



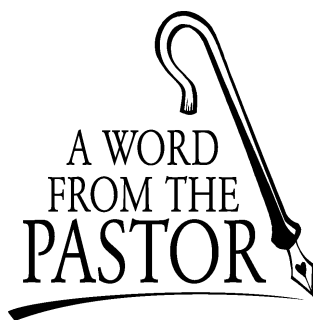
Ascension In Action

Ascension Lutheran Church

January 2024

What lies ahead for worship?

I am going to share some anxiety with you. *Why would you do that?!* Because it isn't just my anxiety, it's ours. And because it probably grabs your attention. And because you already have the anxiety, I'm just going to name it.



You've probably noticed that worship attendance has decreased. It's actually been a fairly steady decline over the past decade or so, with an obvious drop alongside the pandemic. Interestingly, the number of active members of Ascension has not declined. Instead, folks aren't worshipping as often.

We've done a good job accommodating the change. We've pulled some chairs out of the sanctuary and switched to one service in the summer months. Most importantly, we've created a strong online worship so those who can't join us in person can still worship and be part of the community.

But still, there are some Sundays where attendance is down. It *feels* low. It makes me anxious. We continue to have visitors and new members join, in fact more in the last year than most of us can remember. But even so, worship attendance has declined. And so now, we're starting to wonder if something needs to be done.

And that's where a challenge become an opportunity. There is an inertia with things like worship. A sense where we continue to do things the way we've always done them. And sometimes that's good. Sometimes it isn't. Either way, it often takes something from the outside to change things, some force to change the inertia. I believe our anxiety could be that force.

Beginning in January we'll be engaging in some study, prayer, and conversation around worship. Some of this will happen by leaders, and some will involve you. We won't rush anything. We're going to start by learning

about why we worship and what the point of our weekly gathering is. We'll then hear from you – what engages you in worship? Finally, a team will look into options, have more conversations, and recommend any changes to when and how we worship.

What will the result be? I don't know – that's why we do it! But I am confident we will all grow together in faith in the process. After all, in worship God fills us with forgiveness, faith, and calling. There's no way God won't do that in our discussions on worship, too.

You can participate. I hope you do! On January 14th at 9:15 we'll have a class and discussion on what worship is. Then, on January 28th, we'll have a forum where we listen to you.

In all of this, we will lean on our Lutheran theology and spirituality. In fact, we'll be taking up those topics more later this winter and spring. More on that to come.

Let ev'ry instrument be tuned for praise; let all rejoice who have a voice to raise; and may God give us faith to sing always: Alleluia! – ELW 851

God bless, Pastor Daniel Smith

Christmas Gift Tags

We partnered with *One Nation Walking Together* again this year to provide presents for children who live on reservations. A

HUGE thank you to everyone who participated! Because of you, 78 children woke up on Christmas to find a present under the tree.



-Board of Social Outreach

CHURCH COUNCIL/ EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

WHAT'S HAPPENING

Our Congregational meeting on December 3rd approved our church's 2024 budget. What a difference a year makes. Last year, the Congregation approved a budget for 2023 that had to compensate for a \$75,000 shortfall. Estimated giving was down so we froze Rostered Staff (Pastors and Deacon Mary) salaries at 2022 levels, we used a \$15,00 grant from the Wessell Fund to cover the portion of Deacon Mary's salary that addresses senior ministries, we cut budgets from many of our Ministry Teams, and we dipped into our cash reserves.

In January through March 2023, we ran a very successful Special Appeal to retire our church mortgage five years early. In fact, we raised enough money to restore pay raises for our rostered staff retroactive to the first of the year. And we didn't have to make mortgage payments for the last eight months of 2023. This effort eliminated \$55,000 of mortgage costs per year from our budgets for 2024-2028. Then in April, we found out that our application for the COVID Employee Retention Credit (ERC) was approved for \$125,000 (when we thought at best, we might get \$25,000). We had a contentious Congregational meeting during the Summer and decided to give most of that ERC money away to organizations typically supported with our Social Outreach budget. Most of those checks were mailed out in October.

