legal title to the Historic and Real Personal Property of the Parish, and that the Episcopal Diocese has beneficial (that is, trust beneficiary) rights in the Historical and Real Personal Property of each of the Parishes which are preserved under this Agreement. The current and continuing congregations of each of the Parishes may continue to use the buildings and other real property that is part of the Historic and Real Personal Property to continue their Christian worship and ministry and continue in other activities as are traditional and typical. That includes the right to do so as part of the Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh and the Anglican Church in North America."

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Other highlights of the Settlement Agreement include: the payment of an annual fee to TEC; an annual visitation by TEC to each parish to examine historic and real property; permission from TEC for endowment draws greater than 4.5%; permission from TEC to sell, mortgage or otherwise encumber property. The agreement was effective as of December 2018 and since that time the stipulations of the agreement have been carefully adhered to by both parties. The congregation viewed the settlement as miraculously better than expected.

### **More than Stones Capital Campaign**

Ascension launched the *More than Stones* capital campaign in 2019. The Settlement with TEC together with a leadership trip to Thailand in January of that year contributed to the inspiration for this endeavor. The tagline of the campaign, *Welcoming our Neighbors and Reaching the Nations*, directly resulted from the strategic and impactful gospel witness of the Anglican Church of Thailand. While fixing ‘the stones’ had become pressing (masonry bandaids held together the towers of the 1897 Nave), the heart of the campaign focused on much more than that, namely how Ascension could be best positioned to make a difference for the Kingdom of God in its local context, offering hospitality to our neighbors and reaching those from the many nations who live within a short walk from Ascension. In keeping with this vision, campaign funding transitioned the Director of International Ministry position to full-time and provided seed funding for a new ministry to refugees.

Although leadership understood the necessity of such a campaign for many years, they deferred the start of fundraising until controversies with TEC were settled. The campaign strategy set a goal to meet with every member of Ascension, as well as friends and alumni, to share the vision for the project. To carry this out, approximately 20 teams of visitors were trained to make in-person face-to-face visits and campaign asks. Visits began in mid-2019, and the campaign got off to a good start. The onset of the pandemic prematurely halted the campaign in March 2020. When conditions allowed, campaign members completed more visits in the fall of 2021 and again in the fall of 2022, when the realities of post-pandemic construction costs became apparent. Campaign visits resulted in 290 pledges and gifts from members and friends of Ascension totaling \$5,831,849.51. Ascension received pledges from eight foundations totaling \$1,205,523.80. With TEC’s permission, the Vestry also used the entire balance of the non-restricted historic endowment, namely \$2,065,491, making the total just over \$9,102,829. With this amount, all campaign financial goals could be met.

Ascension has three primary structures, namely the Nave (built 1897), Parish Hall (built ~1910 and expanded multiple times), and Education Wing (built 1999/2000). Campaign funds addressed three needs. The first was an historic ‘fix’ of Ascension’s aging structure, including repointing and cleaning extensive stonework which had become blackened and compromised, partly through the city’s history with the coal and steel industries. The fix portion also included extensive stained-glass repairs and roof repairs as well as repairing wooden floors and replacing pews.

Second, campaign funds are addressing navigational and usage challenges in its buildings, constructing a ‘New Narthex,’ namely a new central entrance and welcome area to better connect all three structures into one. The funds will also refurbish and expand the Parish Hall, which the parish has outgrown. This phase also creates of a welcoming outdoor front ‘patio’ space and new bathrooms for men and women including single-user bathrooms on all floors, installs sprinklers throughout the Parish Hall and New Narthex, and refurbishes the second-floor office suite to include several new offices and a central meeting area for staff.

The campaign also provided funding for a third use, namely additional ministry staffing. Overall, \$650,000 of campaign funds were dedicated for this purpose. \$300,000 was designated to fund a new Curacy program described below and \$250,000 has been used for ministry startups, two of which were

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mentioned previously, as well as bridge funding for staff positions to relieve stress on the operating budget as campaign pledges were collected. Approximately \$100,000 in ministry funding for staffing remains.

Work on the historic structure took place concurrently with the campaign. Thus, in May 2020, while the pandemic was raging, all exterior work of repointing and cleaning of stonework began. In 2021 the exterior stonework was complete and, in 2022, the refurbishment of the stained glass was completed. The Vestry finalized architectural plans, hired a general contractor, and began demolition work on the Parish Hall in December 2022. The work is scheduled to be substantially completed by Easter 2024, with a grand opening scheduled for May 4, 2024.

### **The Pandemic**

Ascension clergy and staff learned to pivot quickly and work differently during the pandemic. Ascension was the first church to close in the diocese and within a few days was live streaming services on a brand-new YouTube channel which continues today. Adaptations to worship continued through the pandemic's evolution, including the arrival of vaccines. The church purchased and erected a large 40' x 100' tent for Christmas Eve services in 2020. Disaster struck when an ice storm blew through on December 26 and the tent collapsed. A competent and ingenious Sexton organized a small army of volunteers to put the tent away and then re-erect it in the Spring of 2021. Tent services took place throughout 2021 and became very popular. Despite minor pushback within the congregation to a mask mandate (and the loss of a few attendees), parishioners generally accepted restrictions and then welcomed their eventual lifting. If there were controversies around the vaccine within the parish, they took place quietly. Ascension attracted newcomers during the pandemic who were unhappy with pandemic protocols at their own churches, with some returning to their churches post-pandemic and some staying.

### **Curacy Program and Minster Model**

Concurrent with the *More than Stones* initiative, leadership discussions took place which envisioned Ascension developing as a "Minster," namely a resourcing church within the diocese with breadth of reach and influence. Prior to these conversations, the Vestry had anticipated using some of the \$650,000 ministry portion of *More than Stones* funding to onboard a third full-time priest to serve alongside our Rector and Assistant Rector. However, the focus shifted to the critical moment in which the Anglican church and the Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh find themselves: approximately one third of diocesan clergy will retire within the next 4 - 6 years. There is an urgent need for leadership development and the formation of young clergy. Instead of hiring a third priest, Ascension felt called to create a program that will raise up young, ordained leaders, giving them a solid foundation of church ministry experience, while being mentored by senior church leaders. The image of the church as a teaching hospital resonates well within the parish.

In keeping with this vision, in 2023 Ascension entered a partnership with *Made to Flourish* ([www.madetoflourish.org](http://www.madetoflourish.org)), to establish a Pastoral Residency or "Curacy" program. With the help of a Made to Flourish grant, in July 2023, Ascension hired two pastoral residents or "Curates" for a period of two years. Ascension has committed to a Curacy program for ten years, the first five partially funded by Made to Flourish with the second five funded by Ascension. We are pleased to have two Curates working with us, one of whom is a recently ordained female priest and another of whom is a recently ordained male deacon.

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## Local Context

Ascension is in the North Oakland neighborhood of the City of Pittsburgh, which is home to several institutions of higher learning, namely Carnegie Mellon University, the University of Pittsburgh, as well as Carlow University. Within a short drive are two additional institutions of higher education - Chatham University and Duquesne University.

