



We believe in sharing love and grace with God and one another.

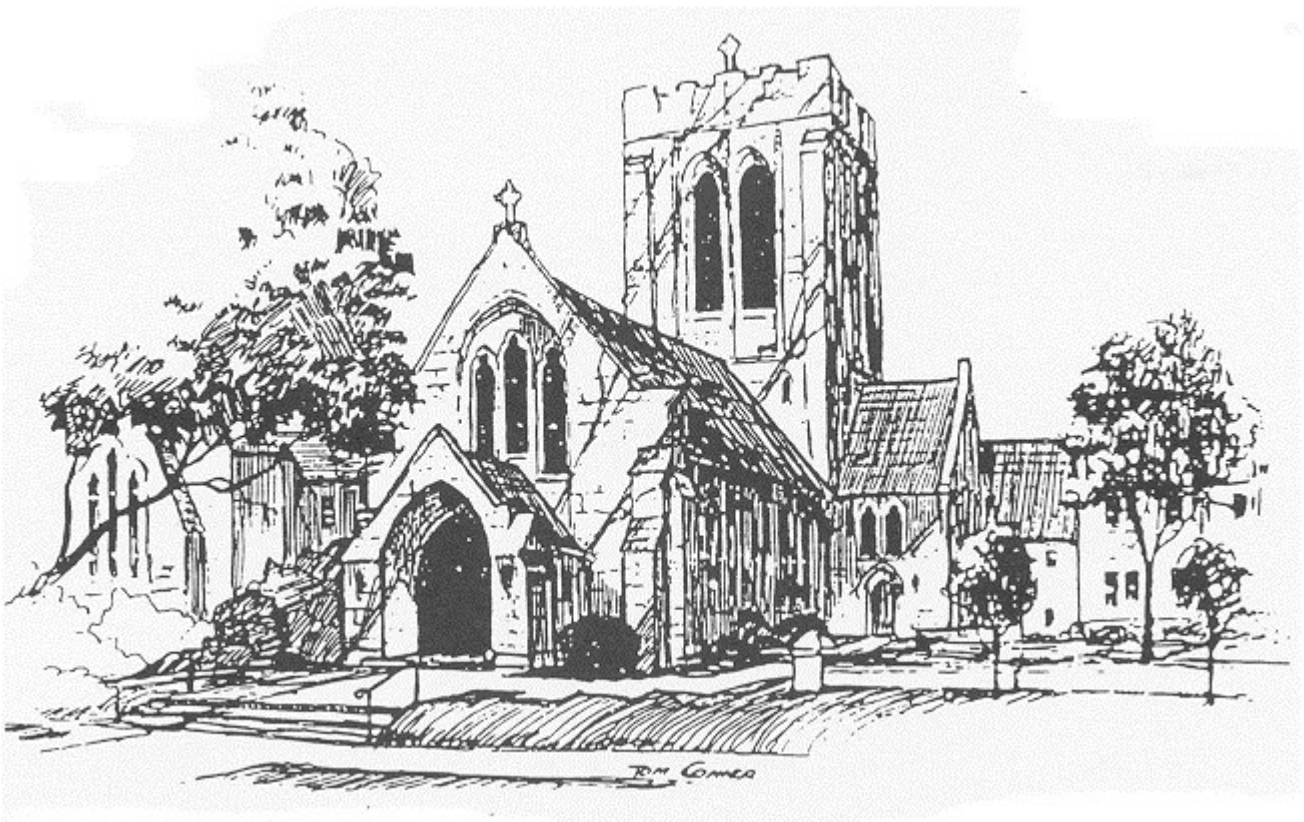
Church of the Ascension

2024

Annual Report

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Rector's Report

As Episcopalians we follow the ebb and flow of two calendars: the Gregorian calendar which tells us the date, and the liturgical calendar, which tells us the season of the church year. Currently, we are in the midst of the Season after Epiphany, which will lead into Lent, followed by Holy Week, Easter, etc. The ebb and flow of the liturgical year draws us into an ordered life. This theme—An Ordered Life—has guided our program year. The hope is that as we seek to order our individual lives, we discover a rule of life that guides our actions, beliefs, and relationships. This rule of life is not just for individuals; it also shapes how we order our life together as an Episcopal community.

