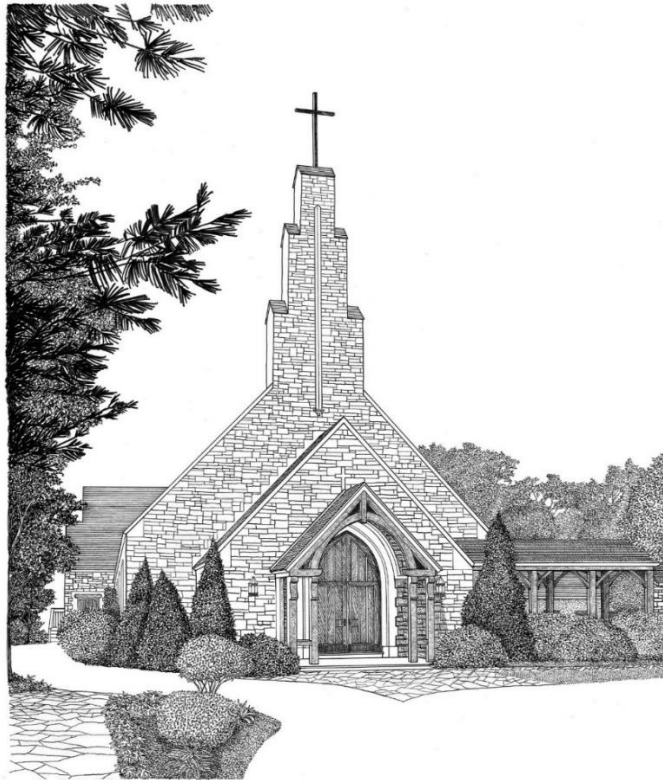


2020 ANNUAL REPORT

Episcopal Church of the Ascension



Presented at the
January 31, 2021
Annual Meeting

AGENDA

Welcome

Prayer

We pray for those who died since our last meeting, especially Tony Atkin, Nan Fanjoy, Nikki Gillespie, Bob Hart, Jon Huskins, Libby Reeves, Jim Roane, Evan Rubins, Ramon Rubins, Jamie Russo, Margaret Shoemaker, and Thomas Whyne.

We pray for our fellow Ascension members who moved away since our last meeting, especially Henrietta Ouzts; Terrie Reed & Chuck McCullough; and Erika Perry.

Reading of Mission Statement:

The mission of the Episcopal Church of the Ascension is to love with the heart of Christ and act as the body of Christ in our church, community, and world.

~Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths. Psalm 25:4~

Rector's Report (page 3) Karla Woggon

Financial Review Tommy Shores

2020 / 2021 Budget Overview (page 6-7)

2020 Financial Reports / 2021 Proposed Budget (page 8)

2020 Endowment Report (page 11)

2020 Ascension Fund (page 12)

Rector's Discretionary Fund (page 13)

Outreach Committee Fund (page 14)

Planned Giving

Small Groups

Recognition of 2020 Wardens Karla Woggon

Lisa Hart, Senior Warden

Lynn Carlton & Ken Wilkinson, Junior Wardens

Brad Lail, Finance Warden

Recognition of Outgoing Vestry Members Karla Woggon

Jean Bolton, Ruth Clontz, Lisa Hart, and Brad Lail

Recognition of Returning Vestry Members Karla Woggon

Term Ends 2021: Lynn Carlton, Bess Fuller, Molly Gross, and Ken Wilkinson

Term Ends 2022: James Carter, Joshua Herman, Nancy Linker, Marian Story

Election of New Vestry Members for 2021-2023 Term (page 18)

Nominees: Elizabeth Arditti, Ashley Massey, Vince Trollan, and Stephen Williamson

Election of Ascension Fund Committee Members

Current Members: Bob Meek, Gail Ramsdell, Bess Fuller, and Nancy Zagaroli

Election of Diocesan Delegate

Nominees: Marlys Kiser and Kendra Williford (Alternate: Steve Walker)

RECTOR'S REPORT

By The Rev. Karla Woggon



This is another day, O Lord. I know not what it will bring forth, but make me ready, Lord, for whatever it may be. If I am to stand up, help me to stand bravely. If I am to sit still, help me to sit quietly. If I am to lie low, help me to do it patiently. And if I am to do nothing, let me do it gallantly. Make these words more than words and give me the Spirit of Jesus. Amen. (BCP 461)

This prayer, a prayer for healing from *The Book of Common Prayer*, set the tone for much of 2020. We did not know from month to month, sometimes day to day, what the day would bring forth. Yet through it all we continued to be the church. We continue to receive the spirit of Jesus and share God's unending love with one another and the world.

In my annual report I typically tell you about the progress we made on goals that the vestry set. The vestry met for our annual retreat at the end of January 2020 and had just begun work on our formal goals when the world shifted under our feet.

Working on this report I read over the letters I sent you last year. In the first letter, written March 17th, I said that, to love our neighbor and to help mitigate the spread of Covid-19 we would follow the advice of the CDC and not gather in person for at least 15 days.