Oakland is also home to medical, law, and dental schools as well as several teaching hospitals. The former Salk Institute, where the polio vaccine was developed by Jonas Salk many years ago, is within walking distance of the church. In fact, Ascension's new parish hall is named after Jonas Salk's research assistant, Mrs. Ethel Bailey, who had been a great friend to our church over many years. Google's Pittsburgh office, several more hospitals, and various robotic and tech companies are within a 10-minute drive of Ascension.

Given this location within the City of Pittsburgh, seat of a metropolitan area with approximately 1.7 million residents, Ascension is home to many professionals who together represent a wide variety of occupations. For example, we have 50+ regular adherents within the medical professions and many others who work in varied capacities including teachers, engineers, architects, financial professionals, lawyers, social workers, urban planners, designers, academics, scientific researchers, contractors, etc. Each fall, on Labor Day weekend, the congregation is commissioned to serve in the way God has gifted and called each one, both within our walls but also vocationally outside of our walls. Ascension parishioners live and work throughout the city and its suburbs, some traveling a significant distance to Oakland each Sunday.

Ascension is close to many undergraduate and graduate students. It is noteworthy that in addition to the 50,000+ students at CMU and 'Pitt,' Oakland has one of the highest concentrations of persons over seventy years of age in the nation. Many live within one block of Ascension. Ascension is also uniquely located to draw internationals, many of whom come to Pittsburgh for medical residencies or academic posts, or as graduate or postgraduate students.

Within a one-mile radius of the church, significant socio-economic differences become apparent. Relatively prosperous neighborhoods like Shadyside and Squirrel Hill stand in contrast to gentrifying neighborhoods such as East Liberty and economically distressed neighborhoods like the Hill District. Within Oakland itself there are similar contrasts. Ascension has developed a supportive relationship with *Shepherd's Heart Fellowship*, an Anglican church that ministers to homeless veterans. Current Ascension members founded two local medical facilities that serve the poor: *East Liberty Family Health Care Center* and *The North Side Christian Health Center*.

Trinity School for Ministry is located within the Diocese of Pittsburgh. Ascension has numerous ties to the seminary, not least of which is the presence of several seminarians and faculty in our congregation.

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## Vision & Mission

Ascension's vision statement describes the kind of Church we desire to be: "A Worshiping Community; Equipping God's People; Sharing Christ's healing with a Broken World." Each phrase of this vision statement has five associated values:

### **A Worshiping Community**

1. Anglican: We embrace three streams of Anglican Faith & Worship: Evangelical, Catholic & Charismatic
2. Hospitable: We intentionally welcome newcomers regardless of their understanding of the Christian faith or lifestyle
3. Connected: We worship as a community gathered and value fellowship and celebration
4. Intergenerational: We value participation by all ages
5. Artistic: We celebrate and incorporate beauty and excellence

### **Equipping God's People**

1. Scripture: We affirm God's Word revealed through the Bible to be the foundation and standard for becoming disciples of Jesus
2. All Ages: We will endeavor to provide excellent and appropriate teaching for people at all ages and stages of life
3. Fruitfulness: We are committed to being faithful in mission and the multiplication of ministry entrusting fruitfulness to God
4. Calling: We will equip people to discern and live out their callings and vocations
5. Lay Ministry: We believe that every Christian is called to use his or her gifts for the building up of the body of Christ

### **Sharing Christ's Healing with a Broken World**

1. Missional Living: We will follow Jesus' command to pray for, go out to, help and serve our families, friends and neighbors in and around Pittsburgh, our nation, and to the ends of the earth
2. Transformation: We acknowledge our own brokenness and need for transformation and we will pray and work for all to come to know God's transforming grace and love
3. Wholeness: We will pray and work for physical, mental, emotional and spiritual healing and wholeness in ourselves and others
4. Relationship: We will pray and work to foster authentic, grace-filled relationships with those to whom we minister and with those who partner with us in ministry
5. Justice: We will pray and work for justice and mercy for the poor, the needy, the broken and the defenseless

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## Leadership

### Senior Clergy & Program Staff

The Rev. Jonathan Millard, Rector (retiring)  
*Cert. in Theology, Wycliffe College, Oxford University, UK; Barrister-at-law, The Inns of Court School of Law, London*

The Rev. Kevin Antlitz, Assistant Rector  
*M.Div. and Th.M., Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary*

Marilyn Chislaghi, Director of Ministry  
*Master of Philosophy, Department of Divinity, Cambridge University, UK*

The Rev. Andrea Millard, Director of Prayer Ministry and Leadership Development, part-time (retiring)  
*Doctor of Ministry, Trinity School for Ministry; M.Div., Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary*

### Additional Clergy & Program Staff

The Ven. Dr. Mark Stevenson, Parish Deacon (non-stipendiary)  
*Ph.D. University of Pittsburgh*

The Rev. Josh Bennett, Dir. of Youth Ministry & (Interim) Contemporary Worship Music Coordinator  
*M.Div., Trinity School for Ministry*

Mr. Gary Harger, Principal Organist & (Interim) Traditional Worship Music Coordinator  
*Colleague of the American Guild of Organist; MA in German Language & Literature, Univ. of Pittsburgh*

Mrs. Jennifer Miller, (Interim) Choir Director

The Rev. Jess Bennett, Curate  
*M.Div., Trinity School for Ministry*

The Rev. Wes Williams, Curate  
*M.Div., Trinity School for Ministry*

Catherine Slocum, Director of Children's Ministry  
*BS, The Kings College, NY*

LuAnn Pengidore, Director of International Ministry  
*Master of Public and International Affairs and MEd, Regent University*

The Rev. Daniel Behrens, Missionary in Residence  
*M.Div., Trinity School for Ministry*

Karen Gowdy, Director of Administration  
*Master of Science and Engineering, University of Michigan*

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## **Vestry**

Vestry members are elected each year at Ascension's Annual Meeting, typically held on the last Sunday of Epiphany. There are three vestry persons elected each year for a total of nine. The Junior Warden, appointed by the Vestry, and Senior Warden, appointed by the Rector (if not already members of the vestry) are *ex officio* members of the vestry as is the rector.

## **Vestry Committees**

### **Finance**

The Finance Committee manages Ascension's investment portfolio with the able help of investment managers from Morgan Stanley.

### **Property**

This committee has not been operational since the start of construction. In 'ordinary time' it manages the major maintenance budget and ongoing facility projects.

### **Discernment**

This committee has a role in the ordination process. In the past 20 years, 32 Careful Inquiries have been completed with most of them forwarded to the Discernment Committee. Several Careful Inquiries have been completed for women desiring ordination to the priesthood, some of whom have gone on to be rectors.

### **Mission**

The mission committee manages Ascension's mission budget and builds relational bridges with those supported by the budget. In recent years the committee has re-visioned its approach such that the budget (1) reflects the corporate calling of Church of the Ascension; (2) is strategic, attempting to go 'long' and 'deep,' and (3) uses a tiered approach so that corporate calling, individual calling, and important partnerships with other agencies are all clearly outlined and supported in appropriate ways.