Then we ran our Stewardship Drive in the Fall of 2023 with an emphasis on Ministerial Excellence and expanded Special Music programs. I wondered how our Stewardship drive would go because we've asked a lot of our Congregation in 2023. Once again, we found out how generous our congregation is with our Stewardship Campaign generating a giving increase of \$20,000 for 2024. Our Congregation also approved disbursing \$12,000 from our current 2023 budget surplus for an Employee Pay Bump that was paid out by December 15th. This pay bump was a one-time payment to our staff to make up for some lean budget years over the last couple of years. Then, to top everything off, our Congregation donated over \$4,000 for Staff Christmas gifts. ***I am truly amazed at the generosity of our Congregation! We are blessed with the Grace of God.***

Wow, what a month of activities. ChristKindl Fest was a huge success again this year. We had almost 300 RSVPs for the event and I'm guessing we had at least 200 people attend. I loved the Petting Zoo, though the animals seemed disappointed when I didn't have a snack for them. A huge thanks to Deacon Mary and her team for organizing this event. The Children's Christmas Program was so fun to watch. Thank you to the Sunday School staff for leading this program. The Cantata was a great event and one of those opportunities we have that is easy to invite guests to come to our church and listen. Thank you Scott and Megan for this event. We also had a Youngish Adult party at church that was well attended. We also had funeral for a long-time member of Ascension - Elaine Glover. It snowed about 3-4" the night before the funeral so a team from our Property and Grounds team showed up at church around 6:00 in the morning and used snow blowers and snow shovels to manually clear the parking lots and the Columbarium. A special thanks goes out to those amazing workers.

Blessed With Visitors and New Members

In last month's Newsletter I mentioned that a relatively new senior-aged member of our congregation felt ignored at times by members of our congregation. Since the article was published, I've been approached by several other new senior-aged members who had similar experiences happen to them. It appears to me that we may have an "ageism" issue with visitors and new members. We understandably get excited when we have a visiting family with children and do a good job making them feel welcome, but it doesn't seem we act the same way toward older visitors who don't have children with them. We can do better than this! We continue to be blessed with new members and visitors of all ages. I've always thought that we are a very welcoming church, but now I wonder when it comes to older visitors. When you see somebody you don't know, please take the opportunity to introduce yourself to that person and welcome them to our church. I normally will come up to them and say "I'm not sure I've met you, my name is John." It may be a little uncomfortable for you to walk up to a stranger and welcome them to our church but think how uncomfortable it may be for them coming to a church where they might not know anybody. *Council President John Hayes*



Rainbow Trail All-Ages Retreat in January

The beauty of the mountains and the joy of connections is on offer at the Ascension Rainbow Trail Retreat January 19-21 with the theme of Strong Connections - connections to each other, to nature, and to the camp. We will arrive Friday evening after supper and spend two nights in heated Bristlecone Lodge or in heated cabins. The retreat cost of \$128 per person includes lodging, three meals Saturday and brunch on Sunday. This is a good opportunity to experience camp life by hiking around the beautiful setting, trying the high and low ropes courses, creating art and woodcarvings, and shooting arrows on the archery field. This is a good opportunity to go skiing at Monarch on Saturday as well. We will sing around the fire Saturday evening and worship together Sunday morning. To sign up, please talk to Deacon Mary or email, text or call Marcia Oltrogge at 719-640-6577 or marcia@oltrogges.com. You can also sign up at this link:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1u1BIzKg_D8NuH7HmPDYNU1YFInvcvP7bCxRMQbKVszc/edit?usp=sharing

Thank you!

Lay Ministry extends a thank you to Helen Hedemark for the new potholders for the lower level kitchen. Thank you for using your needlework skills for Ascension.

Where is Everybody?