We definitely met that goal! As well as others that we didn't directly plan for.

From March 17 until mid-July, we did not meet in person. From mid-July until Christmas, we gathered in the memorial garden in groups of less than 25 people wearing masks to celebrate the Holy Eucharist. And, from the First Sunday of Christmas until today, we've met virtually. We don't know when this will change. My hope is that by mid-Lent or sooner we will be able to gather again in the memorial garden, and that maybe by mid-summer we will be allowed to worship as a full community inside the church. But, regardless of what happens, I believe that we will continue to figure out ways to adapt as we continue to live into our mission of being the body of the Christ to one another and the world.

Even though it has been almost a year since we have gathered as a full community for worship that does not mean that the church has been closed. In faster ways than I could have imagined we figured out a wide variety of ways to study, pray, worship, and support each other and the most vulnerable in our community.

My plan is that after we are allowed to gather again as a large community, we will offer both virtual and in-person worship and study. We've talked for years about the need to figure out new ways of being church. This year we figured out some of those ways. I've heard from many of you that you kind of like snuggling under the covers with a good cup of coffee to pray Morning Prayer on Sundays, and that you like the ease of gathering with others to study and pray from the comfort of your home.

Cory Westby, our music director, has done a magnificent job creating our Sunday morning worship videos while Jared, our Curate, has done an excellent job improving our Facebook and Instagram presence. As a result, we now have a vibrant online presence ministering not just to the people of Ascension but to the wider community. Something I would not have thought possible a year ago. To enhance the quality of our videos and online presence we invested in technology and other worship materials that were not

part of our original 2020 budget.

In addition to the videos, we found new ways to worship in person. Without sacrificing the core elements of our Prayer Book worship, we made adaptations to keep everyone safe. I've been your Rector for a little more than 14 years and, until this summer, had never celebrated the Eucharist in the memorial garden. After the first week of doing so I wondered why it took a pandemic to get me there. Praying in the garden—surrounded by the faithful buried there and the faithful seated in yard chairs while the wind chimes and Cory and the cantors sang—filled me with awe.

We adapted the Eucharist by using double stacked individual cups for the bread and wine rather than a common cup. I missed the intimacy and togetherness of placing the bread in your hands and drinking from a common cup, but I was deeply thankful that we'd found a way to celebrate Holy Communion and still keep the most vulnerable among us safe. We are blessed to have a beautiful memorial garden with windows that open to the sanctuary. As folks sat in yard chairs a few choir members gathered with Cory inside the sanctuary and sang to us through the open stained-glass windows. Wearing masks and singing through the windows kept everyone safe and still allowed us to worship with music. If you did not have the opportunity to gather with us last summer or in the fall I hope when we are allowed to gather again in the courtyard that you will come.

In addition to Sunday morning worship, we created ways to pray and study together almost every day of the week. During the week we gathered daily via Zoom in small groups for Morning Prayer, Centering Prayer, and Compline. We also gathered via Zoom for Sunday school, daytime and weeknight book groups, and story time. These gatherings have included members of Ascension as well as people from the larger community, both here in Hickory and around the country. We also livestreamed organ concerts, evensong, and contemplative worship out into the world.

Along with not being able to worship week by week as a large group in the sanctuary and having to say goodbye to beloved members of our community without having a large funeral and reception was heart wrenching. Once all of the Covid-19 restrictions are lifted, I'd like to plan one big service and reception to celebrate the lives of the beloved saints who died — *Tony Atkin, Nan Fanjoy, Nikki Gillespie, Bob Hart, Jon Huskins, Libby Reeves, Jim Roane, Evan Rubins, Ramon Rubins, Jamie Russo, Margaret Shoemaker, and Thomas Whyne.*

I'm always thankful for the clergy and staff of Ascension. But this year, I am particularly thankful. The Rev. Jared Grant joined Ascension in July as our curate. A grant from the diocese and funds from the Patton Bequest made it possible for us to call him. He and his wife, Jenny, and their new son, Harrison, will be with us until the summer of 2022. In addition to overseeing our Mission & Innovation initiative and the Children, Youth, & Family Ministry, he has helped with technology, worship, pastoral care, and the Christian Formation for Adults classes. He was ordained a priest in July in an ordination ceremony unlike any I've ever seen. Because of Covid-19 restrictions we could only have 10 people in the sanctuary. So, the bishop, the Dean of the Cathedral, myself, Jared and his family gathered in the sanctuary while a virtual community joined us via livestream.

Cory created all of our worship videos and, along with a few cantors, created beautiful music in safe ways that immeasurably enriched our worship. Paul, our sexton, continued to come to the church daily to keep it clean and be a presence while most of the staff and I worked remotely to keep each other and you safe.

Bev and Diane kept the church going administratively and made it infinitely easier for us to become an online and in-person church almost overnight. In addition to her regular ongoing office manager duties,

Bev maintained access to our in-person and virtual worship services through our website, and she helped improve our ongoing communications with the parish. As bookkeeper, Diane, in addition to all of the typical financial administration, helped us thrive in 2020 by monitoring the financial impact of the pandemic, successfully applying for and monitoring our PPP loan, and developing our new church app.