### **Security**

This committee has been functional since 2017, just prior to the *Tree of Life* massacre, a synagogue about one mile from the church. Its main function is to recommend and implement measures to 'harden' the facility as well as measures to train staff, volunteers, and parishioners in best practice security protocols.

### **Nominating**

The nominating committee is responsible for nominating an incoming class to serve on Vestry.

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## Worship, Ministries & Programs

### Worship

The two main Sunday services have each grown to have a distinctive culture. The same sermon is preached at both. The same music team serves both. There is childcare and children's ministry at both. The 9:00 am service is better attended and has a more casual culture with a movable altar on the platform closer to the congregation and with contemporary worship music. The 11:00 am service has a more traditional culture with eucharist celebrated from the high altar. It has a blend of music and is served by the same contemporary music team with an adult choir and organ accompaniment. A host of volunteers support both services: acolytes and crucifers, readers and chalice bearers, prayer ministers, musicians, AV support, ushers, singers, and welcome table hosts. Ascension worship services remain bulletin-based, with technology used periodically to show videos on TV screens installed during the pandemic.

Easter and Christmas typically have double attendance when compared to regular Sundays. Tremendous care, time and attention is taken in the planning of Holy Week, Easter, and Christmas. Feast Days at the 11:00 am service often feature a sung eucharist and incense.

### Diocesan Engagement

In keeping with its perceived call to be a 'Minster' and in absence of a diocesan Cathedral, Ascension shares responsibilities for ordinations and other diocesan services and events with St. Stephen's Sewickley. Ascension hosts ordinations annually and was also the site for the Consecration of Bishop Alex Cameron. In 2014 Ascension also hosted Evensong after the meeting of the College of Bishops and upon the election of Archbishop Foley Beach. Many Ascension parishioners sit on diocesan committees.

### Church Center App

We have continued to adjust our tools and methods in recent years. In 2023, Ascension clergy and staff decided to tackle one additional piece of the puzzle that needed attention, namely transition to a new database. The former database, Church Windows, was nonfunctional for ministry-related work. Planning Center (PC), which has an associated mobile app, came highly recommended. A phase-in of several different modules of PC began in the summer of 2023. All modules should be functional by Spring 2024, including People, Registrations, Giving, Services, and Calendar. A congregation-wide push to use the app will continue into 2024.

### Prayer Ministries

We hope that prayer saturates Ascension's life together. We have a team of 34 trained volunteers available to write and lead the *Prayers of the People*, and 33 trained volunteers serve on *Altar Prayer Teams*, many of whom are the same people. Weekly congregational prayer requests are gathered and emailed to over 75 people. Volunteers currently host three weekly Zoom prayer groups: *10For@4* for Children & Youth, Ascensionites, and Internationals, engaging approximately 15 to 36 people each week. *10for@4* prayer groups arise as congregants and staff feel led to come together to pray. Past groups have come together to pray for Peace, Justice & Racial Reconciliation and Healthcare Workers during the pandemic. *Morning Prayer* with staff is offered to the congregation on Tuesdays at 10 am. A dozen people or so attend *Soul Care*, a monthly contemplative prayer experience. Seasonally, we host special prayer initiatives such as the Ignatian Exercises, a multi-week experience. We offer a Prayer Chapel at our Annual Retreat, the Great Litany over Zoom, and Services of Lament. We also mark other endeavors and special occasions with prayer. The Rev. Dr. Andrea Millard, who currently leads these ministries, will also retire from Ascension in June 2024. It is likely that interim leadership will be appointed.

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## **Congregational Care**

Experience has shown that those who are members of a Community Group typically receive first-line care from fellow members. Thus, Community Groups are a key element in Ascension's approach to Pastoral Care, something we prefer to refer to as Congregational Care. All clergy on staff as well as the Director of Ministry play a role in Congregational Care, communicating with each other through an app called *Notebird*, with particular focus on urgent medical and mental health needs, births, deaths, and other situations of pastoral concern. A very active meal ministry regularly offers meals to support the sick, bereaved, and those who have welcomed a child.

## **Community Groups**

Community Groups are small groups primarily for people who worship with Ascension on Sunday mornings. In addition to corporate worship and personal devotion, Community Groups provide one of the most important spaces for spiritual formation and relationships. Although unique by design, each Community Group includes four practices: studying the Bible, caring for one another, hospitality, and prayer. These practices are inspired by the glimpse of the early church we see in Acts 2:42: "*And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*" In the Fall 2023 semester, we have almost 30 active Community Groups. This includes around 275 adults with 60 leaders (included in the 275).

## **Other Classes & Groups**

Two regular classes are led by the clergy team. The first is Explore Ascension, an afternoon course for newcomers and those interested in membership. The other is Foundations, a multi-week course on the basics of Christian faith and part of the pathway to Confirmation. Pre-pandemic Ascension had a history of hosting a Lenten Dinner Series with focused teaching. While Community Groups remain Ascension's focus as the prime vehicle for spiritual formation, other lay-lead groups form occasionally. Recently several reading groups have been offered to the parish, notably one on racial reconciliation. These groups may also focus on a particular demographic, including a group for parents of youth and a women's hiking fellowship. A men's sexual addiction group is in formation. The Church Center app has made registration for groups very easy.

## **Parish Retreat**

Ascension hosts an annual Parish Retreat the first weekend of October. With a 40-year history, the retreat plays a very significant role in our common life. The retreat is held an hour from Pittsburgh in the Laurel Highlands. It is an all-ages event with programming offered for adults, youth, and children. In 2023 the speaker was Bishop Drew Williams, with an attendance of over 350 people. In 2024 the retreat will take place October 4 – 6 with Bishop Alex Cameron and his wife, Tamara Cameron, as speakers.

## **Music and Worship Arts**

Ascension has a rich history in music and the arts. It is hoped that artists of all disciplines will use their gifts to bless the world, edify the church, and give a foretaste of the Kingdom of God. Worship regularly features special music offerings, an adult choir that leads worship at the 11 am service, a "pick up" children's choir that sings quarterly, and a contemporary worship music team that leads music at both services on Sunday morning. The musical highlight of the year is an annual service of Lessons and Carols on the third Sunday of Advent. With the resignation of the Director of Music and Worship Arts in August 2023 to pursue graduate work at Durham University (as well as his spouse who served as Assistant Director), this ministry has an interim leadership team consisting of a Contemporary Music Worship Coordinator, Traditional Music Worship Coordinator, and Choir Director. All were either on staff at Ascension already in some other role or active parishioners.

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## **Children’s Ministry**

Ascension Children’s Ministry is a robust ministry in a “growth trend” whose primary responsibility is to provide dynamic “ministry of the Word” with age-appropriate and meaningful methods each Sunday morning during our principal worship services. We average 130 people who participate weekly with about 110 being children under the age of 11 years old and about 20 adults and youth who serve in various ways. A Children’s Talk is an important part of our Sunday worship. A full-time Director of Children’s Ministry along with two part-time assistants create and steward an engaging program. The youngest children use the Godly Play curriculum while the lessons for older children are written in house by a curriculum developer. Children’s Ministry notably developed a very popular online following during the pandemic, some families visiting Ascension post-pandemic so they could meet Sally Lolli, a puppet who rose to stardom on Ascension’s YouTube station in 2020.