An ordered life acknowledges discipleship as our highest calling. As disciples, we are invited and expected by God to live lives of transformation. This transformation is expressed in four key ways: worship, growth, connection, and service. If you have visited our website or read the eTower, you may have noticed that they are organized around these four themes of Worship, Grow, Connect, and Serve. Your church leadership—vestry, staff, and clergy—work to create opportunities for transformation in all four areas. These opportunities require a significant commitment of time, volunteers, and resources to be successful. Their vitality depends on the energy the parish contributes. Without your commitment and involvement, we cannot thrive.

As we continue to embrace an ordered life, I hope we come to recognize the importance of inviting, engaging, and empowering others in ministry. It is not enough to simply invite people to participate; we must also give them opportunities to engage and empower them to lead. Healthy ministry reflects leaders who are continually seeking, developing, and lifting up new leadership. The altar guild has demonstrated a great capacity for this over the years. A chair and a co-chair serve for two years. After two years, the chair retires (not from the ministry, but from the role of chair), and the co-chair is elevated to the chair position, with a new co-chair chosen. This leadership fluidity fosters fresh ideas and vision, even as the purpose of the ministry remains fixed. The guild also constantly recruits and trains new members, ensuring its continued health and allows for others to become involved in its ministry. This structure promotes not only the vitality of the ministry but also keeps God at the center of its mission. It prioritizes the relationships between God and each another which reflects the CoA “Why” statement: Sharing in love and grace with God and one another. I challenge all ministries at Ascension to discover this model of invitation, engagement, and empowerment.

This past year, a task group was appointed by the vestry to create bylaws for the church. These bylaws were then presented to the parish for feedback before an edited version was approved by the vestry and forwarded to the bishop for final approval. Bylaws provide a formal structure for how we order our life together and offer us structure in how we govern the church and our mission and ministry. Our bylaws help us to worship and do the work God calls us to do while holding positive relationship with one another. The significant changes in these bylaws include an administrative structure for the vestry, term limits for the clerk and treasurer, and fluidity in leadership roles. They are within the canons of the Episcopal Church and the Diocese of Alabama.

Our Walk in Love Stewardship Campaign netted pledges of \$917,628. Great job! While this is slightly below last year's pledges by about \$100,000, the budget committee has made thoughtful cuts that minimally impact our current mission and ministry. Your generosity is a key part of how we partner with God. I remain hopeful that our work together continues to advance God's kingdom and be pleasing unto his sight. Thank you for all that you do and give to CoA.

The Way, the Truth, and the Life Capital Campaign is nearing the end of the construction phase. The renovations for the choir, Ascension Day School, and Joshua Commons are complete. Currently we are in process to acquire the property on Hull St. between Joshua Commons and the alley. Once that acquisition is finalized, we will revisit our landscaping plans, which include a labyrinth and green space where parishioners and neighbors might enjoy a forest bath and scripture path. We will continue to update you on progress for this exciting addition to our campus.

The year ahead holds much promise. Sunday morning and Wednesday evenings are full of life and vitality. Our average Sunday attendance remains steadfast at 180. Our New Beginnings tutors and students have returned to pre-Covid levels. Our children's choirs have grown and are planning a production of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* this spring. Our Lay Eucharist Visitors take communion to our shut-ins every week. The flower guild delivers altar flowers to the sick and those in need. We've partnered with St. John's to volunteer regularly at Mercy House. The list goes on.

As we continue to order our lives around God, we are investing our time, energy, and purpose into his command to us—to make disciples, to baptize, to teach, and to obey. We do all of this not simply in response to his commandment to us, but in response to his promise, “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)

Light and Life,
Candice+

Associate Rector's Report

I continue to give thanks for the opportunity to serve as your associate rector here at The Episcopal Church of the Ascension. I am grateful for the chance to learn from each of you and from Candice+. As I reflect on my time with you, it is hard to believe that I am already in my fifth year of serving this wonderful community. Looking back over the past year, I am especially thankful for the opportunity to pray, worship, and learn with you. It has been a year full of opportunities, including leading the Clergy Forum, the Men's Prayer Breakfast, and participating in Sunday School with various groups.

As I look out across the pews on Sunday mornings and see so many faces, both new and familiar, I am reminded of how grateful I am to serve God's church here. I have enjoyed visiting with so many of you and look forward to deepening those relationships and forming new ones. In an effort to continue growing as a priest, pastor, and preacher, I was invited to join a program called Thriving in Ministry, conducted by Virginia Theological Seminary. The Diocese of Alabama is a participating diocese in this pilot program, which brings clergy from across the country together via Zoom to share best practices and growth opportunities. I am part of a group of priests serving as associate rectors at larger parishes. We share experiences with one another, learning from each other's insights and receiving best practices from our mentors.