The Rev. Deacon Anita Ware and The Rev. Becky Rowell continued to freely offer their gifts to enrich the ministry of Ascension. Becky was once again with us May-October. She helped preach and lead worship, served as an executive coach for me, and facilitated our vestry retreat. Anita led monthly book groups, daily compline, and the Outreach Committee. She also served as a board member of the Hickory Soup Kitchen and kept us connected to their essential ministry efforts. We also briefly enjoyed the meals of a new parish chef. After many years of faithful, loving service, Adrienne Childress retired to pursue other work. At the beginning of March, I hired Chuck Spaller as parish chef. He provided dinner for two weeks before the pandemic made it impossible to gather safely to share a meal. To support Chuck while we have been unable to provide work for him at Ascension, we email links each week to his carryout meal business, Provisions Catering. Thank you to all who have supported him.

Thank you also for continuing to give your time, talent, and treasure to support Ascension. Your financial support as well as grants from the diocese, a forgivable government loan from the Payroll Protection Plan, bequests, and our endowment helped us meet our 2020 financial obligations. With your pledge commitments and some carryover from 2020, we have passed a balanced budget for 2021. *(Reference pages 6-14 for details)*

It is not just your financial support that keeps Ascension alive...it's the fullness of who you are! It's your participation in worship, study, fellowship, and outreach. It's what you give of your time and talent. It's all of that...all of you...that allows us to live into our mission of being the heart, mind, and body of Christ to one another and the world.

Thank you! Thank you for all that you have done to adapt! Thank you for your prayers, your presence, and your love!

With my love and prayers,

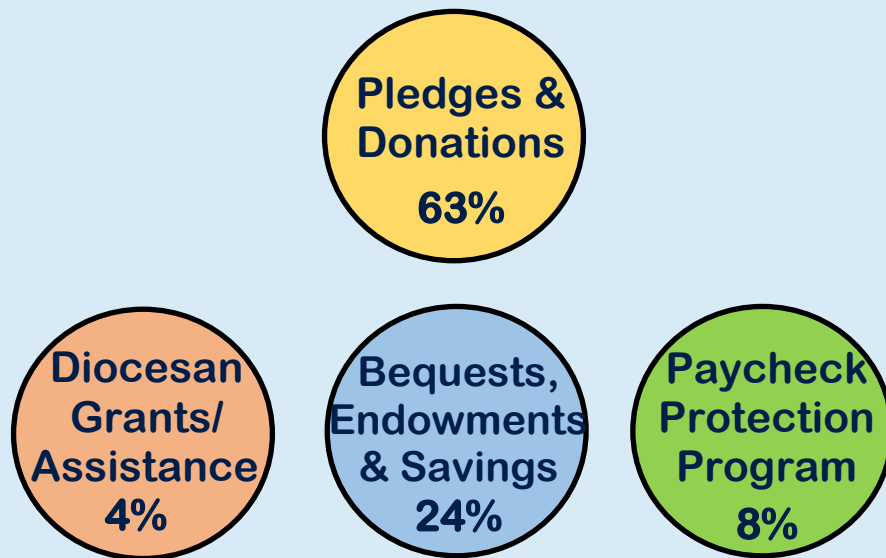


<u>From the 2019 Parochial Report</u>		<u>December 2019 – December 2020</u>	
Average Sunday Attendance (ASA)	93	Weddings	1
Total Operating Income (NOI)	\$521,178	Funerals	11
Pledging Units	95	Baptisms	2
		Confirmations	0
		Transferred In	0
		Transferred Out	1

2020 BUDGET

HOW WE USED OUR FUNDING

To meet our regular expenses and unexpected pandemic costs in 2020, we relied on:



These funds allowed us to:



Keep ministry staffing at regular levels



Continue to offer vibrant worship experiences to the community



Purchase new technology to adapt to COVID-19

2021 PROPOSED BUDGET

2021 Budget = \$574,511

FUNDING

Pledges & Donations

57%

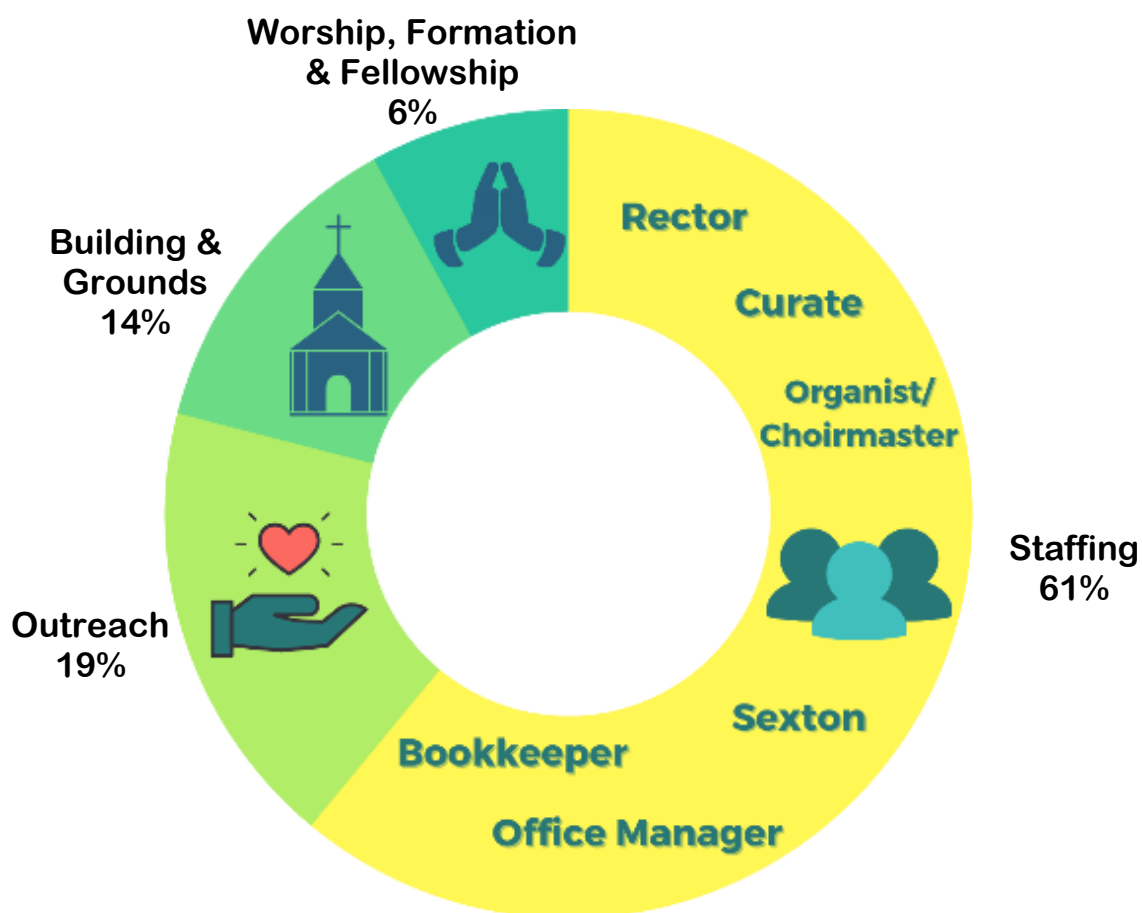
Diocesan Grants/
Assistance

3%

Bequests,
Endowments
& Savings

40%

EXPENSES



2020 FINANCIAL REPORT | 2021 PROPOSED BUDGET

OPERATING INCOME	2020 Budget	2020 Actual	2021 Proposed Budget
Pledge Payments (2021 pledges = \$274,112; 95% of \$274,112 = \$260,406 Budgeted pledges)	\$ 307,069	\$ 324,350	\$ 260,406
Non-Pledge Contributions	\$ 100,000	\$ 102,392	\$ 100,000
Flowers	\$ 3,500	\$ 1,193	\$ 3,500
Endowments (<i>see page 11</i>) (7% Building, 37% General Fund)	\$ 52,011	\$ 52,011	\$ 53,337
Diocesan Grants	\$ 15,000	\$ 19,000	\$ 0
Payroll Protection Program Loan (<i>forgivable</i>)	\$ 0	\$ 54,975	\$ 0
Diocesan Assistance (Curate's Salary)	\$ 10,000	\$ 10,000	\$ 20,000
Trust/Estate Distributions (Assist w/ Curate's Salary)	\$ 45,282	\$ 39,726	\$ 65,349
Rogers' Trust Distribution (<i>Technology Costs</i>)	\$ 0	\$ 5,749	\$ 6,900
Prior Year Operational Fund Surplus	\$ 6,494	\$ 0	\$ 65,019
Allocation of Operational Fund Reserve	\$ 17,681	\$ 0	\$ 0
Total Operating Income	\$ 557,037	\$ 609,396	\$ 574,511

OPERATING EXPENSES

Personnel Expenses

Salary & Wages	\$ 287,986	\$ 288,386	\$ 291,635
Staff Social Security	\$ 12,116	\$ 9,820	\$ 8,035
Travel & Auto	\$ 5,627	\$ 85	\$ 4,000
Cell Phones	\$ 4,800	\$ 4,800	\$ 4,800
Sabbatical (non-cash item)	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 2,500
Continuing Education	\$ 4,500	\$ 626	\$ 8,000
Pension	\$ 33,306	\$ 33,535	\$ 37,268
Health Insurance	\$ 28,221	\$ 28,608	\$ 35,010
Total Personnel Expense	\$ 376,556	\$ 365,860	\$ 391,248

