



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

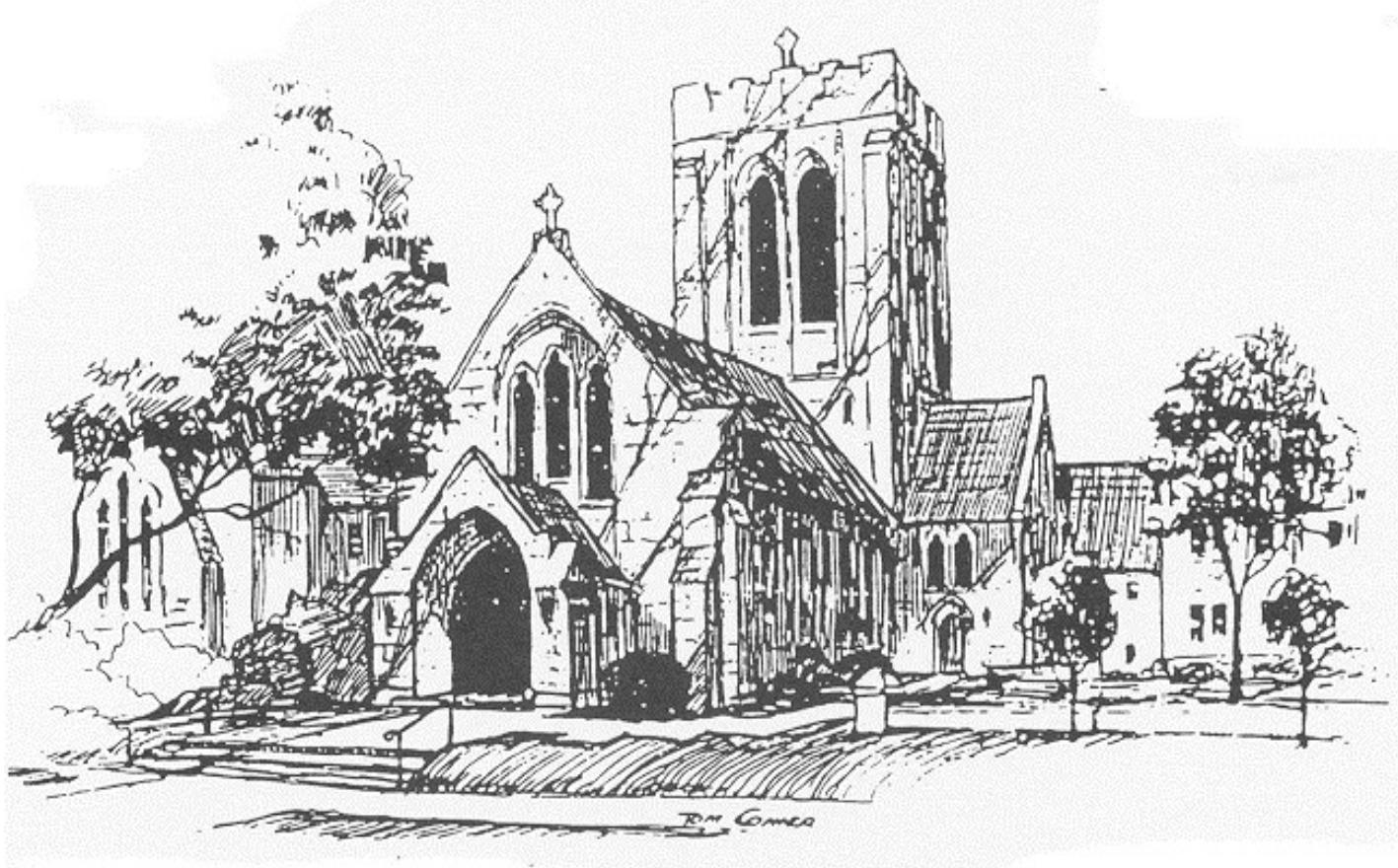
Church of the Ascension

2025

Annual Report

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Rector's Report

I believe our starting point with God is as God's beloved children. Everything we do is an expression of that belovedness. When we forget how much God loves us, we slip into doubt and fear. When we remember that belovedness we connect to that peace beyond all understanding and know that we are enough.