In addition to leading classes, worship, and preaching, I look forward to working with our youth who serve as acolytes. I am grateful for their service and for how much they contribute to our worship experience here at Ascension. Our youth are a testament to the future of the church, not only in their commitment to worship but also through their participation in EYC, diocesan events such as Summer Camp, Happening, and the Christmas Conference. As we continue the work of becoming God's beloved community, Ascension hosted youth from across the diocese and the country for the Jonathan Daniels Youth Lock-In. Many of our own youth here at Ascension participated, engaging with others their age in discussions about race and our history in that story. They also took part in the annual Jonathan Daniels Pilgrimage in Hayneville, AL, in August. Our youth continue to impress me with their compassion and desire to love their neighbors.

I also had the opportunity again to assist in hosting Episcopal seminarians from the Seminary of the Southwest as they visited Alabama's historic Civil Rights sites, including The Legacy Museum and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice. The group then participated in the annual Jonathan Daniels Pilgrimage and visited the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma. Our location here in Montgomery, surrounded by so many important historic sites and institutions, allows us the opportunity to serve as ambassadors for this ongoing work of racial reconciliation. In addition to these opportunities, I continue to find joy in leading chapel on Thursday mornings with some of the children from Ascension Day School. Their joy for learning never ceases to amaze me.

Our scouting programs continue to grow here at Ascension. Pack 1, Troop 1, and our Girl Scouts make Monday nights here at church a very lively place. The opportunity to support our children and youth through scouting programs is truly a gift. These programs offer community, teach valuable skills, and instill traits such as goal setting. They provide young people with a place to develop leadership skills that will serve them throughout their lives. I was grateful this year for the opportunity to serve our scouting programs. Over the past year, I had the honor of serving on the Eagle Scout Board of Review for several of our scouts and was invited to offer the invocation at their Court of Honor.

It is truly a gift to be a part of this community and to serve you as a member of your clergy. Allison and I are so thankful for your support and friendship, and we look forward to all that the coming year has to offer.

Grace and Peace,

Drew+

Building and Grounds Report

The building and grounds improvements continued to be a focus of 2023, highlighted by the completion of the Joshua Commons and the renovation of multiple bathrooms. Everything looks amazing!



In addition to the Capital Campaign, many other maintenance projects were completed in 2024. These include:

- Exterior Door Refinishing
- ADS Relocated back into newly remodeled space
- Sprinkler system repairs
- 6 bathrooms remodeled and painted
- Bell Rope Replacement
- Opening of Joshua Commons
- Large tree pruning
- Sewage pump replacement
- Sprinkler System Repairs

Financial Report

Receipts:	Actual	Budget	
Plate	25,829	6,000	
Pledge	1,006,258	1,025,396	
Other	348,988	323,681	
TOTAL	1,381,076	1,355,077	25,999
Expenses:	Actual	Budget	
Mission Giving	145,247	167,226	
Salaries	775,500	768,053	
Administrative	345,222	352,948	
Programs	64,486	66,850	
TOTAL	1,330,457	1,355,077	43,623
	50,619	0	

Stewardship 2024

Pledge cards received **136**
Pledge total **\$912,628**

Capital Campaign

Pledge cards received **82**
Pledge total **\$2,250,940**

2023 and 2024 comparison:

17 decreased
46 increased
12 new
61 no change

Pledge Giving Range

.01 to 500.00	10
500.01 to 1500.00	25
1500.01 to 2500.00	24
2500.01 to 3500.00	12
3500.01 to 5000.00	17
5000.01 to 7000.00	9
7000.01 to 10,000.00	13
10,000.01 to 15,000.00	9
15,000.01 to 25,000.00	11
25,000.01 to 60,000.00	<u>6</u>
	136

Outreach Report

Episcopal Relief & Dev	\$2,500
Lansing Catholic High School	\$300
Friendship Mission	\$10,000
St. Luke's Episcopal	\$500
Many Colors Arts	\$3,750
Mental Health America	\$5,000
Medical Outreach Ministries	\$9,000
Lunches for Learning	\$10,000
Meals on Wheels	\$8,000
Mercy House	\$15,000
Miscellaneous	\$693

Total Outreach Grants **\$64,793**

Other Outreach Donations

From Vineyard:

Dream Court	\$500
Respite	\$500
Family Sunshine Center	\$500
Boys and Girls Club River Region	\$500
TOTAL	\$2,000

From Altar Guild:

Ascension Day School	\$2,500
TOTAL	\$2,500

From Lobster Fest:

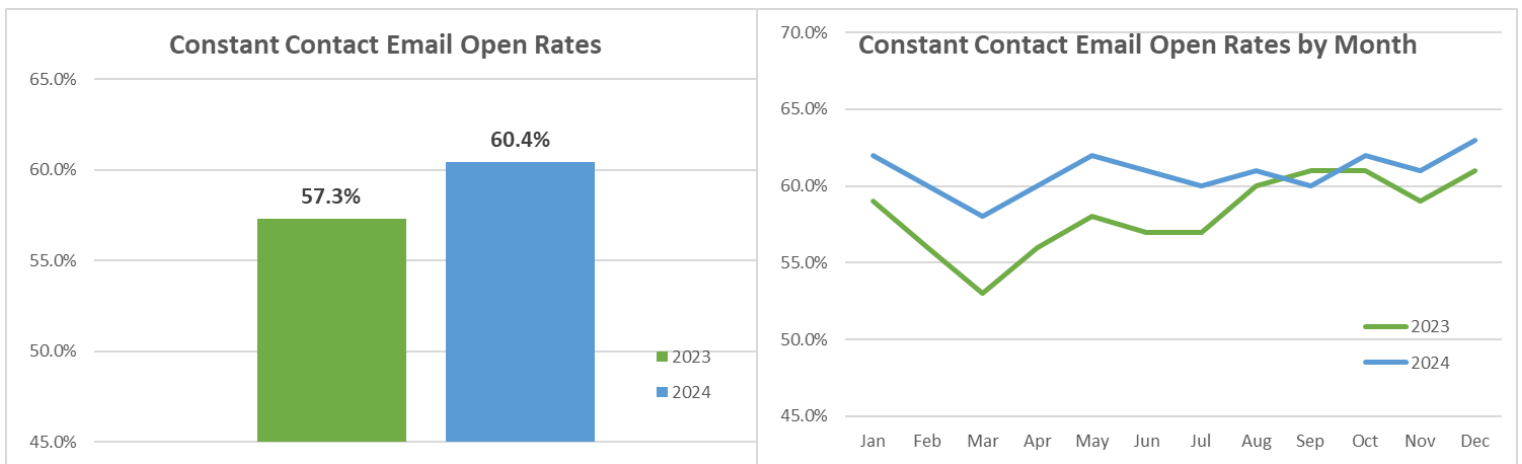
Ascension Day School	\$3,084
Respite Ministry	\$3,084
TOTAL	\$6,168