Facilities Expenses

General Maintenance	\$ 13,000	\$ 5,041	\$ 6,500
Capital Improvements	\$ 0	\$ 1,665	\$ 6,500
Lawn & Garden	\$ 7,000	\$ 7,110	\$ 7,500
Utilities	\$ 23,000	\$ 17,043	\$ 23,000
Security	\$ 4,700	\$ 4,449	\$ 4,548
Total Facilities Expense	\$ 47,700	\$ 35,308	\$ 48,048

Outreach Expenses	2020 Budget	2020 Actual	2021 Proposed Budget
Diocese of Western North Carolina	\$ 50,748	\$ 50,748	\$ 52,118
Outreach (<i>see page 14</i>)	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 0
Outreach (not funded by Endowment)	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 0
Ascension Fund (<i>see page 12</i>)	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 0
Rector's Discretionary (<i>see page 13</i>)	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 0
Total Outreach Expense	\$ 50,748	\$ 50,748	\$ 52,118

Christian Formation Expenses			
Youth (<i>see page 16</i>)	\$ 2,500	\$ 534	\$ 0
Children, Youth & Families	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 3,000
Nursery	\$ 2,650	\$ 2,085	\$ 2,650
Christian Education – Children	\$ 2,455	\$ 0	\$ 0
Christian Education – Adult	\$ 4,503	\$ 1,444	\$ 4,500
Vestry Retreat	\$ 300	\$ 0	\$ 300
WNC Diocesan Convention	\$ 1,000	\$ 0	\$ 1,000
Total Christian Formation Expense	\$ 13,408	\$ 4,063	\$ 11,450

Finance Expenses			
Insurance & Taxes	\$ 15,454	\$ 15,738	\$ 17,165
Stewardship	\$ 300	\$ 300	\$ 300
Audit	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 0
Fees	\$ 1,200	\$ 1,026	\$ 1,200
Total Finance Expense	\$ 16,954	\$ 17,064	\$ 18,665

Office / Administration Expenses			
Copier	\$ 8,367	\$ 4,456	\$ 5,784
Software	\$ 0	\$ 1,408	\$ 5,208
Hardware	\$ 0	\$ 6,068	\$ 0
Technology(paid by Rogers' Fund)	\$ 0	\$ 5,749	\$ 6,900
Dues & Subscriptions	\$ 100	\$ 0	\$ 150
Postage	\$ 2,882	\$ 2,084	\$ 3,015
Office Supplies & Printing	\$ 1,800	\$ 1,320	\$ 1,500
Sales Tax (refunded semi-annually)	\$ 0	\$ 2,460	\$ 0
Advertising	\$ 550	\$ 43	\$ 225
Web Services & Design	\$ 372	\$ 849	\$ 900
Total Office/Administration Expense	\$ 14,071	\$ 24,437	\$ 23,682

Parish Life Expenses	2020 Budget	2020 Actual	2021 Proposed Budget
Parish Life Dinners	\$ 9,000	\$ 3,279	\$ 4,000
Kitchen Supplies	\$ 2,700	\$ 658	\$ 1,200
Bereavement	\$ 2,000	\$ 1,416	\$ 2,000
Wedding Ministry	\$ 0	\$ 400	\$ 0
Meals & Entertainment	\$ 100	\$ 0	\$ 100
Total Parish Life Expense	\$ 13,800	\$ 5,753	\$ 7,300

Worship Expense			
Altar Guild and Worship Supplies	\$ 5,500	\$ 4,905	\$ 5,500
Altar Flowers	\$ 4,000	\$ 1,418	\$ 4,000
Music	\$ 11,000	\$ 13,228	\$ 11,000
Organ & Piano Maintenance	\$ 1,500	\$ 1,048	\$ 1,500
Supply Clergy	\$ 1,800	\$ 0	\$ 0
Total Worship Expense	\$ 23,800	\$ 20,599	\$ 22,000

TOTAL OPERATING EXPENSES

\$ 557,037 \$ 523,832 \$ 574,511

**TOTAL OPERATING
Surplus/(Shortfall)**

\$ 0 \$ 85,564 \$ 0

Fanjoy Charitable Remainder Trust

\$ 0 \$ 75,000 \$ 0

Non-Operating Income (*Non-budgeted items:
Discretionary funds; Outreach, Ascension fund,
Men's Ministry; Circles; youth fundraisers, etc.*)

\$ 0 \$ 77,513 \$ 0

Non-Operating Expenses (*Non-budgeted
items: Discretionary funds; Outreach, Ascension fund,
Men's Ministry; Circles; youth fundraisers, etc.*)

\$ 0 \$ 67,400 \$ 0

**Total Operating & Non-Operating
Surplus/(Shortfall)**

\$ 0 \$ 170,677 \$ 0

ENDOWMENT REPORT

Portfolio Value = \$3,442,780

As of December 31, 2020

PORTFOLIO	% OF TOTAL	SHARE OF ENDOWMENT
Burns Endowment <i>(Rector's Discretionary 25%; Outreach 75%)</i>	46.203 %	\$ 1,489,769
Burns Special <i>(Building)</i>	7.107 %	\$ 229,158
Fennell Endowment <i>(Music)</i>	9.516 %	\$ 306,834
Nelle Burns <i>(General Fund)</i>	26.207 %	\$ 845,018
Ascension Fund	9.516 %	\$ 306,834
Burns Fund <i>(Altar Guild)</i>	1.451 %	\$ 46,786
Total Endowment	100.000 %	\$ 3,224,399
Rogers' Outreach Bequest		\$ 19,190
Trust/Estates Bequests		\$ 199,183
Stock Gift Account		\$ 8
Total Investments		\$ 3,442,780