Though we may embrace our belovedness at Ascension, many people do not know that they, too, are beloved children of God. A desire to share this good news has begun to shape the mission and ministry of Joshua Commons. As our third and final phase of the The Way, the Truth, and the Life Capital Campaign nears completion, we are already seeing our efforts at kingdom building pay off. Joshua Commons or "The Commons" has become a "third space." A place for the community to gather, build relationships, and grow spiritually.

This past fall, we held our first spirituality workshop in The Commons, *Cross and Currents*. About fifty people gathered together to explore the spiritual journey through the metaphor of boat building and then made their own boats from natural materials. The idea came from Canterbury Cathedral who were delighted to share their journey boats across the pond. Our lead artist, Cam Armstrong, exhibited her creations at Ascension in the nave for much of November and December. The boats are now on exhibit at St. John's Episcopal Church in downtown Montgomery.

Regular usage of The Commons includes:

- Garden District Preservation Association monthly meetings
- Troop One (including a girls' and boys' troop) meeting space weekly
- AA meetings on Mondays and Wednesdays
- The Regulators open rehearsal on 2nd and 4th Tuesdays each month
- ESL Book Club every other Thursday
- Community Connections Coffee Hour on 2nd Fridays at 8am
- Women's Bible Study on Thursdays at noon
- Beans and Rice on 2nd Saturdays
- Food Box Ministry on 4th Saturdays

As you can see, The Commons is an important and effective way in which we are doing the work of building up the kingdom. In the coming months, we hope to see the transformation of the space behind The Commons as we complete the labyrinth and our sacred wood.

The Commons is not our only expression of mission at Ascension. Other kingdom building initiatives are:

- Ascension Day School - 131 children, 27 teachers, 3 administrators
- Girl Scouts – 24 girls, 5 leaders, 28 adult volunteers
- Pack One – 41 youth, 16 adult volunteers
- Troop One – 5 girls, 27 boys, 24 adult leaders
- New Beginnings Tutoring program – 18 kids, 18 adult tutors

We touch many lives here at Ascension through our work of Mission and Ministry.

We also continue to support our life together through various ministries. This past year we saw the revitalization of our Ascensionaires' ministry. This is a ministry for those who are retired to come together for fellowship and often share a meal together once a month. Our Pray and Play signature events continue to be a favorite: Feast of Lights and Chili Cook-off, Church Olympics, Ascension Day Evensong and dessert, Good Vibrations Sunday, and the All Hallows Festival are well attended and bring joy to members of Ascension as well as those in our neighborhood.

Sadly, we lost a member of our staff this past year. Ryan Hall was one of our sextons and loved being part of our Wednesday nights as well as helping with special events. Ryan was quiet and might often be seen with headphones on, but he always had a kind word and a willing spirit. His final gift was the gift of life for others as an organ donor. We miss Ryan and are grateful for his life among us for almost fourteen years.

The Rev. Drew Brislin also left us for the mountains of North Alabama. Drew+ was called to St. Joseph's on the Mountain in Mentone, Alabama. He served Ascension faithfully for five years as an Associate Rector. He loved working with the youth and was always willing to jump in whenever anything needed to be done. We miss Drew+ and wish him and St. Joseph's joy in their new call together.

This past August, Becky Taylor announced plans for her full retirement in Summer 2026. Becky has been a part of the life of Ascension for over 40 years. Her creative expression and faithfulness have helped to deepen our spiritual life. She will be missed. A Music Search Committee led by Bryan Reeves and Jan Davis was formed in the wake of her announcement. In December, they sent out a survey and conducted interviews with the adult choir and parents of our children's choirs. The committee is using that information to create a Director of Music/Organist job description. They hope to post the listing by mid-February. Other members of the committee include Evans Bailey, Nan Barganier, Mark Bullock, Richard Norris, and The Rev. Candice Frazer. The committee hopes to issue a call by May of this year.

To live as beloved children of God is always about building up others from a place of love, hope, and trust in whatever God is calling us too. It is a joy to serve this beloved community. I am grateful for this place and each of you.

Light and Life,
Candice+

Newcomers Ministry

The **mission** of Newcomers Committee continues: To welcome, embrace, and immerse newcomers to Episcopal Church of the Ascension into the life of our church.

The **theology** of Newcomers Committee continues: We subscribe to the idea that every parishioner is a member of the Newcomers Committee by their response to visitors to our church. Further, we believe that all who enter our church are church members "in the moment" because we all worship together, pray together, and dine together at the Lord's Table "in the moment."