Total All Outreach Giving **\$75,461**

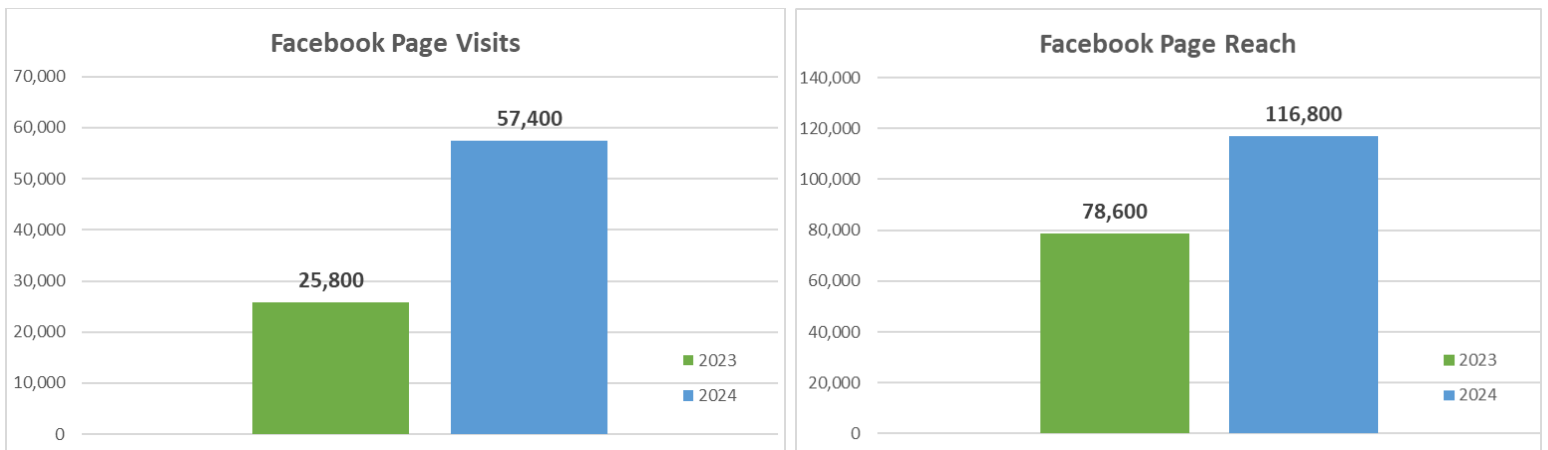
Communications Report

2024 was an exciting year in communications and social media. We started some new programs and streamlined some others. We continued our texting program to remind users of important events or share timely information, such as event reminders or weather delays. If you are interested but not currently enrolled in our texting program please let us know! Below are metrics and communications statistics as well as some things to look forward to in the year to come.

The primary responsibility I am tasked with is communicating with and distributing information to parishioners, and the main tool I use to distribute information is Constant Contact. This allows us to send emails to large groups as well as send targeted messages to specific groups. In 2024, we sent under 103,000 individual messages, which was down slightly from 108,000 in 2023. One of the other metrics we use to track the effectiveness of our communications is open rate, or the % of messages that are opened by the recipient. The graphs below compare open rates in 2024 against previous year as well as trending by month. Our open rate increased over 3% in 2023, and as you might expect we see increased open rates around Easter and Christmas, with a little dip in the summer months.



We also saw some amazing growth in our social media reach in 2023. We track this by analyzing page visits and page views. Page visits are the number of times our page was visited, and page reach is the number of people who saw our content while scrolling. Our page visits doubled in 2024 to over 57,000! Our reach also saw large increases and were up 48% in 2024. Let's all continue to engage with our social media and keep these numbers trending in the right direction.



Thanks!
Jason Pate

Family & Faith Formation Ministry

In 2024 the Family & Faith Formation Ministry enjoyed a full calendar year with Laura and Nick Mielke heading up their respective areas of Children and Youth Ministries. A lot of energy and effort was put into re-establishing lines of communication, volunteer rosters, and consistent programming efforts that focused on worship, growth, and service. Below are highlights from both areas during the 2024 calendar year.

Children's Ministry:

-Renewed programming for Sunday School and Children's Church including volunteer teacher/leader rotations that involve parents and church members in helping the children grow and enjoy these times.

-Wednesday Night Live is alive and well with Family Supper, rotation of Children's Choirs and Bible lessons, and Family Compline.

-Vacation Bible School was held in partnership with St. John's and hosted downtown with many children from not only both parishes but the community coming to enjoy "Hometown Nazareth!"

-Colors of Creation Camp was a new program launched this summer that explored the Creation Story as told by the Beulah Land curriculum. A group of Ascension Volunteers assisted children in grades 3rd-6th with hand making fabric faith banners. The experience was wildly imaginative and spiritual!

Youth Ministry:

-Consistent Youth Sunday School and EYC schedules were put into place in order to give the youth of Ascension opportunities to learn, grow, serve, and fellowship with one another. From sharing EYC with St. John's to nights out to dinner, to trivia night, skit night, game night, and more there were lots of activities to keep the youth busy.

-The summer mission trip in 2024 saw 10 youth and 5 adults travel to the Hinton Rural Life Center for a week of rural home repair ministry. Our group spent the week building a set of stairs on a steep incline that would allow the homeowner access to the creek below her home. The group also spent time having fun and exploring Asheville and greater Western North Carolina.

-Youth from Ascension also participated in events in the Diocese such as the Jonathan Daniels Lock-In and Pilgrimage, Bethany's Kids Camp, Senior High Camp, Christmas Conference, Spring Retreat, Youth Department, DioDay, and more, including the election of Margie Anne Prescott to the Diocesan Youth Department.

Family Formation also led and participated in such Parishwide activities as Chili Cook-Off, Easter activities, Good Vibrations, and All Hallow's Fest. Many of these activities were great ways for our church family to come together but also provided the opportunity to open our grounds to our neighbors for fellowship as well.

Submitted Respectfully: Laura and Nick Mielke

Newcomers Ministry

Mission: To welcome, embrace, and immerse newcomers to Episcopal Church of the Ascension into the life of our church.