## **Youth Ministry**

In September 2023, Ascension’s Youth Group transitioned to an interim leader, the Rev. Josh Bennett, when the former Director of Youth Ministry accepted a position at Trinity School for Ministry. Despite this change, it continues to be a magnet, drawing students from both Ascension and other local churches. Each Sunday both middle and high school youth gather for separate programs. The Director of Youth Ministry runs the high school group, and one of our Curates, the Rev. Wes Williams, runs middle school. The Director oversees a team of 10-15 volunteers who serve approximately 80 youth within the wider program. Ascension’s Youth Ministry also includes an 18-month confirmation preparation program which consists of teaching, mentoring, and a retreat.

## **College-age Ministry**

In spring 2023, having paused a long-term partnership with the Coalition for Christian Outreach (CCO), Ascension’s College-age Ministry began a season of discernment as to the direction it might take for strategy and staffing. In this interim period, the vision for this ministry is twofold: to disciple the students and young adults who are currently involved, and to increase engagement with the wider parish. Toward these ends, the group gathers weekly for Bible Study and finds ways for young adults to connect intergenerationally. There are 17 total participants with an average of 10 weekly attendees. One of our Curates, the Rev. Jess Bennett leads the ministry. There are no volunteers, but 4 parishioners have developed a prayer team.

## **Seniors Ministry**

Legacy is “a fellowship of senior men and women growing in Christ and sharing the treasures of our faith with one another and our neighbors.” Currently, this ministry takes two forms. The first is a monthly luncheon with a speaker on a variety of topics such as: aging faithfully, dealing with grief, refugee ministry, sacred garden spaces, and prayer. Attendance varies from 25 to 60, averaging about 35. The second component of the ministry is a monthly Bible study of about 20 people, currently focused on the life of St. Paul. Led by the Rev. Ann Tefft, a retired priest, a leadership committee of 6 people determine yearly programming, faithfully assist with set up, and conduct the meetings.

## **Special Needs Ministry**

Ascension has a small but highly valued ministry for special needs adults (ages 18 – 40) who have various cognitive disabilities and different levels of ability. Families who have members with cognitive disabilities are 90% less likely to be a part of any worshiping community. As a congregation, we have also learned that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to those with cognitive disabilities. The focal point has been a regular Sunday gathering with lessons and service projects, as well as quarterly social gatherings with about 10 participants. One of the strengths of the ministry is the building of bonds of friendship between members of the congregation with participants and their families. Two young men with non-speaking autism have gotten confirmed in the past couple of years - a highlight of the program.

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Both communicate using a spelling board. One of these young men now has a regular column in the parish newsletter, *The Ascent*, and participates on the leadership team for the ‘Access Leadership Network’ of the ACNA. The ministry has a healthy volunteer base as well as a teacher who is paid an honorarium. Our Curate, the Rev. Wes Williams, serves as staff liaison to the ministry.

### **International Ministry**

In 2016 Ascension began an international ministry with ESL classes as the core program. LuAnn Pengidore founded the program and serves as the full-time Director of the International Ministry. Currently the program has at least 200 students attending one of the 14 ESL classes or 5 Bible studies. Additional students and their family members attend monthly field trips or end of semester parties. There has been tremendous congregational “buy in” around this ministry with approximately 60 adult volunteers who teach or assist in classes, lead Bible studies, serve as conversation partners, go on field trips, invite internationals for meals in their homes, or join in a weekly Conversation Café. We warmly invite internationals into the life of our parish – to weekly worship, and to church events. We hold baptism classes about two times a year. Since inception 17 internationals, primarily from China and Iran, have been baptized. We also come alongside internationals as they need practical resources such as childcare, jobs, schools, or medical advice. Our meal ministry also provides meals to internationals in times of need.

### **Refugee Ministry**

The Refugee Ministry provides holistic care to low-income refugee immigrants who are settling in Pittsburgh. The keystone of the refugee ministry is a “co-sponsorship” initiative. Ascension partners with a federal resettlement agency, *Hello Neighbor*, to support a newly arrived refugee family for at least six months, from furnishing a home to providing a circle of new friends. The church welcomed three Syrian families in 2023, utilizing a core of 30 volunteers supported by donations from many parishioners. Other initiatives that are growing within the broader ministry include a regular meeting of Latinos as well as a Job Partner program for lower income immigrants. Members of the ministry have also come alongside a fledgling Sudanese congregation that worships in the facility on Saturday afternoons. The Rev. Daniel Behrens, Missionary in Residence, directs this ministry.

### **Immigration Legal Clinic**

Ascension partners with the Christian Immigration Advocacy Center (CIAC) to host a free weekly legal clinic. CIAC’s Mission is to provide high-quality legal services in a compassionate and culturally appropriate way. CIAC primarily serves low-income individuals and families in need of immigration legal services surrounding green cards, naturalization, family reunification, asylum claims and other related immigration matters. An immigration lawyer from the congregation volunteers her time to staff this clinic. Two administrators, one of whom is fluent in Spanish, work alongside her.

### **Samaritan Ministries**

For many years Ascension has partnered with East End Cooperative Ministry and Shepherd’s Heart Ministry to provide tangible help to Pittsburgh’s poor, specifically the homeless. There are two volunteer leaders who organize the cooking and serving of approximately 20 meals/year (for 100 people each). Numerous volunteers work with the leaders, including participants from the International and Special Needs Ministries.

### **The Workshop Counseling Center**

“The Workshop” is Ascension’s counseling service. Three professional Christian counselors who operate private practices share offices within the facility. All of the counselors have sliding scales for payment, and some accept insurance. Counseling services are open to those outside of Ascension as well as members of the congregation. Workshop counselors provide helpful consults and advice to Ascension

clergy when needed.

### Community Support

Ascension desires to be a good neighbor and makes the facility liberally available to multiple recovery groups and other important community groups. Ascension has hosted one of the largest AA groups in the City of Pittsburgh for many years, making Saturday mornings almost as busy as Sunday mornings. Twice annually we are also a polling station for two precincts. With the expansion of the parish hall, we anticipate hosting more gatherings as well as wedding receptions for those getting married at Ascension.