Membership: Our committee welcomed Stacia Bailey and Garrett Bamman to our fold and bid a fond adieu to Young Boozer, Jim and Tina Harstad, Sharon Massey, and Monique Walker, who served us faithfully and well. Continuing members include Smitty Smith, chair, Paula Smith, Nan Bargaineer, Mary Anne Martin, Brittany Wade, Juan-David Rincon and The Rev. Candice Frazer, ex officio.

Actions and Activities:

- Upgraded our Visitor Cards to be more functional and user friendly.
- Continued providing Welcome Bread to visitors.
- Continued to provide Welcome Packets and conduct Rector Meet-ups with newcomers.
- In coordination with Ascension staff, coordinated quarterly Episcoparties and the annual Ministry Fair.
- Introduced the use of Name Tags to welcome Interim Assistant Father David Hall and for other welcoming activities.
- Refined and memorialized committee governance and forwarded it to Policy & Procedures Committee for review and, ultimately, Vestry approval.

By our best count of recorded visitors, Church of the Ascension welcomed 34 visitors of all ages. Of these, eight (8) joined our church.

The Newcomers Committee is grateful for the support and hospitable environment provided by our entire parish family throughout the year. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,
Nelson "Smitty" Smith, Chair

Building and Grounds Report

During 2025, many needed repairs took place as well as extensive demolition and clearing of the 2 lots from the acquired properties on South Hull Street. Extensive slate roof repairs were completed in several phases during the year, and a couple phases will be taking place in 2026. All were funded by the Tullis Fund.



Phases:

- North tower wall slate removed, roof decking repaired and copper flashing replaced.
- East tower slate removed, roof decking repaired, copper valley and cricket pans replaced as well as new copper flashing.
- West tower slate removed, roof decking repaired and copper cricket pans and flashing replaced.
- South tower slate removed, roof decking repaired and copper flashing and ridge cap replaced.

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.