Committee Members: Nelson “Smitty” Smith, Chair; Young Boozer, Treasurer; Monique Walker, Scribe; Nan Bargaineer, Ann Blackmon, Jim Harstad, Tina Harstad, Julie McNair, Paula Smith, Brittany Wade, The Rev. Candice Frazer, ex-officio; Nick Mielke, ex-officio.

Budget: \$10,000. Pending rector’s approval: \$1,169.99 for 500 welcome folders.

Actions:

1. As appropriate, made follow-up contact with visitors/newcomers after initial contacts made by clergy.
2. As requested by the rector because their functional connection with embracing newcomers to Ascension, selected hosts for quarterly Episcoparties and insured newcomers were invited to these events.
3. In the same light as with #2 above, organized and oversaw the Ministry Fair, conducted in conjunction with Good Vibrations Sunday, September 8th..
4. Reassigned Newcomers Bulletin Board (located in Ascension Hall entryway) to Brittany Wade, who is updating it by liturgical season. Highlights church activities, memorable moments, and information useful to everyone.
5. Work to do: Improve signage within the church.

Respectfully submitted:

Nelson “Smitty” Smith

Chair

Audit Committee

1. Pursuant to the directive of the Rector, the Audit Committee was established in May 2024.
2. Mission: To facilitate and oversee an annual independent audit of the financial books and records of the Parish; ensure compliance with applicable Episcopal Church Canons; and supervise all actions regarding the resolution of findings and the implementation of recommendations.
3. Members: Nelson Smith, Chair; Young Boozer; Don Orlando.
4. Actions:
 - a. Researched three accounting firms and recommended Tom Damman, KOEXCO, to the Vestry for conducting the 2024 Annual Parish Audit. The recommendation was based on the applicability of Mr. Damman's audit services to our situation and affordability. The recommendation received vestry approval.
 - b. Audit was conducted on September 15, 2024 and results sent to parish on September 25. Expense for audit services: \$1,866.
 - c. Following committee review of results and vestry approval, the completed audit was sent to the Diocese on November 26, 2024. The audit's recommendations were forwarded to responsible parish offices and organizations for action and/or response as appropriate.

Respectfully submitted,

Nelson Smith

Chair

Chili Cook-Off Committee

1. Mission: To organize and oversee the Feast of the Epiphany Chili Cook-Off.
2. Committee Members: Co-chairs: Smitty and Paula Smith; Lynn Coker, Scribe; Gina Curvin, Communications; David Johnson, Logistics/Set-up; Mary Ed Davis, Runner; Will McQueen, Ex-Officio member; The Rev Candice Frazer, Ex-Officio member.
3. Budget:

2024: \$900 (security, food/consumables; musicians)

2025: \$1,050 (security, food/consumables, musicians)
4. Accomplishments:
 - a. Planned and oversaw the 2024 Feast of the Epiphany Chili Cook-Off.
 - b. Developed and memorialized the CoA Chili Cook-Off Committee Organization, including structure, roles and responsibilities of the committee.

Respectfully submitted,

Smitty & Paula Smith

Co-Chairs

Music Ministry Report

Music Ministries at Church of the Ascension is thriving with services, choirs, concerts and community activities. The following list is of activities in which the Choirs and the Director of Music were involved.