Your Church leadership is concerned with declining in-person attendance at our Services. Our membership numbers remain strong as do our financials, but we're not seeing as many people attending our Services. I'm a firm believer that we get more out of our Services if we attend them in person. For me personally, I look forward to coming to church each Sunday because I get to see my friends and see how they're doing. It feels good to recite our liturgy together and I love to sing together because then I can hide my voice amongst the many voices that know how to sing. I love to listen to our Special Music and I'm excited to see how the Pastors will craft a sermon from our readings. I get energized when I'm at church with my friends...my family. I strongly encourage all of you to join me at church to worship God and strengthen each other.

Meet the new Executive Director of Family Promise!

Ascension helped found Family Promise over 25 years ago. In that time, hundreds (thousands?) of families have exited homelessness and found sustainable housing. On Sunday, January 7th, the new Executive Director of Family Promise, Ralph Patrick will join us to give us an update on Family Promise and look ahead with us. Join us on the 7th in the Library at 9:15.

From Your Social Outreach Team:

Social Outreach is highlighting our partnership with Family Promise this month.

Family Promise provides transitional shelter and comprehensive wrap-around services to families experiencing homelessness. Its primary goal is to empower families with children to transition into independent affordable housing. They realize this mission by providing families with children experiencing homelessness shelter and meals utilizing existing community resources, and building upon those basic needs through offerings of intensive case management and comprehensive wrap-around services.



Secondary goals include meeting families housing needs in the most cost-effective manner possible and providing congregations with an opportunity to put their faith into action. **"At the core of what we do is developing partnerships within the community, to help address family homelessness within our city."**

Family Promise of Colorado Springs was incorporated in 1996 as Interfaith Hospitality Network (IHN) of Colorado Springs, which remains its legal corporate name. IHN adopted the Family Promise of Colorado Springs Trade Name in 2014. Family Promise of Colorado Springs was founded as the grassroots initiative of local community activists alarmed by the rise of homelessness in the Pikes Peak region.

One of 200+ affiliated agencies across the nation responding to the nation's homelessness crisis, Family Promise of Colorado Springs is an affiliate member of Family Promise, Inc. established in New Jersey in 1986. Family Promise of Colorado Springs' original network of seven participating congregations has grown to more than 30.

CHRISTIAN SYMPATHY TO...

**Carlyle Glover & family at the death of his wife, Elaine.

**Dave & Kim Knoche & family at the death of his father.

**Nancy Johnson & family at the death of her brother.

Grounds Upkeep

Grounds Group: Help us keep the outside looking beautiful. We meet 9:00am on the third Saturday of the month. Please join us, if possible, to help keep the landscape tidy.

Dine Out With Us!

Dining Out in January will be at Crystal Park Cantina on January 19th at 6:00. They are located at 178 Crystal Park Road, Manitou Springs. You may recognize CPC having been in the "Best of Colorado Springs" for Mexican restaurants for several years. Please RSVP to rajohanson@aol.com by Wednesday the 17th if you plan to attend.

Movement Ministry | Monday & Wednesdays

Professional Trainer Laura Rinne is leading Movement Ministry classes at Ascension, open to all. Classes are held in the lower level, Mondays 10am–11am and Wednesdays 12:00-1:00pm. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to Coach Laura at laura.h.rinne@gmail.com.

Donuts Need You!

If you enjoy a donut during fellowship hours, please sign up to pick up the donut order at King Sooper on Austin Bluffs and Academy. You don't even have to get out of your car! Sign up here: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/30E084AAAAF23A3FE3-fellowship> or contact Marcia Oltrogge (719-640-6577 or marcia@oltrogges.com).

Join the Choir this Season

You are invited to sing in our regular Chancel Choir and in our occasional Cantata Choir, which is not just for cantatas anymore! With the success of our two big choir

presentations last season we are offering up a few extra events for the 'big' choir to sing.

Mark your calendars for some other 'big' choir opportunities in the coming choir season:

- In Holy Week we are planning to present 'The Seven Last Words of Christ' by Theodore Dubois on *Passion Sunday, March 24, 2024* with rehearsals beginning in February 2024.
- In addition, we hope we can gather a good size choir for *Easter Sunday, March 31, 2024*.