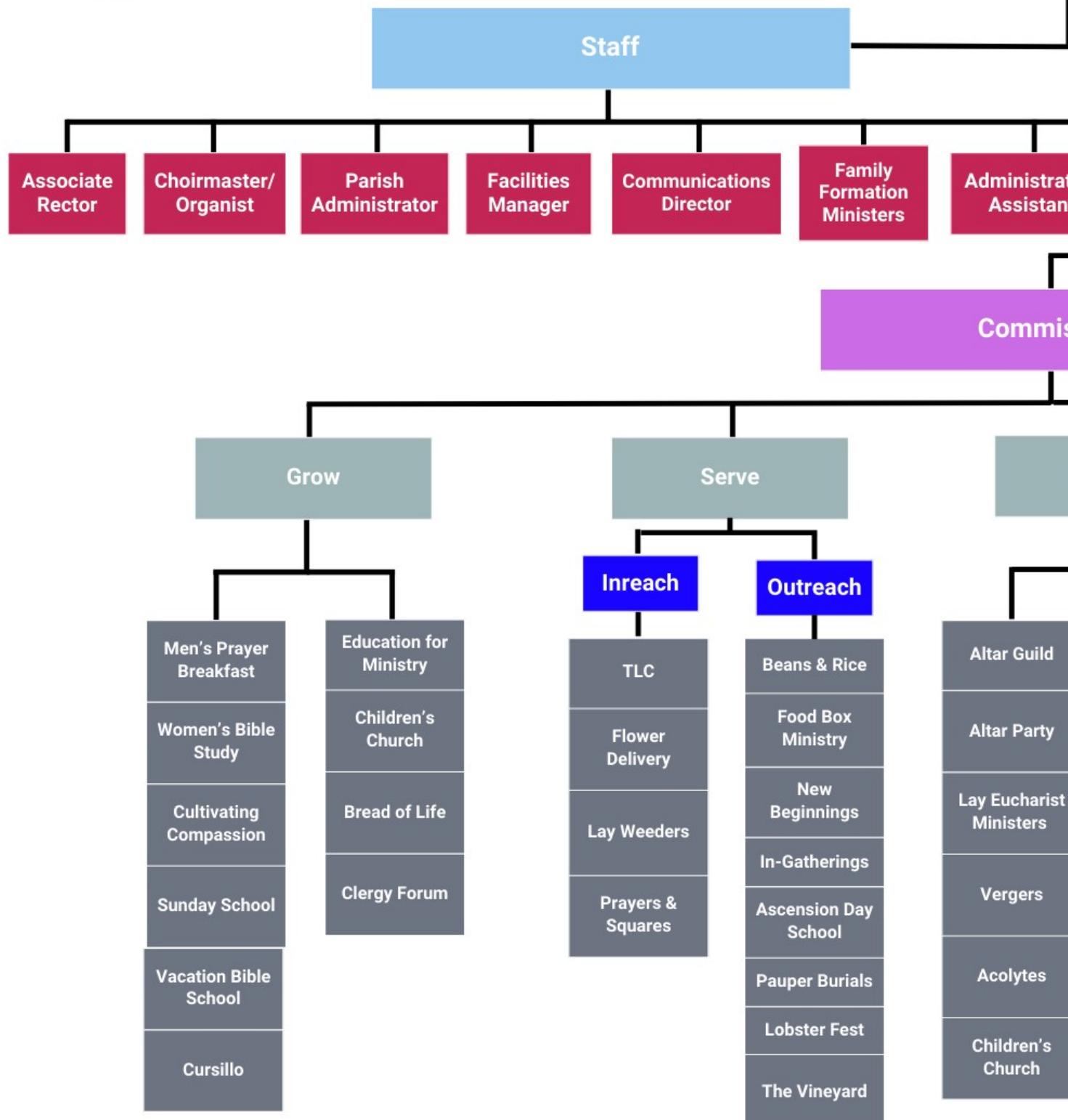
- The Ascension Choir, including 4 Choral Scholars from Alabama State University, has served faithfully this year. In addition to offering and leading Music in Worship at the 10:30 am service on Sunday morning services, the Choir provides music for weddings and funerals when requested, and additional services during All Saints, Thanksgiving, Epiphany, Christmas and Easter. Also, the Choir performed with the Alabama Shakespeare Festival's production of We Shall Stand Together, a play touring nationally.
- Our Children's Choirs, Rejoice! and The Ascension Choristers, continues working with Children's Ministry, and culminated the school year with a fun and exciting performance of Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat! In December, the children's choirs joined the Children and Youth in offering a brand new, completely rewritten, reset, restaged and re-costumed Christmas Pageant, which was well received by the congregation. The children offered anthems at around 6 services this year, and their numbers are healthy. The 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, continues to be a highlight.
- The move to the new The Choir Loft, located on the 4th floor, has been not only convenient, but beautiful and inspiring.
- The community Men's Group, founded at Ascension, Encore!, has offered a sung Compline service on the 3rd Sunday of each month, with around 20 people at each service.
- The 26th season of the Trawick-Scott Advent Recital Series was a success again, offering our community and congregation an opportunity not only to hear beautiful music, but to have a quiet hour in the midst of the busy pre-Christmas season.
- 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
- Rebecca Taylor announced her pending retirement on August 1, 2026, and is working towards having the music facilities, sheet music, and resources in good shape for her successor. Volunteers are welcome!