2020 INVESTMENT PERFORMANCE	TOTAL INVESTMENTS
Market Value at 12/31/2019	\$ 3,264,338
Dividend and Interest	\$ 79,187
Deposit to Trust/Estate Fund	\$ 75,000
Management Fees	\$ (39,943)
Change in Market Value	\$ 227,130
Annual Endowment Distribution	\$ (117,457)
Ed Rogers Bequest Distribution	\$ (5,749)
Trust/Estate Distribution (Patton)	\$ (39,726)
Market Value at 12/31/2020	\$ 3,442,780

ASCENSION FUND

As of December 31, 2020

2020 Funds available to Ascension Fund

Balance carried over from 2019	\$	16,716	
Endowment Distribution	\$	<u>11,177</u>	
Total Funds Received	\$		27,893

2020 Disbursements by Category

Auto Insurance Assistance	\$	1,094	
Auto Loan Assistance	\$	336	
Dental Assistance	\$	500	
Exodus Homes-Resident Assistance	\$	2,800	
Eyeglasses Assistance	\$	500	
Funeral Expense Assistance	\$	500	
Health Insurance Assistance	\$	400	
Medical Assistance	\$	450	
Property Tax Assistance	\$	204	
Rent/Mortgage Assistance	\$	9,346	
Social Worker Training Assistance	\$	500	
Students in need Gift Cards	\$	500	
Utility Assistance	\$	<u>6,211</u>	
Total Disbursements	\$		<u>23,341</u>
Funds remaining as of 12/31/2020			<u><u>4,552</u></u>

RECTOR'S DISCRETIONARY FUND

2020 Analysis
As of December 31, 2020

RECTOR'S DISCRETIONARY FUND INCOME		
Prior Year Cash Balances	\$ 4,465	22.52%
2020 Endowment Income	\$ 13,567	68.41%
Donations to Rector's Fund	\$ 1,800	9.08%
Total Cash Sources	\$ 19,833	100.00 %

RECTOR'S DISCRETIONARY FUND EXPENSES		
Camp Henry Scholarships	\$ 1,095	6.50 %
Community Assistance - Individuals	\$ 2,378	14.11 %
Community Organizations	\$ 2,253	13.36 %
Parish Life	\$ 716	4.25 %
Parishioner Assistance	\$ 6,839	40.57 %
Staff bonuses/assistance	\$ 3,576	21.21 %
Total Disbursements	\$ 16,857	100.00 %
Funds remaining as of 12/31/2020	\$ 2,976	

OUTREACH COMMITTEE FUND

OUTREACH FUNDING	2020 Actual
Carryover Funds from Prior Year	\$ 24,630
Annual Endowment Fund Distributions	\$ 40,702
Total Funding	\$ 65,332

OUTREACH DISBURSEMENTS

Global Disbursements

Episcopal Relief and Development.	\$ 2,500
Total Global Disbursements	\$ 2,500

Local Disbursements

Exodus	\$ 7,760
Hickory Soup Kitchen	\$ 5,000
SawDust Storytelling	\$ 2,150
Total Local Disbursements	\$ 14,910

Grand Total Disbursements

Funds remaining as of 12/31/2020

\$ 17,410
\$ 47,922

MUSIC AT ASCENSION

By Cory Westby, Music Director



I have spent nearly twenty years working in church music ministry, twenty years spent trying to encourage people to sing, telling people it's okay to sing in worship, that singing together is a vital part of our response to God's blessings, that it binds us together in community. I've encouraged people to not just sing, but to sing out and sing loudly! I've encouraged and taught the importance of gathering, of coming together as the church in corporate worship, the importance of sharing space and time, uniting in prayer and praise. So what does one do when the core of one's work is turned inside-out, almost overnight, and those core elements (gathering together, strong singing) are not just put aside but are now dangerous?

I have struggled greatly with how the pandemic has impacted the church and its worship. We discourage gathering in large numbers, limit how many people can be together, limit our worship opportunities, prohibit singing, and limit participation. We record our worship services, edit the speech and the music, and distribute it online. We make sure the chancel is properly staged to film the sermon: we put out the beautiful flowers, light the candles, and display the appropriate paraments. But the pews are empty. Our beautiful sanctuary serves as more of a studio than the house of God, with lights shining, cameras on tripods, and microphones in the aisle. It has been nearly a year since I have held a rehearsal with our wonderful choir, nearly a year since I worked in the office with the staff at the same time, nearly a year since I sat down on Wednesday nights for dinner in the parish hall, and nearly a year since I heard the glorious sound of a gathered body singing their praises to God, united in heart and voices.