## Local Active Body

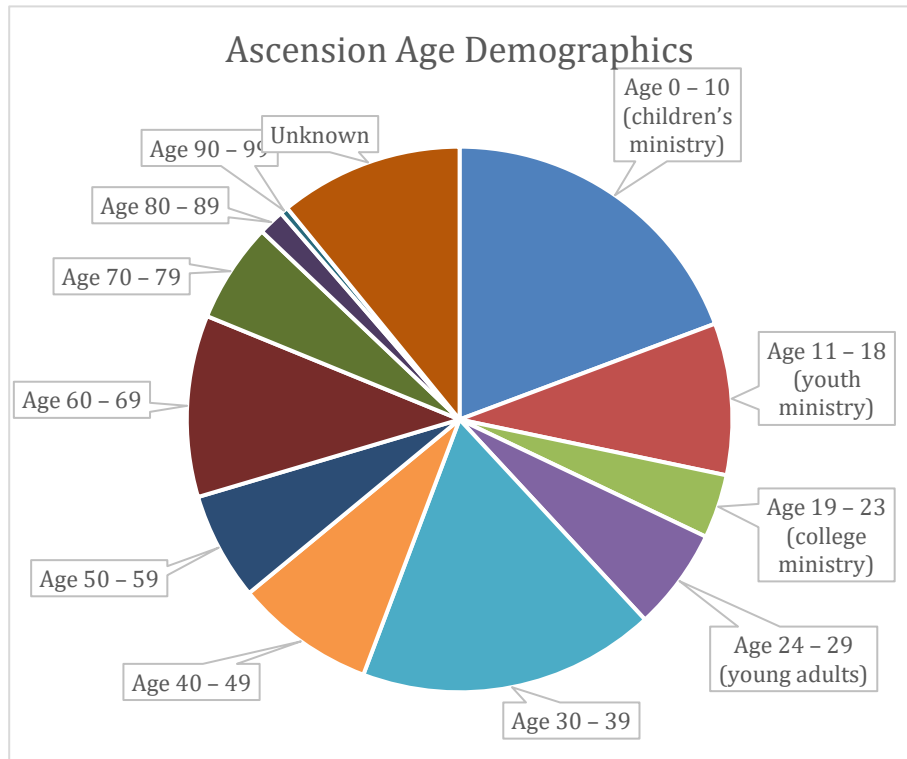
### Active Members

Ascension has 369 active members, 152 are male and 217 are female. Members must be at least 18 years old. In February 2016 Ascension’s Vestry adopted a new membership process which includes participation in a class, an application, an individual meeting with a member of the clergy, and an official welcome in front of the congregation with a specific membership liturgy. We no longer accept letters of transfer nor is confirmation sufficient for church membership. We strongly encourage all those who are members to be confirmed. There are 287 confirmed members.

### Local Active Body

The “Local Active Body” is broader than adult members only. It refers to those members and non-members of all ages (including children and youth under 18) who participate in the life of Ascension through worship (in person or online), Youth Group, a Community Group, a ministry, etc. There are 845 people listed as part of Ascension’s local active body, of which 392 are male and 453 are female. We have 18 clergy included in that number. Congregational makeup is well split between suburban and city residents. We do not track ethnicity, although it can be said that Ascension is predominantly Caucasian with some diversity developing through the International Ministry. Age demographics are as follows:

- Age 0 – 10: 163
- Age 11 – 18: 76
- Age 19 – 23: 32
- Age 24 – 29: 51
- Age 30 – 39: 149
- Age 40 – 49: 70
- Age 50 – 59: 54
- Age 60 – 69: 91
- Age 70 – 79: 50
- Age 80 – 89: 13
- Age 90 – 99: 4
- Unknown: 92



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### Average Sunday Attendance (ASA)

The tables below summarize Average Sunday Attendance since 2016. 2020 is not shown because it was such an anomaly due to the pandemic. While devices are also counted since we live stream, we do not show them here. As the graph below suggests, attendance has almost returned to pre-pandemic levels. These numbers, however, reflect some departures as well as the addition of new congregants. Notably, attendance was very high in the last quarter of 2023: October (486), November (510), December (553).

Year	9:00am	11:00am	Total
2016	171	251	426
2017	200	246	435
2018	216	230	443
2019	239	262	486
2021	172	121	293
2022	226	172	391
2023	278	196	474

### Easter Attendance

Year	6am	9am	11am	total
2016	197	216	367	780
2017	217	205	310	732
2018	252	249	267	768
2019	291	234	280	805
2021	120	250	123	593
2022	214	224	234	672
2023	280	318	232	830

### Baptisms and Confirmations

Year	# Child Baptisms	# Adult Baptisms	# Confirmations *
2016	16	2	18
2017	23	1	14
2018	18	1	17
2019	11	4	10
2020	10	2	11
2021	20	2	10
2022	22	5	14
2023	10	2	14

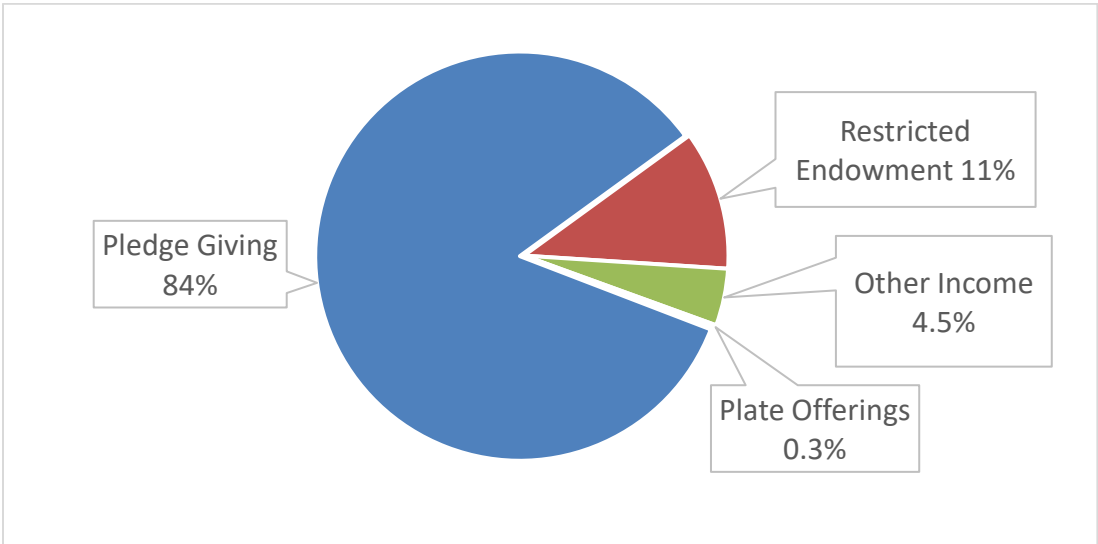
*\*Confirmations, Reaffirmations, Receptions all included in this total*