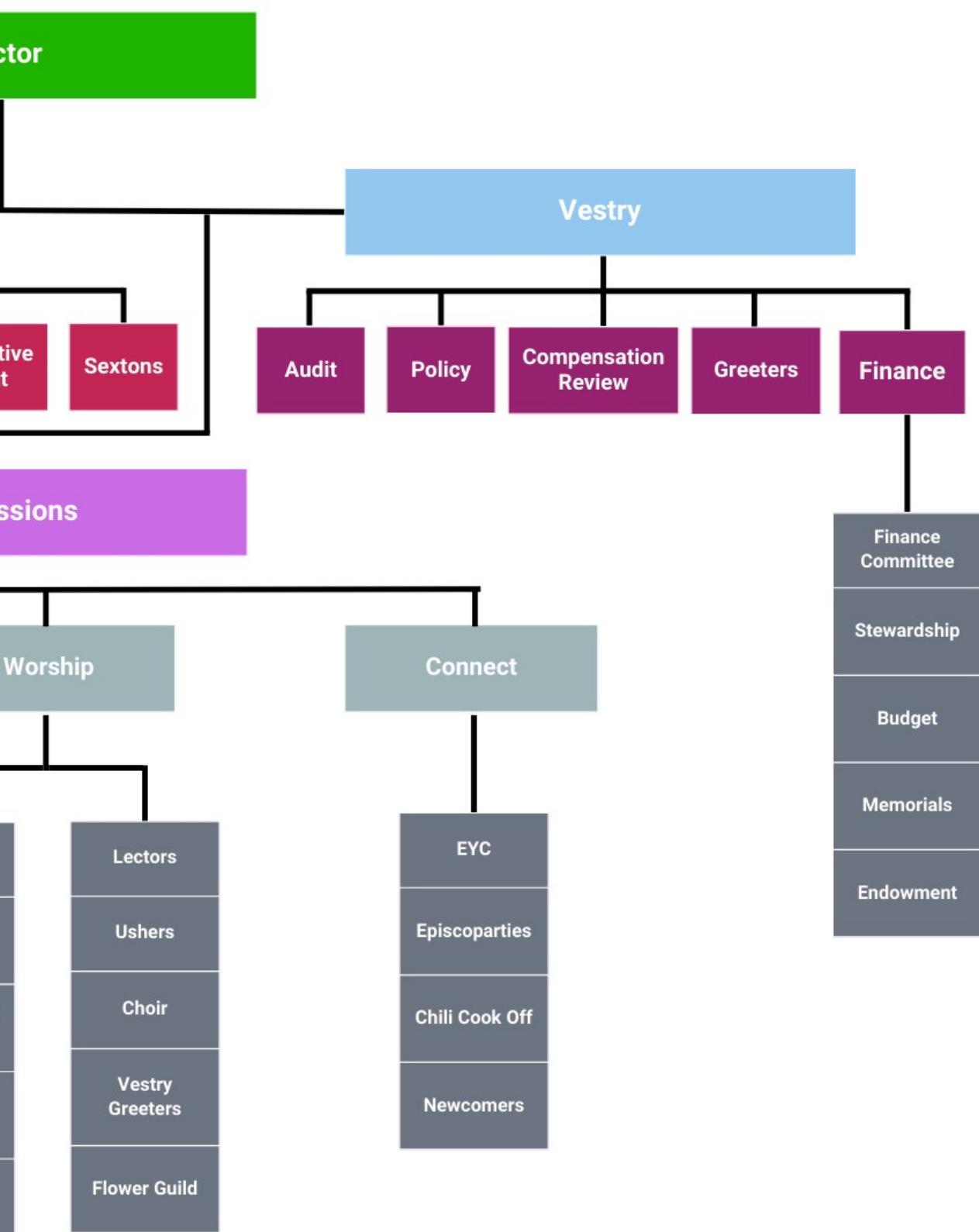
Becky Taylor



Church of the Ascension

Mission and Ministry





Financial Report

Receipts:	Actual	Budget
Plate	23,743	25,000
Pledge	924,762	932,628
Other	242,796	158,114
TOTAL	1,191,301	1,115,742
		75,559

Expenses:	Actual	Budget
Mission Giving	63,062	80,031
Salaries	715,415	724,481
Administrative	311,945	268,500
Programs	32,762	43,100
TOTAL	1,123,184	1,116,112
		(7,072)
	68,117	(370)

Stewardship 2025

Pledge cards received **126**
 Pledge total **\$880,621**

Capital Campaign

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

2024 and 2025 comparison:

10 decreased
 49 increased
 9 new
 58 no change

Pledge Giving Range

.01 to 500.00	11
500.01 to 1500.00	24
1500.01 to 2500.00	19
2500.01 to 3500.00	14
3500.01 to 5000.00	11
5000.01 to 7000.00	13
7000.01 to 10,000.00	9
10,000.01 to 15,000.00	9
15,000.01 to 25,000.00	11
25,000.01 to 60,000.00	<u>5</u>
	126

Outreach Report

Diocesan Covenant	\$51,957
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Outreach Grants:

Holy Comforter	\$275
New Beginnings	\$8,000
TOTAL	\$8,274

Other Outreach Donations

From Vineyard:

Dream Court	\$500
Respite	\$500
Family Sunshine Center	\$500
Boys and Girls Club River Region	\$500
Meals on Wheels	\$500
Mercy House	\$500
TOTAL	\$3,000

From Altar Guild:

Beans and Rice	\$350
Food Box Ministry	\$350
TOTAL	\$700

From Lobster Fest:

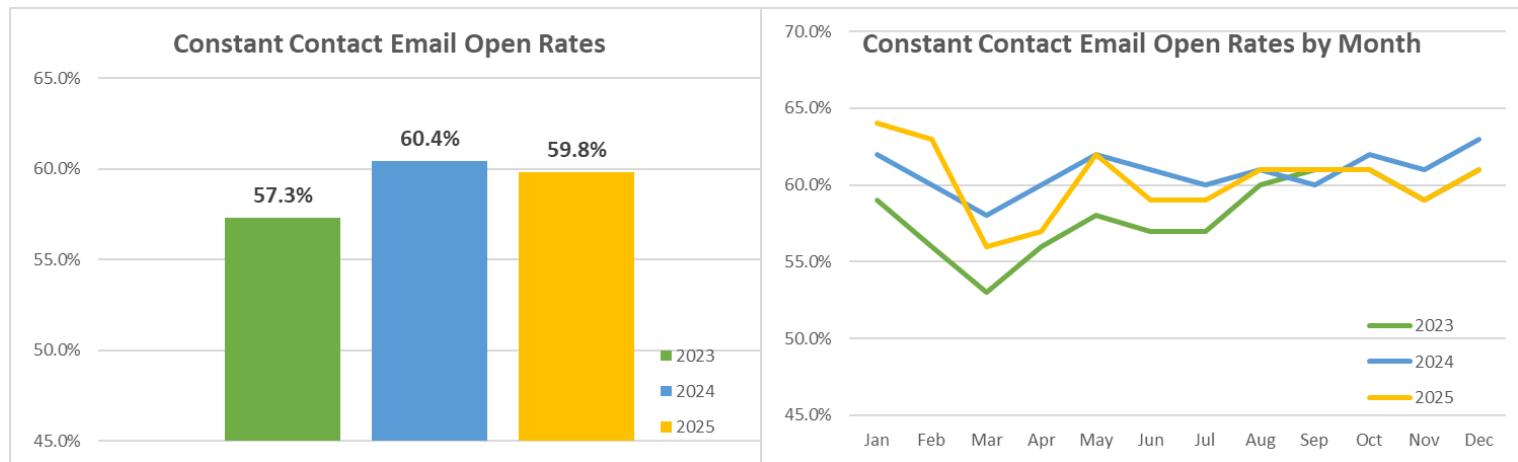
Ascension Day School	\$2,403
Respite Ministry	\$2,403
TOTAL	\$4,806

Total All Outreach Giving	\$68,738
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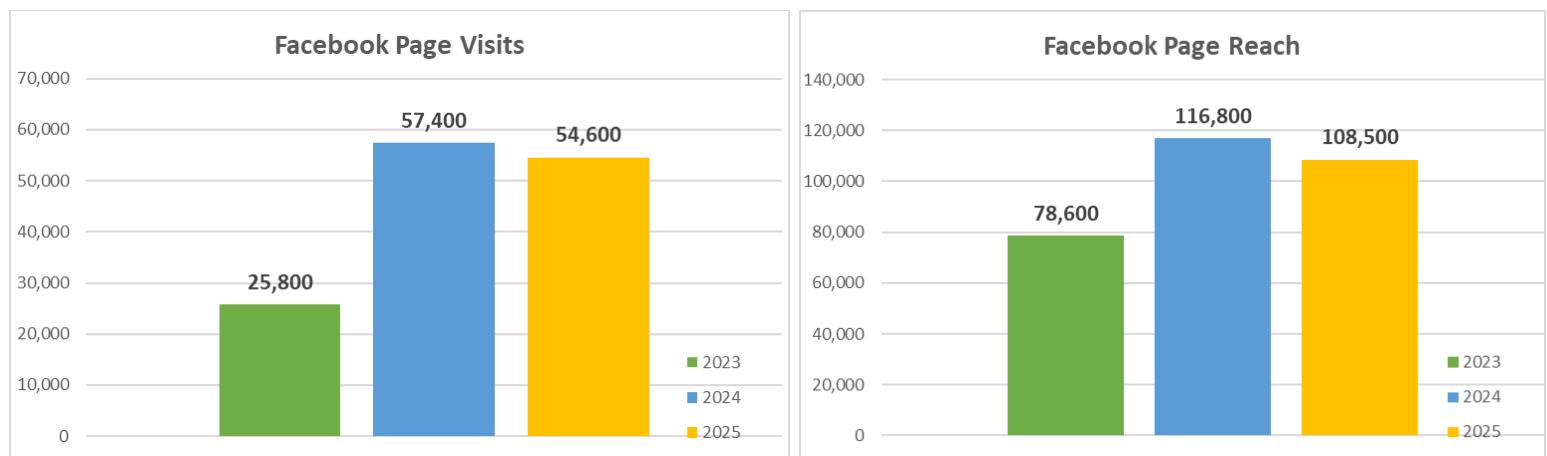
Communications Report