Practices are Thursdays at 7:15pm. Contact Scott or Megan with questions. We look forward to a full choir loft for 23-24.

Blessings, Scott and Megan

Nursery Available

We encourage children to participate in worship on Sundays, including at the communion table. We also realize some families might prefer for their child to spend some of worship in the nursery. Our nursery is located downstairs and is staffed during every worship service. You can bring your child down for some or all of the worship service. An usher can assist you in finding the nursery.

Looking for Media Ministry Team Members

Media Ministry Team members stream our worship services for those who are unable to attend in person. What to join the team? Contact Deacon Mary.

We still need a few more ushers!

Are you friendly and faithful person between the ages of 13 and 113? You can usher! The time commitment: 9 Sunday's (Sept - May) for the 10:30 service. If you can't commit to 9 Sundays, we are also seeking help for both services on the three Sundays where there are five weeks in the month: Oct 29, Dec 31, and March 31. This would be a very minimal time commitment.

Worried about vacations or unexpected events? Don't be! The usher team will find you a substitute if needed. Worried you're inexperienced? Don't be! We will train and you'll work with an experienced usher. This is a great way to get involved and meet people. Questions: Call Rob Koehler (719) 963-5748 or email: cmkoehle@gmail.com.

Bridge Group

Our Bridge Group will meet on January 20th at 5:30PM. Please let John or Kathy Hayes know if you plan to play that night. Feel free to contact them at (719) 572-1052 or at kittypawz@aol.com if you have any questions about this group. If you'd like to learn how to play bridge, Charles Lewis would be happy to give you bridge lessons.

BECOME INVOLVED...

****Prayer Shawl:** If you know of anyone in need of a prayer shawl, contact one of the Pastors or Darcy Ayen, 719-351-0776, or dkdayen@gmail.com.

****Flower Chart** – The 2024 Flower Chart is posted in the office for you to sign up on for a special Sunday for you or a family member, or a special occasion. Check with the church office for more info.

****Ascension's Free Pantry:** Remember to pick up groceries for the pantry when you do your own grocery shopping. They can be placed directly in the pantry outside the CLC or in the cupboard in the Fellowship Hall. It's making a difference.

****Prayer Ministry** – as we pray for people it helps us to have updates to keep us connected to the person and situation. If you have a prayer concern or would like to become a member of our Prayer Chain, contact the office, 634-1694 or office@ascensioncos.org.

****Quilts for New Beginnings** – meets every Wednesday from 9-1 in the Fellowship Hall. They spread out quilts in all phases of creation, and if you'd like to help put together quilts for a good cause, come and join us. No experience necessary, just a good heart willing to learn and participate.

****Mercy's Gate** – formerly Northern Churches Care – Pantry items and toiletries are collected in the cupboard in the Fellowship Hall. Ongoing needs: crackers, mac & cheese, oatmeal, spaghetti, corn, green beans, spaghetti sauce, tomato products, tuna, gravy, toothpaste, toothbrushes, face soap.

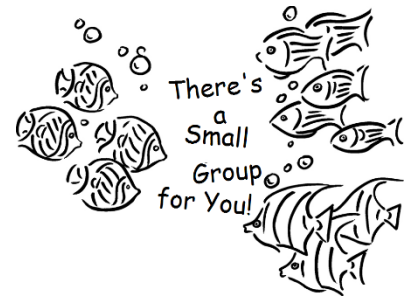
****Terrace Gardens Bingo** – Our church has been supporting bingo at the Terrace Gardens Healthcare Center for about 35 years. Herb Bagenstos started this out-reach program and then Bev Godec took it over from him. John Hayes took it over from Bev in 2015. This program is supported by a small group of four hardy volunteers. We call three games of bingo from 10:00-11:00AM on the third Wednesday of each month for the residents. We normally have about 15 players. We call out numbers until every player wins in each game. After they win, we help them (if needed) to the prize table where they can pick out a prize of their choice. The prizes are all donated by members of the Ascension family. WE ARE ABOUT OUT OF PRIZES FOR THE RESIDENTS. Prizes include gently used men and women's clothing (mostly sizes Large and higher for men and large and Plus sizes for women), sweatpants and tops (large sizes), baseball caps, hygiene products (body washes, lotions, toothpaste, shampoo, etc), playing cards, some small