- The Ascension Choir has increased in number with 4 new congregation members (one of whom has, sadly, just moved away). We began a new initiative and partnership with Choral Scholars from Alabama State University, with the support of an anonymous patron, and currently have 3 scholars singing. The Ascension Choir faithfully leads Music in Worship at the 10:30 am service on Sunday morning services. In addition, the Choir provides music for weddings and funerals when requested, and additional services during All Saints, Thanksgiving, Epiphany, Christmas and Easter.
- The two Children's Choirs, Rejoice! and The Ascension Choristers, are also growing. They offered anthems at around 8 services this year, and their numbers have increased to levels of healthy participation. This fall, we worked closely with Children's Ministry in organizing a Wednesday evening program that fulfills goal of both Ministries. Perhaps the most important thing we do is a short Compline service on Wednesday nights in The Choir Loft, where parents, choir members, children, their parents and participants from our Tutoring Program and other programs join to offer their prayers and hear the children read the service.
- Our most exciting news this year was the move into the beautiful new rehearsal space, The Choir Loft, located on the 4th floor. Not only is our rehearsal space greatly improved for both adults and children's choirs, but the move cleared space for the growth of the Ascension Day School.
- The community Men's Group, founded at Ascension, Encore!, has resumed offering a sung Compline service on the 3rd Sunday of each month. The group travelled to Dothan, Church of the Advent, and sung Compline with that congregation.
- In October, the Ascension Choir attended a retreat lead by Dr. William B. Roberts, Professor Emeritus of Church Music at Virginia Theological Seminary. Choir members were renewed by both musical work and small-group discussions which reinforced their commitment to provide music at Ascension.
- Ascension continues to host the convocation-wide All Saints' services where choir members and clergy from other churches join to offer the service.
- The 25th season of the Trawick-Scott Advent Recital Series featured the Ascension Choir at the final recital of this successful program, which attracts several audience members from the community.
- Music at the Ascension continues its support for Support the Montgomery Chorale, a city-wide MLK celebration in partnership with ASU, the Respite program Side By Side Choir, and the Alabama State University Choir.
- In addition to the work listed above, Rebecca Taylor presented a major Organ Recital on the St. John's series. It was well supported by Ascension parishioners.
- Two grand pianos were donated to the Ascension this year, one of which is in the Choir Loft and the other to be placed in the Nave, hopefully restored for concert-quality performances.

Becky Taylor

2024 Vestry Report

2024 brought opportunities and challenges to the Church of the Ascension. We saw our capital campaign come into further fruition with a newly designed and renovated Joshua House, which the Vestry repurposed and re-named the Joshua Commons by proclamation in September of 2024. Joshua Commons now illuminates life and opportunity to further our ministry and expand our outreach within our community.

The Vestry appointed a Joshua Commons Visioning Team which was charged with the mission of discerning how the Church of the Ascension can use the Joshua Commons to foster spirituality and our mission in an inclusive and welcoming way in the Garden District. The visioning team met regularly from June through November of 2024 and produced a detailed and thoughtful report. The Church's visioning regarding Joshua Commons will continue into 2025.

In furtherance of our ministry and outreach into the community, we negotiated the purchase of the 1408 Hull Street property which is adjacent to the 1414 Hull Street property that we acquired in 2022. We anticipate closing on the purchase of the 1408 Hull Street property in early 2025. The structure that currently sits on this property has been abandoned and is in extreme disrepair. Pending approval from the Garden District Association and the City of Montgomery, we expect to move forward with demolishing the existing structure and transforming this property into a green space. The Vestry believes that our acquisition and transformation of this property will enhance our community and the Church of the Ascension's place within it.

In 2024, we renovated and modernized several of our bathrooms that had been in disrepair. This project was essential to keeping our facilities up to par with the expectations of our parishioners and visitors. The Vestry also approved extensive roof repairs, which are in the process of being completed. Given the age of our building, the need for significant upgrades and repairs will continue to present challenges moving forward.

Per the recommendation of our consultant, Rev. Cannon Scott Holcomb, the Vestry created several task groups. A Roles and Responsibilities Task Group was charged with defining and clarifying the duties and responsibilities of various church officers, committees, and ministries. The task group, which was led by Tim Marquardt, conducted a comprehensive review of our church ministries and any existing policies and procedures. The task group recommended the development of a comprehensive policies and procedures manual. We expect this work to continue in 2025.

The Vestry also created a Governance Task Group with the charge of reviewing and overhauling our governing structure consistent with the Episcopal Church Canons and commensurate with the size of our Parish. Under the leadership of Ellen Brooks, this group worked meticulously and exhaustively in generating new proposed by-laws for the Church of the Ascension. These proposed by-laws were published to the Parish with the opportunity for review and comment, revised further, and approved by the Vestry in December. These bylaw will go into effect after approval by the Bishop and this Parish.

Per the recommendation of the Governance Task Group, the Vestry also established a budget committee, audit committee, and compensation review committee. Each of these committees went into operation in 2024.

The Vestry dissolved the consultation agreement with Rev. Cannon Scott Holcomb in December of 2024. Rev. Cannon Holcomb dedicated a great deal of time and effort to our Parish. He made multiple recommendations, which the Vestry considered and began work on implementing as it deemed appropriate in 2024. Although our work in implementing these recommendations continues, the Vestry considers Rev. Cannon Holcomb's work with our Parish complete.

Faithfully,

Virginia Humphrey, Senior Warden
Philip Sellers, Junior Warden

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