# Financial Health

## Summary of Giving 2012 – 2022

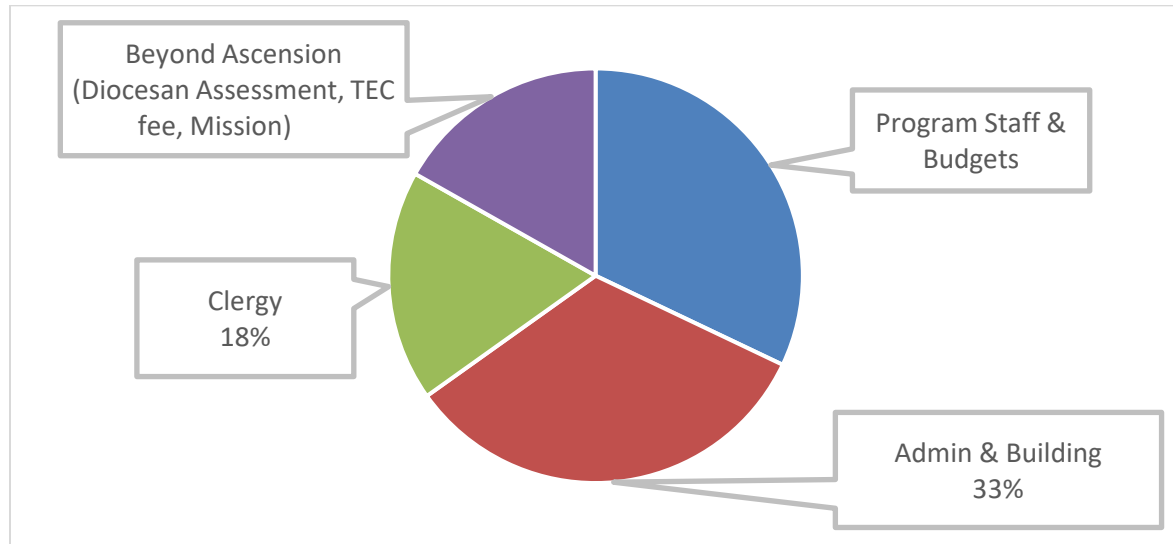
Year	Total Giving	Increase From Previous Year
2012	889,471	
2013	966,549	8.67%
2014	1,080,798	11.82%
2015	1,160,191	7.35%
2016	1,119,382	-3.52%
2017	1,241,335	10.89%
2018	1,323,407	6.61%
2019	1,412,337	6.72%
2020	1,519,428	7.58%
2021	1,502,546	-1.11%
2022	1,577,109	4.96%
2023	1,667,205	5.7%
Average		5.97%

### 2022 Income Sources:



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## 2023 Budgeted Uses:



## 2022 Budget

2022 was the first deficit budget Ascension has had in many years with budgeted income of \$1,870,710 and budgeted expenses of \$1,960,577. The current capital campaign and inflation contributed. Because giving increased 6% from 2021, exceeding budget by 1%, and because expenses were down by 2.6%, the budgeted deficit of \$90,000 came out at \$47,000. After covering the \$47,000 the Vestry reserve fund remained healthy with a \$419,000 balance.

## 2023 Budget

The 2023 budget was also designed with a deficit of \$98,350, with budgeted income of \$1,844,439 and budgeted expenses of \$1,942,789. Giving was strong and not only was budgeted income met, but the deficit was fully covered as well. While income and expenses are being finalized at the time of writing, it appears that the year ended with a \$20,000 surplus.

## 2024 Budget

We move into 2024 with a balanced budget. A 3% increase in giving from 2023 actuals is projected. This is relatively conservative given annual growth averages. The vestry is aware that 2024 could be a difficult year with another election (notably giving was weak in December 2016 after a contentious election). We also enter 2024 knowing that a major leadership transition will take place.

## Budget Vulnerabilities

The finance committee looks at vulnerabilities and upcoming challenges. On the latter, 'bow waves' are of particular concern, namely a present commitment that implies future funding increases. The Curacy program presents a current example as funding to the operating budget will need to grow to provide for the program over the course of the next several years.

Regarding vulnerabilities, looking at 2022, 27 giving units were responsible for \$719,000 of the overall annual giving, or 46%. While this is not necessarily unusual for a church or for non-profits in general, the departure or life-changing event for any one of these giving units could have a significant impact on our budget. Further, primarily because of lack of staff capacity, we do not have a multi-year budget and have not modeled out future years with an understanding of important factors such as the age of the

congregation, impending retirements, and the implications for giving. Annual budgets are always put forward in faith with as much planning as the team has capacity for.

**Financial Stewardship**

Ascension consistently teaches financial stewardship and carefully stewards resources as an organization. Each fall stewardship is the focus of sermons. The biblical principle of tithing is endorsed by the vestry as an important part of discipleship and faithful stewardship and is taught from the pulpit. Tithing is also included as part of our new member class. We collect pledges for the following calendar year on Christ the King Sunday.

**Assets**

The assets discussed below are held at Morgan Stanley. Currently our investment mix is: 54.1% Equities, 22.9% Fixed Income and Preferreds, 20.3% Cash, 2.7% Alternatives.

Restricted Net Assets: Ascension has restricted funds totaling approximately 4.875 million. The largest fund, the Clapper Endowment, is approximately \$4.374 million. We withdraw 4.5% each year to support the operating budget. The remaining \$500,000 is made up of several restricted funds which are administered by our Vestry in accordance with the restrictions of the donors.

Unrestricted Net Assets: With permission from TEC, Ascension used the entire balance of the Unrestricted Endowment for the capital campaign. In 2020 a new Unrestricted Endowment named the ‘2020 Fund’ began. There is approximately \$46,000 in that fund. This fund does not come within the parameters of the settlement agreement with TEC.

Capital Campaign Fund: The table below shows what has already been spent and what we plan to spend over the next 3 years on various projects. As stated elsewhere in the profile, \$1.2 million is from granting agencies, \$2.1 million was from our non-restricted endowment, and the remaining \$5.8 million is from individual donors inside and outside the congregation.

<b>More than Stones Projects</b>	<b>Already Spent</b>	<b>Planned</b>
Campaign Expenses	\$ 231,331.72	\$ -
Masonry	\$ 1,058,788.36	\$ -
Parish Hall Building, Nave Doors & Stairs	\$ 3,179,224.65	\$ 3,257,930.13
Pews & Nave Flooring	\$ 249,168.43	\$ -
Stained Glass Windows	\$ 437,413.00	\$ -
Livestream, Sound, Data Wiring, Wi-Fi, Security	\$ 131,128.32	\$ 53,159.73
Roofing	\$ 37,705.00	\$ 402,750.00
Gates & Outdoor Lighting	\$ 4,473.00	\$ 6,000.00
Organ Repairs	\$ 14,750.00	\$ -
Furniture & Signage	\$ -	\$ 51,520.00
Ministry Spending	\$ 225,025.79	\$ 424,974.21
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 5,569,008.27</b>	<b>\$ 4,196,334.07</b>

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## Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities

### What's next?

God willing, by the time a new rector is appointed, most of the pledges from the capital campaign will be fulfilled, the historic fix and expansion of the building will be almost complete, there will be no debt to pay off, clergy and program staff will have returned to a renovated office suite, all modules of an excellent database will be operational, services will be well-attended if present trends continue, and a healthy array of ministries will be fully operational. The question before the next rector as well as the Ascension parish will be, "What's next?" As stated previously, the tagline of the More than Stones campaign was *Welcoming our Neighbors, Reaching the Nations*. With expansion, church leadership never wanted to construct a larger and more elegant 'clubhouse' for members, but to position Ascension to be an active participant in the Oakland neighborhood of the City of Pittsburgh for years to come, sharing the love and healing of Jesus. What will that look like in the next decade?