containers of ladies' perfumes, adult coloring books/crayons, and costume jewelry. If you would like to contribute gifts, please mark items as "Bingo Prizes" and place them in the Terrace Garden Bingo box located in the cupboard behind the Welcome Center. The residents really look forward to our bingo each month and it is rewarding to help them. We also need to build up our pool of volunteers to help us because we've lost a couple of our volunteers because of deaths and moves. Please contact John Hayes at 572-1052 or at blazehayes@aol.com if you'd like to help or learn more about this program. Thank you for your continued support.

****Campbell's Soup Labels:** Please just cut the UPC bar code and the picture of the "point value boy" from the following products: Campbells - soups, chunky soups, Healthy Request, Supper Bakes; Pepperidge Farm, Spaghetti-Os, Swanson, V-8 beverage caps and Prego Spaghetti Sauce. Thanks for continuing to collect these to help the people with disabilities.

****Pop can tabs** help the Ronald McDonald House. They may be placed in the container in the cupboard in the Welcome Center.

SMALL GROUP MINISTRIES QUARTERLY UPDATE



**All are welcome;
come join in the
fellowship!**

If you'd like to join a group, please reach out to the group's contact person to get the most up to date information on when/how/if the group is meeting.

If you are considering starting a NEW group, please contact Aimee Calderon (aimeebuesing@yahoo.com).

DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS

Centering Prayer Group

Discussions on theology and practice of centering prayer and centering silence together.

Meets: 1st & 3rd Monday at church 7:00 pm.

Contact: Pastor Dan Holt, 719-634-1694 or d.holt@ascensioncos.org

Scripture Roundtable

One of the Pastors leads study on Bible or religious topics chosen by group, or scripture for the week.

Meets: Tuesday morning at church 10:30 am.

Contact: Pastors Dan or Daniel, 719-634-1694 or office@ascensioncos.org

Men's Bible Study

Pastor Dan is leading a Men's Bible study that will focus on understanding the scripture and allowing time to discuss its implication.

Meets: 2nd Monday at church 7:00 pm.

Contact: Pastor Dan Holt, 719-634-1694 or d.holt@ascensioncos.org

FELLOWSHIP GROUPS

Bridge

Come play bridge once a month with others who love this card game!

Meets: monthly Saturday night at the church. Actual dates in church bulletin.

Contact: John & Kathy Hayes, 719-572-1052 or kittypawz@aol.com

Dining Out

Group participants take turns selecting the date, time, and restaurant each month. The hosts then make reservations for all those who are able to attend.

Meets: Monthly on Thursday or Friday nights. Call to add your name to the email list. Actual dates in church bulletin and by email.

Contact: Rich & Judi Johnson, 719-360-5319, or jrajohnson@aol.com

Men's Breakfast

Get together with other men for fellowship over breakfast.

Meets: Thursdays at 8:00 am at Wooglin's Deli, 4750 Barnes Rd. (corner of Barnes & Oro Blanco).

Contact: Rich Johnson, 719-360-3411 or jrajohnson@aol.com

Faith Seeking Understanding

Ascension's book and podcast club. We read a variety of books and listen to podcasts in order to have the civil conversations so lacking in our world. Topics have included race-relations, immigration, faith and homosexuality, and criminal justice. Fiction, non-fiction, and maybe even a dabble into poetry! The discussions are friendly, honest, and open to anyone.

Meets: 4th Monday of the month at church and via zoom. Contact Pastor Daniel to learn about the next book and podcast we're discussing or to be put on the group's email list.

Contact: Pastor Daniel, 719-634-1694, or d.smith@ascensioncos.org

Walking Group

Walks at various venues. Some of our favorite places are Nancy Lewis Park, Old Colorado City, Manitou Springs, and our neighborhoods (one has a coffee shop en route!)"