2025 was an exciting year in communications. 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 2025, we sent over 119,000 individual messages, which was up from 103,000 in 2024. 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 2025 against previous years as well as trending by month. Our open rate decreased about 0.5% in 2025, 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 consistent performance in our social media reach in 2025. 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. We basically maintained our numbers after massive increases 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 2025 the Family & Faith Formation Ministry enjoyed another wonderful year with Laura and Nick Mielke leading their respective areas of Children and Youth Ministries. Energy and effort were put into continuing to establish good solid lines of communication, volunteer rosters, and consistent programming efforts that continue to prioritize worship, growth, and service. Below are highlights from both areas during the 2025 calendar year.

Children's Ministry:

-Continued programming for Sunday School and Children's Church utilizing the Beulah Land curriculum and including volunteer teacher rotations that involve parents and church members in helping the children grow and learn. The range of child attendance during Sunday School is 10 – 15 while the range attendance to Children's Church is 10 – 20. The total number of Children's church volunteers is 34 (12 pairs).

-Wednesday Night Live continued each week with Family Supper and Children's Choir. This year the choir, under the always amazing leadership of Becky Taylor, put on wonderful programs such as Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat as well as a beautiful new Christmas Pageant complete with parish volunteers and new costumes and set designs. There were also many special music offerings throughout the year in the worship services.

-Vacation Bible School was held again in partnership with St. John's and hosted at Ascension with many children from both parishes and the community, as well as ADS coming to enjoy learning the story of Joseph and his journey in Egypt.

-Laura provided several Beulah Land Bible lessons to the two older ADS classrooms with continuation of this ministry set to occur during Lent of 2026.

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. Our weekly EYC nights have continued to grow starting the year with 8-10 regular attendees to averaging now more than 15 youth per week.

-The summer mission trip in 2025 saw 14 youth and 5 adults travel to the Hinton Rural Life Center for a Another week of rural home repair ministry. Our group served on the mission by repainting the home, deck, and outbuildings for an elderly gentleman and his daughter. It was a wonderful week of service and bonding that strengthened the bonds of our youth group members.

-Youth from Ascension also participated in events in the Diocese such as the Jonathan Daniels Pilgrimage, Bethany's Kids Camp, Senior High Camp, Christmas Conference, Spring Retreat, Youth Department, Dio-Day, Ascension's Cross and Currents Art and Spirituality Workshop, and more.

Family Formation also led and participated in such Parish wide activities as Chili Cook-Off, Easter activities, Good Vibrations, and All Hallow's Fest. These activities are always so special for our church families to come play and pray together and also serves as a way for us to reach out to our neighbors. In efforts to complement existing church communications, "The Wing" Family Formation weekly newsletter was established as an "at a glance" guide particularly for parents of children and youth. This email is sent every Thursday to more than 75 families at Ascension.

Submitted Respectfully: Laura and Nick Mielke

Memorials Committee Report

The Memorials Committee is charged with overseeing the Church's Memorial Fund and to "use it to the Glory of God through Church improvements and beautification projects."

To that end, we sometimes joke we are called to be the Church's own Design Review Board. And we are happy to do so!

Mark Waldo, Sr. remembered

A cloudy February day brought members of the Waldo family together to remember Mark Waldo Sr., fifth rector of Ascension. Candice said prayers as Will McQueen and I laid the gravestone on his burial site in the floor of the Waldo Garden. The limestone marker is engraved for Mark and Anne and etched between their names is the cross of St. Cuthbert. Cuthbert and his cross are of special significance to the Waldo family. Years ago, Mark and Anne walked the "Way of St. Cuthbert" in northern England. Anne is known to wear a replica of Cuthbert's legendary pectoral cross. Their son, Andrew Waldo, retired Bishop of Upper South Carolina, selected Cuthbert's cross as his pectoral cross.