### Staff Transitions

The profile highlights several staff transitions. In a year from June 2023 to June 2024, Ascension will have said "goodbye" to seven clergy or program staff members: two campus ministers, two music ministers, one youth minister, one prayer minister, and one rector! A natural question might be, "Is something terribly wrong?" The short answer is "No."

The departures in campus ministry were the hardest and the source of much pain for two staff members whose contracts were not renewed, as well as the group of students they served. All other transitions were understandable given the life circumstances and career choices of those involved. All had celebratory goodbyes! We anticipate more celebration of "work well done" with the retirement festivities upcoming in 2024 for Jonathan and Andrea Millard.

While staffing certain ministries will be imminent upon the arrival of a new rector, which will definitely be a challenge, the vacancies also create an opportunity for the next rector to 'reset the table' with staffing that supports any new direction he or she discerns. The new rector will inherit a highly competent administrative staff as well as excellent clergy and program staff, both those who hope to stay and those appointed on an interim basis.

### Increased Capacity

Ascension is getting full. The pews at the 9:00 am service are consistently full, and the 11:00 am service is on its way to a similar situation. Building on the expertise of church growth experts who identify a 70% full sanctuary as a possible barrier to growth, Ascension previously addressed the full sanctuary problem as an opportunity by adding a second primary Sunday service.

The current expansion will provide additional physical capacity. In addition to hospitality events, the new parish hall is designed and equipped with sound and video to accommodate a worship service in a modern space with seating for approximately 250. Although there are no specific plans on how to use this new capacity, Ascension leadership has contemplated reintroducing a Saturday or Sunday evening service using the parish hall space or providing incubation space to a church plant.

Regarding a church plant, it must be noted that two prominent church plants close to Ascension have either closed or are struggling, many of their parishioners in fact now worshipping at and becoming members of Ascension. One of them is our former church plant, Jonah's Call. It struggled through a leadership transition after its second rector accepted a call to another church. More hopefully, it recently appointed a part-time rector. The other is a church plant we helped to fund through our 2000 capital campaign, Seeds of Hope. The church had its last service in the fall of 2023 with most of its former

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members now attending Ascension.

### **Undergraduate Campus Ministry**

The struggle Ascension has had with undergraduate campus ministry over the last 20, if not 30 years, stands in significant contrast to the explosive growth in International Ministry we have experienced. We have tried different models – a ‘missionary to campus’ model as well as an ‘Ascension-based campus ministry’ model. Neither seemed to flourish in the sense that we could identify a core group of at least 25 undergraduate students in regular attendance at Sunday services and consistently engaged in the life of the congregation. Ascension is a magnet for those who have completed college and have entered the professions or graduate studies, but far less so to undergraduate students. For example, many of the internationals who have become Christians are graduate students or young professionals. Do we focus on this demographic? Do we try another strategy to reach undergrads? Do we look for another champion? A theology of place, being next door neighbors to 50,000 students, many of whom are undergrads, would seem to lead us toward continued striving.

### **Christian Identity and Mission**

If the dark clouds on the horizon at the beginning of Jonathan Millard’s rectorship had to do with Ascension’s relationship with TEC, the dark clouds currently above us have everything to do with the cultural forces forming the hearts and minds of our children and youth as they live within the milieu of an aggressive post-Christian culture. As many studies have shown, the church is losing people, particularly its younger generations, in droves. Political polarization and abuse within the church, as well as its approach to matters around sexuality, gender, diversity, and race have made the church unappealing to many. The phenomenon of “Nonverts,” described adeptly by Stephen Bullivant, namely those who choose ‘none’ when asked for religious affiliation, is now widely recognized. So-called ‘nones’, many of whom were raised in the church, simply stop attending. We have seen this with many of Ascension’s youth group graduates. A challenge before us is to capture the hearts and the minds of our children, youth, and young adults - the next generation - with clear and winsome biblical teaching and practice, providing supportive discipleship structures which enable them to grow to maturity with a clear and strong Christian identity and vibrant relationship with Jesus Christ.

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## **Rector Profile**

Ascension seeks a godly leader gifted for the task of shepherding our church into a new season. A parish survey which was circulated to members and non-members in December 2023 received 259 responses. While it was not expected that the parish would be of one mind, clear themes emerged and have shaped what follows. The candidates best suited to lead Ascension into a new season of its common life must be eligible for the task in terms of character, capacity, chemistry, and competencies. While the committee will consider candidates from all backgrounds, with the following in mind, previous experience as a rector will be invaluable.

### **Character**

We hope that our profile will attract strong candidates with accomplished resumes who can and will champion good work and fruitful flourishing at Ascension, managing and growing the goals and scope of our ministry for the glory of God. That said, before looking at the external markers of leadership, it is important to clearly state the internal markers of the leaders we seek. Christian leaders who steward their authority and responsibility faithfully have practices and systems in place that provide support and accountability to live with steadfastness and integrity, as well as grace to manifest the love and character of God no matter what the external and internal pressures may be.

The Scriptures paint a beautiful composite picture of a good shepherd who hears the voice of the Chief Shepherd and follows very closely in his footsteps. The good shepherd has both the heart and the will to search for the lost and bring back the strays. Above all, the good shepherd knows and deeply loves the Chief Shepherd of our souls. With this image in mind, the committee seeks a rector whose character has been formed through spiritual practices and life habits that enable him or her to know and follow the voice of the Chief Shepherd. We seek a rector whose first priority is to care for his or her own soul. We seek a rector who is a friend of God.

### **Capacity**

The role of rector is a demanding one that requires some level of competence in many areas: preaching and teaching; church finance, bylaws, canons; leading a staff team; setting direction for the parish; diocesan and national church engagement; designing services and leading in worship; congregational care; counseling; celebrating at joyous occasions and walking alongside those who mourn. More could be added to this list. In addition to the foregoing, the next rector - married or single - will have family commitments. If soul care is top priority, care for his or her family must follow very closely. All of the commitments of ministry follow thereafter.

Our hope is that our next rector will lead from a place of rest rather than a place of frantic hurry. While sabbath rest will be an obligation of the vestry and parish to the rector, even sabbath rest will be the rector's own responsibility to keep. The parish cannot rest for the rector! Speaking metaphorically, this is not a role for the weak of heart. 'Fitness' is an apt descriptor. Our hope is that our next rector will have the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual fitness to be a vibrant leader for the next season of our life together. In light of the above, the incoming rector must have capacity coupled with a disciplined sense of priorities in order to attend to the demands of the position as well as his or her own health and life commitments.

### **Chemistry**

Of course we hope that our next rector will like being among us and that he or she is warm and approachable, capable of discerning what is required in interactions with individuals or groups for the good of the Gospel. We hope that he or she is relationally responsive and engaged, adept at inspiring a

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sense of cohesion and togetherness in the context of the parish's broad range of skills, backgrounds, and personalities. We seek a rector we enjoy being with and hope that the feeling is mutual.