But we have innovated, we have learned new ways of worship, new ways of making music, new ways of being the church. I am so thankful for our staff singers who have been able to help record music each week. We have recorded nearly 100 hymns, chants, and choral pieces that have been included in weekly Morning Prayer services on our YouTube page, as well as singing for the outdoor Eucharists we held in the summer and fall. I have spent months learning new software programs for audio and video editing, using new equipment for recording, livestreaming, and digital distribution.

The Church is still the Church. Though the pews are empty and the hymnals untouched, our mission is the same: to share the Good News of Jesus with a world in tremendous need. The Church has endured through many trials and difficulties, and it will endure through this one, as God has promised. I've heard it said during this pandemic that "the Church is not on hiatus, it is on deployment." God has given us work to do! So while you're working, sing in your heart, remember God's blessings to you in your life, chiefly the blessings of salvation and new life in Jesus Christ. God is still to be praised, thanked, and adored for the grace we have been given though we do not deserve it.

I am incredibly thankful for Karla, the rest of the staff, the Vestry and their leadership. I am grateful for the entire congregation of Ascension, for the ways you all have shown your support, encouragement, and love. We will gather again, and I look forward to hearing the glorious sound of your singing in worship. Until then, let us continue to do the work we have been called to do: share the Good News.

"Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning." - Psalm 30:5b

In Christ,

Cory

CHILDREN, YOUTH, FAMILIES & COMMUNITY AT ASCENSION

By The Rev. Jared Grant, Curate



Children, Youth, and Families

The year 2020 brought many challenges for Ascension's Children, Youth and Families ministries. The pandemic has made it difficult to gather in person. In-person, face-to-face contact is a cornerstone of these ministries. Fundamentally, these ministries are about garnering strong relationships between participants and their peers, mentors, friends, church, and their God. We have greatly missed the opportunity to gather in the ways that we once did. With that said, we have not lost our commitment to building relationship, even though it looks a little different than we'd like or we'd imagined.

Looking at past Annual Reports, you will find this section filled with details of fun youth activities done throughout the year, including lock-ins, fieldtrips, and gatherings. From this, we can see that one of the most important aspects of this ministry is fellowship. I'm happy to report that fellowship is still at the forefront of our ministry even during the pandemic, as outlined below.

- **Youth Group** – The youth of Ascension have continued to meet throughout the pandemic on a regular basis. Sometimes this has meant meeting on Zoom, but more often it has meant meeting in person in the courtyard. We've played games, carved pumpkins, watched movies, and spent time reflecting on the difficult realities that many youth face during this pandemic. With all that is going on in school, we've tried to make a space where youth can just be youth.
- **Pray-at-home Resources** – The reality of the pandemic has meant that we do not meet in person as often as we would like. Ascension families now receive a weekly email with pray-at-home resources. These resources include an online Sunday school curriculum, a Bible story presented by Godly Play teachers from around the world, a weekly devotional guide for children, teens, and adults to use together, as well as links to Ascension's recorded prayer services. Praying together as a family is an incredible spiritual exercise. We hope that praying at home as a family will continue far beyond the pandemic.

Even without the overlay of the pandemic, 2020 was a year of transition for the children, youth, and family ministries at Ascension. Cole McGlynn, who served as our assistant for evangelism, children, youth and family ministries, finished his time with Ascension in May. We thank Cole for his service to Ascension and for the wonderful presence he brought to these ministries. The Rev. Jared Grant began his curacy at Ascension in June. As part of his curacy, Jared oversees ministries for our children, youth, and families. We are blessed to have Molly and Jonathan Gross continue as youth group leaders; their spirit and dedication is a treasure. Molly also serves as the vestry liaison for youth ministries. Nancy Linker serves as the vestry liaison for children's ministries. Again, we are very thankful for their service.

We know 2021 will be a different year as well, but we have learned many lessons along the way. We're looking forward to some exciting things, including youth confirmation class, engaging with Camp Henry, and engaging with diocesan-wide youth events. We also hope to be able to return to some of the cherished annual youth events, like retreats and lock-ins, as soon as we possibly can. Looking around Ascension, we have many families with small children. We'll be looking into how to better minister to these parishioners and continue to share in the fellowship of Jesus Christ.

Mission

The Mission and Innovation Task Force was formed in 2019 to address how Ascension will “faithfully continue to follow God in our church and city as society and the community changes.” The work this group undertook is broad in its scope. Vital to this work is getting out into the community and building relationships with community stakeholders (i.e., neighbors, businesses, organizations, etc.). As you might imagine, the pandemic has put another layer of difficulty in getting “out and about” into the community. Nevertheless, the work of building relationships with our community is more important than ever.