Why Knot?

Under the wise guidance of our church architect, Robert Cole, we redesigned the much-loved Sundial Garden transforming it from a labor intensive annual and perennial garden to a "knot garden." Knot gardens, popularized in the 17th century, are a form of a parterre, their more intricate and elaborate French cousin. Knot gardens use low, trimmed shrubs to form simple geometric patterns. In our version, we have used two different varieties of boxwoods with standard (single trunk) gardenias and roses. The antique sundial, bluestone center, and plaque honoring faithful long-time gardeners Hazel Mathis and Carrie Williams remain in place.

Is that what I think it is?

Perhaps you have seen the recent gift to Ascension, a magnificent Italian Renaissance style painting of the Madonna and Child. It took only moments for former parishioner and art historian, Alice Novak, to suggest it was "after Andrea del Sarto perhaps". And right she was! This is a copy of a portion of his most famous work, Madonna of the Harpies (1517), and hangs in Hall 58 of the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, Italy. According to the Uffizi "this painting allows us to understand the many influences Andrea del Sarto absorbed during his life: the classicism of the Florentine tradition but also the great achievements of Leonardo, Michelangelo and Raphael." Our version is most likely 19th century. It was common for talented artists of the day to copy masterpieces, which were exquisite and popular souvenirs for those on their Grand Tours of Europe. The painting is installed in the Chapel for all to enjoy. Most churches with side chapels have a chapel dedicated to Mary, so perhaps this is our way of paying homage to that tradition. We are grateful to the Yelverton Families for their generous and splendid gift.

Pretty Trash

With the encouragement of Ann Blackmon and the skill of furniture maker Jeff Dutton, we transformed two of the marvelous Tudoresque "candle troughs" designed by Charlie Caldwell years ago into trash receptacles for Ascension Hall and Joshua Commons. The other two "candle troughs" were reinvented into an entrance table and a rolling sheet music organizer for the Choir Loft.

Which way? That a way!

We are blessed with a beautiful (and rambling) facility! The additions over the decades tend to make way-finding a little confusing, especially for the visitor or new members. We have added consistent signage in high traffic areas to help people navigate their way. From restrooms, to the children's wing, to Ascension Hall, we hope these signs help us show hospitality. Many thanks to Smitty Smith and Will McQueen for their help and guidance in this important project.

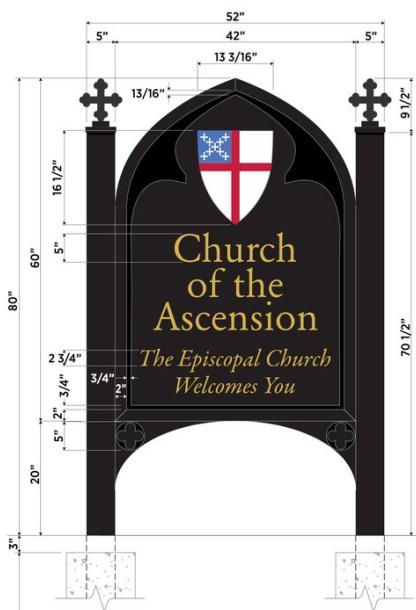
Welcome!

Speaking of hospitality, The Episcopal Church has a motto and reputation of “Welcome!” A major way of welcoming is assuring people find their way. We have employed the services of the experts at Fravert Inc. of Birmingham to help us with our exterior signage needs and design. Our first project are “legacy” signs at the three corners of our campus. While these designs are still being perfected, we’d like to give you a little sneak peek. The design takes cues from our architecture and most specifically our windows. The designs also fit well within the guidelines of the Garden District and city codes for historic districts.

CIRCA 2026

In 2026, we look forward to completing our signage project, furnishing the bridal restroom in the Vestry Hall-way, and assisting with the new gardens on the north side of our Campus next to Joshua Commons. Stand by!

Respectfully Submitted,
Richard Norris, Co-chair of the Memorials Committee



THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION

315 CLANTON AVENUE

MONTGOMERY, AL 36104

(334)263-5529, STAFF@COASCENSION.ORG

www.coascension.org

Like and follow us on Facebook, YouTube and your favorite Podcast Channel

The Episcopal Church of the Ascension @coascension