Meets: Tuesday & Thursday mornings, outside when weather permits and in Chapel Hills Mall when it doesn't. Please call to confirm special times & locations.

Contact: Wini Klein, 719-636-1232 or wklein636@msn.com

SERVICE & SUPPORT GROUPS

Quilts for New Beginnings

We'd love to have new members join us in 2024. If you'd like to bring warmth to others, join us on Wednesdays, and we'll find how you'd like to contribute- no matter your skill level. If you would like to help from the comfort of your own home, kits are available to take home. We provide quilts for Family Promise, ONWT, Bakhita Mountain Home, Habitat for Humanity, and World Relief (through Mennonite Central Committee and Lutheran World Relief).

Meets: Wednesdays 9 a.m. – 12:00 p.m., at the church.

Contact: Anita Arends, 719-651-3470 or Barb Daugherty, 719-264-1630 or bdkm@pcisys.net

Fountain View Bingo

Have fun helping nursing home residents play Bingo and win prizes.

Meets: Fountain View (formerly Terrace Gardens) monthly, 3rd Wednesdays from 9:45-11:15 am

Contact: John & Kathy Hayes, 719-572-1052 or blazehayes@aol.com.

SEASONAL GROUPS

Camping

Bring your RV, motor home, pull behind trailer or tent and join other folks who enjoy the great outdoors for fellowship and fun! We will share calendar dates and great camping sites with one another via email.

Meets: During the late spring and summer months at different times and locations based on interest.

Contact: Donna or Scott Crump, 719-622-0927 or dannec664@aol.com (please contact Donna or Scott if you would be willing to help plan the trips)

Biking, Holy Pedalers

Rides are scheduled most weekends. Group members can sign up to schedule and lead rides. Bike riding is mostly on trails, with some lightly traveled roads. Most rides include a stop for breakfast or lunch in support of fellowship.

Meets: Weekly, April – October, weather permitting. Most rides are on Saturdays. Time & location by email and on the Ascension Holy Pedalers' Facebook page.

Contact: Aimee Calderon, 720-318-7479 or aimeebuesing@yahoo.com



AIA January 2024 Issue #1
Ascension Lutheran Church, ELCA
2505 N. Circle Drive
Colorado Springs, CO 80909

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

CHURCH STAFF

Normal Office Hours: 9-12 Mon-Fri (719) 634-1694

Pastor Dan Holt – off on Friday

Pastor Daniel Smith – off on Friday

Music Director/ Organist – Scott Christiansen

Choir Director – Megan Miller

Diaconal Minister of Faith Formation – Mary Stoneback

Office Administrator – Ruth Albrent-Runnells

Child Learning Center Director – Teresa Adams

E-mail addresses: office@ascensioncos.org

d.holt@ascensioncos.org (Pastor Holt)

d.smith@ascensioncos.org (Pastor Smith)

m.stoneback@ascensioncos.org (Mary Stoneback)

s.christiansen@ascensioncos.org (Scott Christiansen)

music@ascensioncos.org (Megan Miller)

t.adams@ascensioncos.org (Teresa Adams)

clc@ascensioncos.org (CLC)

ts.trinko@gmail.com (newsletter articles)

Our Website: www.ascensioncos.org

February newsletter deadline: Jan. 24



Melvin Allen, Mary Ann Bond, Allen Brooks (Foster son of Darcy & Tom Johnson), Brad Buhler, Ferne Dillow, Michael Foret, Eileen Hedstrom, Stewart Hellem, Don Knight (friend of John Hayes), Pam Landry, Carol Passon, Cerne Rieves (ALC Quilter), Rick Rogers, Fran Schumacher (friend of Ron Mohler), Jeff Sebben, Cassie Shaffer (friend of Trents), Cathy Stanley (sister-in-law of Marilyn Gulliksen), Bruce Thompson (Brother of Sandy Trent), Carol Thompson, Bob Vanlandingham, and all of our men and women serving overseas, especially Anthony Calderon.