## **Competencies**

### **1. We seek a leader who will encourage Ascension to discern and live into its corporate calling.**

Ascension has a mission statement in three parts, the first of which is "A Worshiping Community." Corporate worship is the engine that powers the rest of Ascension's common life. Liturgical worship is highly valued as is a love of Anglicanism and beauty. We celebrate the Eucharist every week. The parish survey often described Ascension with words "community" and "hospitality," particularly in relation to Sunday worship. Put simply, worship in its current form is widely beloved. Somewhat humorously, one respondent to the survey hoped that a new rector wouldn't "wreck it!"

Some of the challenges for our worship life were also clearly expressed. Not all feel they have a niche and are somewhat lost, finding Ascension large and difficult to navigate as a newcomer. Furthermore, worship services are getting full and seats can be hard to find. Put positively, some ask questions like the following: How can we welcome "even more?" How might we use our facility expansion to build on what is already a welcoming culture?

The second phrase in the mission statement is "Equipping God's People." It points to Christian discipleship and formation. The survey evidenced a wide and healthy yearning for more, namely a desire to go deeper in discipleship and spiritual formation, often accompanied with the request for additional adult education offerings besides Community Groups. Half of respondents felt Ascensionites are biblically literate while the other half felt they are somewhat biblically literate or wanting in this regard. On pressing matters that confront us today - gender, sexuality, race, politics - only 22% of survey respondents believe they are well equipped with many indicating they do not have a sure footing on matters such as these.

The third phrase in the mission statement is "Sharing Christ's Healing with a Broken World." Once again the survey evidenced a very positive yearning for more. How do we move even more fully into sharing the healing of Jesus? Do we expand current ministries or start new ones? How might we serve the least of these? How might we invite and serve more of our diverse neighbors?

To discern and move more deeply into our corporate calling, the next rector and those he or she gathers to lead must ask questions such as these: Where is there fruit? Where is there much endeavor but little fruit? What exactly is "fruit" as pertains to ministry? What do we cease to do? What do we begin to do? Does our budget mirror our calling? Do we have the right people to do what we are called to do? Will the current mission statement continue to serve us well or does it need to be refreshed? The next rector will need strategic leadership skills, specifically godly discernment that inspires the congregation to follow, to guide successfully into a new and unknown season.

### **2. We seek a preacher and a pastor.**

As stated above, corporate worship is the engine that powers the rest of our common life. The next rector will be our chief shepherd, setting the tone for weekly corporate worship, a key part of which is the liturgy of the word. While Ascension currently has a reasonably deep preaching bench, the rector must be a good preacher and set the tone for the other clergy to follow. Delivering a spirit-filled message that is both biblically faithful and engaged with the issues of the day is imperative.

Moreover, preaching does not happen in a vacuum. The particular audience each week - the sheep whom the shepherd cares for - will be those members and friends who travel from near and far to worship at Ascension. As the rector grows in the position, he or she will come to know the life situations and

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enormous challenges of those who look up from the pews. Our next rector will need to wed biblically based preaching that is responsive to the contemporary questions with a honed pastoral sensibility and wisdom. Thus, we seek a pastor who is an effective preacher. Said another way, we seek a preacher who is an effective pastor.

**3. We seek a leader of leaders.**

Leadership at Ascension functions at several levels. First, many in Ascension's congregation hold leadership roles within their professions. They are accustomed to, and expect, leadership in strategy, direction, and people development. Second, Ascension's ministries will only thrive and flourish to the extent that lay leadership development occurs on an ongoing basis. Ministry cannot multiply if it is held in the hands of just a few. Third, Ascension leaders, particularly but not solely clergy, have taken many leadership roles in the diocese and the ACNA. Fourth, Ascension is a leading voice on the ordination of women. Finally, as described previously, Ascension functions as a Minster, and is a resource parish to the wider diocese. As such, it operates in ways similar to a Cathedral and hosts a Curacy program for the recruitment and development of young clergy. We desire our next rector to lead the charge on all of the above such that the Ascension is a powerful force for the Kingdom of God in Pittsburgh, the diocese, and beyond through the provision of able and trained leadership.

**4. We seek a seasoned leader who communicates with wisdom.**

We live in a polarized time. Many faith communities adopt overt postures aligning with politics of the right or politics of the left. While Ascension is not homogeneous, it has for the most part been a unified worshipping community despite strong differences of opinion held by people in the pews. A high value within the congregation is to maintain a unity based around our identity in Christ. Although many appreciate Ascension's non-partisan approach, many also recognize the need to meet the hard questions of the day – racial justice, human sexuality, gender, creation care - from a perspective that is both biblical and open-minded. For this task, we seek a seasoned leader who infuses communications with wisdom.

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## Summary

Ascension has been successfully led by one rector for the past twenty years and is poised for a new era. It is a vigorous parish with a future full of challenges and opportunities for the Kingdom of God, several of which are outlined in the foregoing:

- Having completed a capital campaign and major building project, leaving no debt, what's next for Ascension?
- Who will fill pressing staff vacancies?
- Since our pews are getting full on Sundays, how do we increase capacity in a healthy way?
- What is the future of undergraduate campus ministry at Ascension?
- How can we capture the hearts and minds of upcoming generations for Jesus as they grow up within an aggressive post-Christian culture?

Ascension seeks a godly leader gifted for the task of shepherding our church into a new season of faithfulness to the Gospel of Christ. Specifically, we seek a rector with the following characteristics and strengths:

- We seek a shepherd whose knows and follows the voice of the Chief Shepherd of our souls.
- We seek a rector who has capacity coupled with a disciplined sense of priorities in order to attend to the demands of the position as well as his or her own health and life commitments.
- We seek a rector with whom we have good chemistry, who we enjoy being with and who enjoys being among us.
- We seek a rector with four specific competencies:
  - (1) strategic leadership skills to help the parish discern and live into its corporate calling.
  - (2) a strong preacher and a pastor, namely one who regularly delivers sermons responsive to issues of the day with a honed pastoral sensibility.
  - (3) a leader of leaders who will develop leaders within Ascension and continue Ascension's leadership within the diocese and the ACNA.
  - (4) a seasoned leader who can speak into the hard questions of the day, infusing communications with wisdom.

The search committee eagerly invites candidates who wish to apply for the position to email a letter of interest, resume, and links to three sermons to the secretary of the committee whose name and contact information is on the inside cover. Names and contact information of references will be requested at a later date.

Candidates may be assured that the search committee has agreed to strictest confidence and will share names with no one outside the circle of the committee, with the exceptions of the Bishop of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, the Rt. Rev. Alex Cameron, as needed to gather references, and, of course, at the appropriate time, with the vestry.

*Almighty God, giver of every good gift: Look graciously on your Church, and so guide the minds of those who shall choose a Rector for Church of the Ascension that we may receive a faithful pastor who will preach the Gospel, care for your people, equip us for ministry, and lead us forth in fulfillment of the Great Commission; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*