To that end, the Mission and Innovation Task Force began work in 2020 on a community mapping process inspired by a model of community development known as Asset Based Community Development (ABCD). ABCD asks communities to look at what assets, resources, and gifts are already present within the community, and then looks at ways to best utilize those assets for the betterment of the community. In theological terms, we are trying to identify what God has given us and where God might be calling us based on those gifts. Asset mapping is a long process. We will begin with looking deeply at Ascension itself and will work our way out to the community. Through this process, we seek a deeper knowledge of ourselves, our community, and our God. We’re excited for the fruits that this process will bear in due time.

As with the children, youth, and family ministries, this was an area overseen by Cole up until his departure in May. The Rev. Jared now oversees this ministry area as part of his curacy. In other highlights for 2020, the Mission and Innovation Task Force worked on a community garage sale that would have taken place in the spring as part of an initiative to connect with members of the community. Unfortunately, the pandemic has put those plans on hold indefinitely. The task force also hosted an advent discussion group, which was open to the whole community, where we listened to different voices from the Global Anglican Communion reflecting on the Advent Sunday gospel readings as a way of seeing God working in varied and diverse contexts throughout the world. We will look for more ways of engaging the community in this important work in 2021.

VESTRY STEWARDSHIP COVENANT

- **We believe** that in spite of any barriers, God is a God of abundance. Provision for ministries to all people and the entirety of God's creation will occur when our focus and our trust remain with God.
- **We commit** to give as Jesus did and focus on need not want. We seek to pray more and think less and to live within our means so that we are able to give to others.
- **We invite** each of you to open your heart and mind to embrace giving as a response to a deeper connection with God, your neighbor, and the world.



VESTRY CANDIDATE PROFILES

ELIZABETH ARDITTI

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Tell us a little about yourself.

I am a native of Catawba County and a cradle Episcopalian. Some of the highlights of my youth were attending Camp Henry and Camp Kanuga, as well as attending conferences at Valley Crucis with my youth group. I am the mother of four sons and am married to Jeff Arditti. I work as a school counselor at Discovery High School, a job I truly love. Jeff and I have been members of Ascension since 1988.



What about Ascension nurtures your spiritual life? I love the relationships I have with others at Ascension as well as the memories I have created with family and friends over the years. I also appreciate and find solace in the liturgy, our beautiful church, and the music. I always feel at home at Ascension, and it is a privilege to worship here.

What gifts do you think Ascension might have to share with the world? Ascension has loving, welcoming members; professional, competent leaders and staff; and beautiful, restorative services. I think our church is a treasure.

What gifts/skills do you have that bring you joy that you'd like to share? I work well with people and thoroughly enjoy being with others. Furthermore, I am dedicated to carrying out my responsibilities.

ASHLEY MASSEY

Phone: 704-363-7614

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What about Ascension nurtures your spiritual life?

Moveable Feast and the fellowship while gathered around a meal is something that speaks to me.

What gift do you think Ascension might have to share with the world?

So often Ascension is a light in the world that we don't see enough from other churches. When we say "All are welcome," I can actually see it in the members of our church and how open and inviting they are.

What gifts/skills do you have that bring you joy that you'd like to share?

I think my friendliness and ability to connect with people are gifts that I can share with Ascension.



VINCE TROLLAN

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Tell us a little about yourself.

I am a husband and father of two grown children. I love my Ascension family, which has supported me and my family since we arrived in Hickory in 1993

What about Ascension nurtures your spiritual life?

Just about everything from the fellowship to music, sermons, the Eucharist, Sunday school, and love.

What gifts do you think Ascension might have to share with the world?

Education, spirituality, Love, and acceptance.

What gifts/skills do you have that bring you joy that you'd like to share?

Teamwork, persistence, problem solving and Love.



STEPHEN WILLIAMSON

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Tell us a little about yourself.

I grew up at St. Luke's in Lincolnton and my daughter is the third generation in my family to know the joy of Camp Henry. I spent ten years in the restaurant business before enlisting in the US Army, where I served one tour in Baghdad in support of OIF. I used my GI Bill to study philosophy at LRU and computer programming at CVCC. My wife, Tina Fox, is a middle school teacher and our daughter Caroline is a freshman at UNC-Charlotte. I am now the office manager at a real estate appraisal company. My interests include science fiction, bad action films, information technology, and studying world religions.

What about Ascension nurtures your spiritual life?

I am spiritually nurtured in many different ways at Ascension; our liturgy fills me with both nostalgia and an "in the moment" connection with God; our take on the Anglican tradition that blends just enough "high church" with the ability to not take ourselves too seriously; the skill of our staff; and a community that loves resiliently.

What gifts do you think Ascension might have to share with the world?

I think the greatest gift Ascension can share with the world is radical acceptance. I think that we are uniquely equipped to reach out not only to those that have never been involved in a faith community but also and especially to those that have so often heard the message of God's Judgement that they can no longer feel the truth of His Mercy and Love.

What gifts/skills do you have that bring you joy that you'd like to share?

I have a trove of impractical knowledge ranging from Eastern Religious Traditions to Rabbinic Literature to Pre-Socratic Philosophy and French Phenomenology; and I have been told that the classes I've led were interesting. I'd like to think that I am very easy to get along with and add a unique perspective to any situation.